

# THE CLOCK

Program Guide by Elizabeth McLeod

One of radio's great virtues during the medium's golden age was its versatility, and no genre of programming demonstrated that virtue more than the dramatic anthology. With no continuing characters or storylines to tie the writers' imaginations down, every week and every episode could bring something new, exciting and different. But at the same time, popular anthology programs would often also strive to hit a familiar note — depending on a single theme or concept to give the program a level of consistency from week to week. The “hosted anthology” format grew out of this quest for familiarity. One of the more unusual programs in this style appeared in 1947 as a program hosted by time itself: *The Clock*.

Hosted anthologies were a growth industry in postwar broadcasting, but their roots go back to the very dawn of the medium, to the days when just about every radio station concluded its broadcast day with a program of bedtime stories for the kiddies. The stories were different every night, but were presented by a familiar host — perhaps a local announcer masquerading as Uncle Bob, Aunt Sally, Grandpa Jack, Santa Claus, or The Man in the Moon. These increasingly fanciful story hosts conditioned an entire generation of young radio listeners to expect a regular narrator for their broadcast entertainment. So, as the medium's pioneer days gave way to the early years of network radio drama, the hosts followed along in fine form. Week after week, season after season, and year after year, old timers, old rangers, salty old sea captains, exotic desert chieftains, cackling witches, and mysterious shadowy voices all competed to bring the most exciting tales to the air.



*The Clock* regular Alice Frost

The 1940's brought the hosted anthology format to the peak of its popularity, with mystery and suspense programs leading the way. The grisly, gruesome host of *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, the grimly ironic “Whistler,” and the threateningly oily “Mysterious Traveler” all took their turns thrilling and chilling an enthusiastic audience. But, as the craze for such programs built, original concepts grew ever more scarce. It took a hard-working ABC staff writer by the name of Lawrence Klee to come up with the original notion of an anthology hosted by Time itself, as personified by the voice of “The Clock.”

Lawrence M. Klee was, in the best sense of the word, a journeyman radio writer. He could take any thread of an idea, any germ of a plot, for any kind of program, and turn out an



Cathy Lewis frequently appeared on *The Clock* with her husband, Elliott Lewis

efficient, entertaining script. Born in 1915, the son of vaudeville performers, he joined his parents' act at the age of ten. It wasn't long before he began writing jokes and gags for other performers on the side. Although he had entertained notions of becoming a doctor, he found show business more enticing than pre-med studies. By the early 1940's he had found a place for himself churning out radio scripts for Air Features, Inc, the production arm of Hummert Radio Features (the legendary soap-opera assembly line).

Klee spent several years with the Hummert organization, turning out continuity for *Mary Noble*, *Backstage Wife*, *Aunt Jenny's Real Life Stories*, *Front Page Farrell* and, most notably, the Hummerts' long-running detective program, *Mr. Keen*, *Tracer of Lost Persons*. It was here that he learned the routine of radio mystery writing, and he learned those lessons well. Turning his back on soap opera by mid-decade, he would devote the rest of his career to scripting thriller programs.

Klee would remain associated with the Hummert organization into the early 1950s, scripting *Mr. Keen* along with the other Air Features mystery programs (*Mr. Chameleon* and *Hearthstone of the Death Squad*), but he would also contribute scripts on a freelance basis to non-Hummert programs. His most notable accomplishment in that arena would be *The Fat Man*, ABC's successful adaptation of Dashiell Hammett's "Continental Op" pulp detective tales. Klee wrote the bulk of the episodes for the first two seasons of *The Fat Man*. He effectively translated Hammett's lumbering, overweight, nameless detective into the sardonic Brad Runyon, as impeccably performed by former Fred Allen stooge Jack "J. Scott" Smart. The success of this series established Klee as a notable talent in the field of thriller drama, and led to the opportunity for him to develop a series all his own. Taking his cue from the other popular anthologies of the time, Klee introduced *The Clock* in the fall of 1946.

Thematically, *The Clock* has something in common with *The Mysterious Traveler* and *The Whistler*. All three feature presentations of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances, the weight of which carry them to an inevitable fate. In *The Clock*, the grim-voiced Father Time gives the proceedings a suitable atmosphere of foreboding. The program began its run from New York, tapping in to the significant pool of east coast directing and acting talent. For its second season, the show moved to Hollywood where it came under the influence of William Spier. Recently departed from the helm of the prestigious *Suspense*, Spier gave the program his customary masters' touch, while bringing in old *Suspense* colleagues. Writers Lucille Fletcher and Robert Richards provided fresh story material, and the inimitable William Conrad served as the narrator. But, even under Spier, Klee's memorable format continued intact, with "The Clock" himself enduring to the end of the program's run.

*The Clock* disappeared from ABC's schedule in 1948, but the series had an enduring second life on the other side of the world. Nearly a decade after its initial run, international program syndicator Grace Gibson arranged to have the scripts sent to Australia — along with many of Klee's *Fat Man* episodes — where they would be produced anew with local talent and rebroadcast for Antipodean audiences. Many of these Australian recordings have, over the

decades, found their way to American listeners — leading many Old Time Radio collectors and writers to incorrectly assume that the series itself was a fully Australian product, despite the program’s perfectly American pedigree.

Klee kept a busy hand at the typewriter after time ran out for *The Clock*. He moved effortlessly into television, where he made perhaps the most enduring mark of his career as the creator and writer of *Man Against Crime*. As television’s earliest successful private-eye drama, it enjoyed a delightfully pulpy, successful run from 1949 to 1956. Klee had finally established himself as a marketable show-business name, and further projects would no doubt have followed. Unfortunately, but in one of those bitter twists of fate that might have fit into one of his own scripts, the writer was felled by a heart attack in 1957. He died at the age of 42. But, *The Clock* lives on in memory of a versatile and talented author who understood what made radio drama tick.

The American Broadcasting Company presents  
THE CLOCK

**CD 1A: “The Manicurist” - 07/14/47**

A disturbed young woman with an obsessive need to manicure men’s nails escapes from an institution. Featuring Fran Lafferty, with Charles Webster as the voice of “The Clock.” Written by Lawrence Klee, and directed by Clark Andrews.

**CD 1B: “Eddie” - 11/13/47**

A reporter investigating a murder finds himself inevitably drawn to the murdered man’s widow. Featuring Joe DeSantis and Alice Frost, with Charles Webster as the voice of “The Clock.” Written by Lawrence Klee, and directed by Clark Andrews.

**CD 2A: “Aunt Emmy” – 11/27/47**

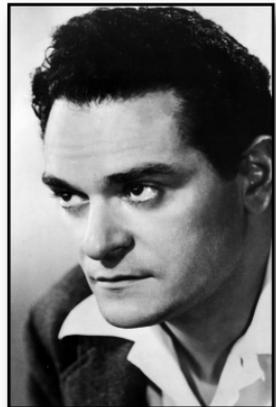
A young girl on the way to visit her aunt in the country hears a disturbing story from the elderly villager who drives her out to the farm. Featuring Alice Frost and Leora Thatcher. Written by Lawrence Klee, and directed by Clark Andrews.

**CD 2B: “The Companion” – 12/11/47**

“Companion to elderly person or invalid. Young, refined, free to travel, two years last employer...recently deceased.” A personal companion looks for a new victim – but her proposed victim has other plans. Featuring Alice Frost and Joe DeSantis. Written by Lee Williams and Alan Hartshire. Directed by Clark Andrews.

**CD 3A: “Gertrude” – 1/1/48**

A man on his way to murder his wife picks up a young hitchhiker named, Gertrude, who he decides to use in his plan. Featuring Alice Frost and Joe DeSantis. Written by Lawrence Klee, and directed by Clark Andrews.



Joe DeSantis

**CD 3B: “Nicky” - 03/04/48**

A condemned convict devises an elaborate plan to cheat the electric chair. Featuring Cathy and Elliot Lewis, with William Conrad as the voice of “The Clock.” This episode was the first of the series to originate from Hollywood. It was broadcast over the ABC network, was written by Lawrence Klee, and was produced and directed by William Spier.

**CD 4A: “Bad Dreams” - 04-25-48**

A hard-working immigrant sees his life disrupted by an inexplicable series of terrifying nightmares. Featuring Elliot Lewis and Jeanette Nolan, with William Conrad as the voice of “The Clock.” Broadcast over the ABC network, this episode was written by Lucille Fletcher, and was produced and directed by William Spier.



Jeanette Nolan

**CD 4B: “Bank Holiday” - 04-30-48**

A young bank teller who doesn't take her work seriously finds herself the captive of a gang of robbers. Featuring Cathy and Elliot Lewis, with William Conrad as the voice of “The Clock.” Broadcast over the ABC network, this episode was written by Robert Richards, and was produced and directed by William Spier.

Elizabeth McLeod is a journalist, author, and broadcast historian. She received the 2005 Ray Stanich Award for excellence in broadcasting history research from the Friends Of Old Time Radio.



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