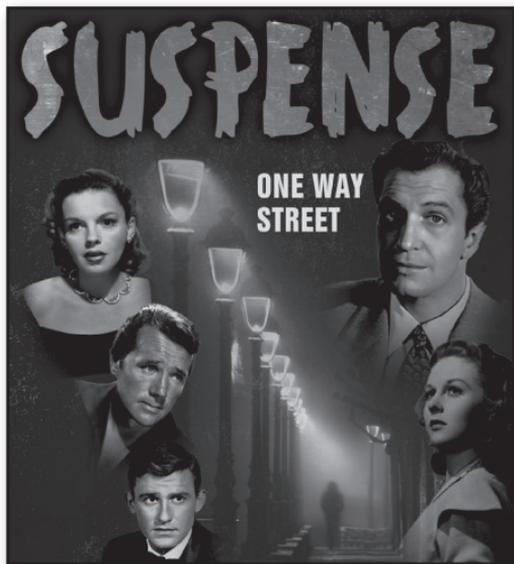


# SUSPENSE

## One Way Street

Program Guide by Elizabeth McLeod

Excitement, tension, white-knuckled fear -- for over twenty years, these were the building blocks of "Radio's Outstanding Theatre of Thrills." From the summer of 1942 to the fall of 1962, listeners heard the best that audio drama had to offer on this weekly showcase for thrill-driven entertainment. But like any program that runs for so long, *Suspense* did not exist as a changeless, continuous institution. It was, in essence, a series of different programs under different directors, sharing a name and a basic format, but each with a slightly varied approach to the realization of its purpose. Some will argue that the program reached its creative peak in the early 1950s under the auspices of innovative producer-director Elliott Lewis. But others will agree that *Suspense* reached the peak of both its popularity and its influence during the tenure of producer-director William Spier -- and that many of Spier's most satisfying accomplishments during his run came in the years just after the Second World War.



If, walking down Sunset Boulevard on a sunny spring afternoon in 1946, you spotted a slender, dignified man with wavy dark hair and an immaculate, professorial beard walking briskly into Columbia Square, it would be entirely reasonable for you to conclude that this man had something to do with the creative end of broadcasting. William Spier didn't look like a bean-counter or a pencil-pusher. In his distinctive appearance he projected the air of a visionary, an artist, someone who might be more at home in a Bohemian cafe than in a pan-

eled office. So you might be surprised to learn that William Spier started out as a music critic, rubbing shoulders with the elite of the concert world. He was a man fully at home in the refined world of the symphony and the opera, a protégé of renowned author-critic Deems Taylor. And you might be entirely nonplussed to learn that he was only a teenager when he began that early career. Doubtless many of his interview subjects were. The cultivation of his famous facial hair not only lent him an air of dignity, it also helped to conceal his startling youth.

In 1929, at the venerable age of twenty-three, William Spier and his whiskers went to work at Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborne. An advertising firm whose name sounded, according to Fred Allen, like a steamer trunk falling down four flights of stairs, might not have seemed quite the place for an artistic young man of Mr. Spier's type. However, it was that agency's involvement in classical and concert music that brought him there. B-B-D-and-O, as it was known around Madison Avenue, packaged and produced *The Atwater Kent Hour*, an NBC feature presenting the cream of concert and opera talent. Spier, with his deep background in the field, was an ideal fit as agency producer. And the young man found, over the course of his new duties, that he enjoyed radio a great deal.

As an agency man, Spier found himself working on a wide variety of program types. One of the most unique of these series began at CBS in 1931 -- a feature that might be described as a highly specialized variation of the popular themed-anthology format. Overseen and sponsored by *Time* magazine, *The March of Time* offered a dramatized look at current events. Actors would impersonate prominent personalities of the day in scenes offering an embellished, entertain-



William Spier

ing version of each week's news. As director, Spier assembled a notable cast of versatile character actors drawn (for the most part) from Broadway. This group included such rising personalities as Agnes Moorehead, Everett Sloane, Paul Stewart, Ray Collins, Martin Gabel...and a young man from Wisconsin who combined preternatural talent with limitless self-importance to a degree never before encountered in a radio studio. William Spier would remember all of these performers, especially that baby-faced kid genius called Orson Welles.

*The March of Time*, with its ever-changing settings, demanded rigorous attention to technical

detail. It was the greatest proving ground a radio director could ever experience, and William Spier emerged from that program a seasoned pro...with a flossy new position on the CBS staff. Management called him "Director of Development," sat him down in an office, gave him a list of unsold time slots, and told him to get busy coming up with new unsponsored program concepts with which to fill them. Spier liked this just fine. His years at the *March of Time* had never taken him far from the watchful gaze of Henry Luce and his various minions... and now CBS had just given him the keys to the playroom and carte blanche to do anything the broadcast censors would allow.

Spier's pet project in the summer of 1940 was called *Forecast*, a catch-all title allowing on-air tryouts for many of the nifty concepts he'd cooked up (or had caused others to cook up). And it was on an episode of this series, on the 22nd of July, 1940, that listeners got their first taste of *Suspense*. The proposed thriller anthology avoided the kid-oriented hokum that had plagued much of the genre during the 1930s. Indeed, *Suspense* would take advantage of methods developed by the Columbia Workshop to create an electrifying feature with an adult sensibility. Its sample episode, featuring a deft adaptation of Alfred Hitchcock's silent-film classic *The Lodger*, drew positive notices. The claim that Hitchcock himself had directed the broadcast was a publicist's sham, and CBS passed on the idea of a regular series.

Passed, that is, until 1942. With an unsold summer time slot to fill, the network picked up the program and, with no fanfare at all, tossed it on the air that July. Spier wasn't involved in the earliest broadcasts, but within a month he'd taken over and shaped the bare concept into the form it would hold for the next twenty years. The emphasis was on real-world tension, on stories of things that could happen to ordinary people who were suddenly thrust into extraordinary circumstances. Spier had no firm rule against dealing with supernatural stories -- but if they were used, they had to be presented plausibly, and the characters had to react as actual people would react in such situations. *Suspense* was specifically not a "horror show." There were no monsters, there was no gore, and there were no broad *Inner Sanctum* style histrionics. Even when Spier added a "mysterious host" figure to introduce the stories in 1943, he had stern-voiced Joseph Kearns give that role in a steely, serious tone (utterly free of Raymond-ish camp).



Alfred Hitchcock

Spier was just as serious in his selection of story material for the series. Original stories by top radio talent like Lucille Fletcher were alternated with adaptations drawn from the cream of thriller fiction. Such authors as John Dickson Carr and Cornell Woolrich were well-represented on *Suspense*, with careful, thoughtful adaptations of their best short stories. With scripts in hand, Spier cast his episodes with great care. After the Roma Wine Company (a subsidiary of the Scenery distilling empire) came aboard as sponsor in 1943, Spier had the budget to bring in name talent. However, he always insisted that any movie stars engaged to do his show possess the actual radio acting talent required to do justice to the quality of the material. Not every movie personality had that talent -- and those who didn't, those who saw radio as a chance to pick up some fast cash for no effort, would never darken William Spier's microphone. Those who did were expected to deliver exacting performances, and for those stars who accepted the challenge and relished the experience, the door was always open for further appearances.

The production values demanded by Spier matched the standard of the performances he expected of his cast. *Suspense's* first musical director, Bernard Herrmann, revolutionized the art of scoring for radio drama during the mid-1930s, and his scores for the early years of the program set the tone that would be followed by all subsequent composers and conductors. Lucien Moraweck, Wilbur Hatch, and Lud Gluskin adhered to the Herrmann style of original music, and their work added immeasurably to the dramatic power of the broadcasts. Likewise, the sound effects crew headed by CBS-Hollywood technician Berne Surrey expanded the boundaries of what could be done in radio sound work. Spier worked closely with the chief soundman in developing a distinct approach to the effects in each episode. Surrey's soundscapes avoided the excesses of "mickey mousing," the sort of exaggerated effects work that depicted every footstep and every tick of a clock, and instead used sound to punctuate and emphasize plot points and situations as they developed within the story.



Bernard Herrmann

Spier's tenure on *Suspense* wound down in the post-war years. (This is because a new series, *The Adventures of Sam Spade*, claimed an increasing share of his time.) He had headed "Radio's Outstanding Theater of Thrills" for over five years, creating a body of work that influenced all of his successors on the series...and which stands on its own as one of the most impressive resumes in all of audio drama.

**The ROMA WINE COMPANY**  
presents  
**SUSPENSE**

**Produced and Directed**  
by  
**WILLIAM SPIER**

**Music Composed by**  
**LUCIEN MORAWEK**

**Music Conducted by**  
**LUD GLUSKIN**

**Sound Effects Created and Supervised By**  
**BERNE SURREY**

**CD 1A: “Return Trip” - 06/27/1946**

Four people are trapped on a bus during a blizzard -- and one of them has a deadly secret. Elliot Reid and Cathy Lewis are featured in this story by Maurice Zimm.

**CD 1B: “An Evening’s Diversion” - 07/04/1946**

Can a man who accidentally learns of a murder plot stop the killer? This episode, written by Stan Schlessinger, stars Leon Ames, Elliott Lewis, Cathy Lewis, and Gerald Mohr.

**CD 2A: “Photo Finish” - 07/18/1946**

Roy Grandy and Robert L. Richards wrote this tense tale about a photographer who snaps a murderer in action. Will this shutterbug become the next victim? Heard in this broadcast are Michael O’Shea, Jerry Hausner, Cathy Lewis, and Wally Maher.

**CD 2B: “The Last Letter of Dr. Bronson”**  
**- 08/15/1946**

A doctor facing the slow onset of insanity tries to get himself murdered. This Leonard St. Clair adaptation of a Richard Krekye story features the voices of Henry Daniell, Herb Butterfield, and Wally Maher.



Cathy Lewis

**CD 3A: “The Great Horrell” - 08/22/1946**

The wife of an oppressive mind-reader tries to break free of his grasp. Joan Lorrying and Herb Butterfield star in this episode, written by George and Gertrude Fass.

**CD 3B: “You’ll Never See Me Again” - 09/05/1946**

Robert Young and Cathy Lewis are heard in this broadcast about a newlywed quarrel that turns into a baffling mystery. This Cornell Woolrich tale was adapted for radio by William Spier.

**CD 4A: “Hunting Trip” - 09/12/1946**

Two men go on a trip to the woods -- will they both return home alive? Vincent Price and Lloyd Nolan are featured in this story by Paul Bernard and Lee Horton.

**CD 4B: “Till the Day I Die” - 09/19/1946**

A murderer and his victim share the same face in this thriller by Robert L. Richards and Martin Ryeson. Starring in this broadcast are Dane Clark and Cathy Lewis.



Vincent Price

**CD 5A: “Three Times Murder” - 10/03/1946**

The widow of an executed prisoner clashes with the prosecutor who sent him to the chair. Rita Hayworth and Hans Conreid are heard in this episode, written by John deWitt and Robert L. Richards.

**CD 5B: “A Plane Case of Murder” - 10/10/1946**

A love triangle leads to an airborne murder plot. John Lund, William Johnstone, and Cathy Lewis are featured in this tale by Robert L. Richards.



Rita Hayworth

**CD 6A: “Dame Fortune” - 10/24/1946**

A blackmail victim decides to turn the tables on her tormentor. Susan Hayward and William Johnstone star in this story by Max Wilk and Ed Murkland.

**CD 6B: “Lazarus Walks” - 10/31/1946**

A man returns from the dead...and he isn't the same man he was when he

died! Brian Donlevy, Cathy Lewis, and Hans Conreid are heard in this episode written by J. M. Speed and adapted for by Robert L. Richards.

**CD 7A: “Easy Money” - 11/07/1946**

Jack Carson, Paul Frees, and Cathy Lewis star in this broadcast about a wealthy woman, a desperate man...and a talking bird. The script was written by Sidney Renthal.

**CD 7B: “Drive-In” - 11/21/1946**

Judy Garland headlines this thriller about a restaurant carhop who becomes the target of a murderer. Elliott Lewis and Cathy Lewis co-star in this story by Mel Dinelli and Muriel Roy Bolton.

**CD 8A: “The House in Cypress Canyon” - 12/05/1946**

A couple moving into a new home is stalked by an unspeakable terror. Robert Taylor and Cathy Lewis are featured in this episode, written by Robert L. Richards. (Howard Duff makes a special guest appearance as Sam Spade.)

**CD 8B: “They Call Me Patrice”**

- 12/12/1946

A woman who takes advantage of an opportunity to assume a new identity finds herself the victim of blackmail. Susan Peters and William Johnstone are heard in this broadcast. William Spier adapted this Cornell Woolrich tale for radio.



Judy Garland

**CD 9A: “The Thing in the Window”**

- 12/19/1946

Joseph Cotten and Cathy Lewis star in this Lucille Fletcher story about a man who sees a dead body in an apartment window. Why can't anyone else see it?



Joseph Cotten

**CD 9B: “One Way Street” - 01/23/1947**

A slum youth in postwar London looks for a way out. Roddy McDowall and Jeanette Nolan are featured in this episode, written by Robert L. Richards and Sanford Schlessinger.

**CD 10A: “End of the Road” - 02/06/1947**

A sleazy car salesman steals a rich man’s wife -- and that’s just the beginning of his problems. Glenn Ford and Cathy Lewis are heard in this broadcast, written by Robert L. Richards and Irving Moore.



Anne Baxter

**CD 10B: “Always Room At The Top”**

**- 02/20/47**

Anne Baxter, Cathy Lewis, Wally Maher, and Jack Webb star in this Eleanor Beeson story about an advertising agency staffed by the vicious and ambitious.



Jack Webb

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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