

On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio

By John Dunning

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Now long out of print, John Dunning's *Tune in Yesterday* was the definitive one-volume reference on old-time radio broadcasting. Now, in *On the Air*, Dunning has completely rethought this classic work, reorganizing the material and doubling its coverage, to provide a richer and more informative account of radio's golden age.

Here are some 1,500 radio shows presented in alphabetical order. The great programs of the '30s, '40s, and '50s are all here--*Amos 'n' Andy*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour*, and *The March of Time*, to name only a few. For each, Dunning provides a complete broadcast history, with the timeslot, the network, and the name of the show's advertisers. He also lists major cast members, announcers, producers, directors, writers, and sound effects people--even the show's theme song. There are also umbrella entries, such as "News Broadcasts," which features an engaging essay on radio news, with capsule biographies of major broadcasters, such as Lowell Thomas and Edward R. Murrow. Equally important, Dunning provides a fascinating account of each program, taking us behind the scenes to capture the feel of the performance, such as the ghastly sounds of *Lights Out* (a horror drama where heads rolled and bones crunched), and providing engrossing biographies of the main people involved in the show.

A wonderful read for everyone who loves old-time radio, *On the Air* is a must purchase for all radio hobbyists and anyone interested in 20th-century American history. It is an essential reference work for libraries and radio stations.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Mystery writer and radio talk show host Dunning has expertly compiled and organized a massive amount of research data on hundreds of radio shows aired from the 1920s through the 1960s. The entries, listed alphabetically by show title, each contain a treasure trove of information—broadcast dates, casts and personnel, anecdotes, special analyses, and a detailed overview of each show's background, format, and content. Entries range from popular series such as Amos 'n' Andy and The Green Hornet to the Metropolitan Opera Auditions and the NBC University Theatre—everything from soaps, Westerns, and comedy to sports, drama, and documentaries. An extensive bibliography and index enhance the book's appeal. For those who once gathered around the console, the more than 700 pages of entries should provide a wonderful stroll down memory lane. Historians and researchers will also find this a valuable reference tool, offering new discoveries and insights. For reference libraries with large media collections. Carol J. Binkowski, Bloomfield, NJ
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From [Booklist](#)

As he did in *Tune in Yesterday: The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (Prentice Hall, 1976), Dunning here provides a storehouse of information about the people and programs of radio's Golden Age (1930s, 1940s, 1950s). The storehouse, however, has been thoroughly remodeled and refurbished. The amount of material covered has been considerably expanded and its presentation carefully reorganized.

Some 1,500 radio shows, listed in alphabetical order, are described in concise articles linked with an extensive system of cross-referencing. The cross-referencing is crucial, because someone looking for *Ozzie and Harriet* or *Sam Spade* will need to know that both programs are listed in the main part of the text under *The Adventures of...* The articles vary in length, from the briefest of paragraphs (*The Billie Burke Show* and *Linda's First Love*) to several pages (*The Lone Ranger* and *The Mercury Theater of the Air*). Each program entry consists of title and broadcast history (including exact starting and ending dates, day and timeslot, network, announcer, sponsor, etc.). This is followed by an essay that often imparts all manner of detail, or, in the case of those short entries, a capsule description of the program.

Although the majority of the articles are about individual programs, there are also a number of survey articles, such as *sports broadcasts*, *concert broadcasts*, and *news broadcasts*. Here, too, the cross-referencing is essential in order to find information about a specific program that might fall under one of those categories and is not listed separately. There is an extensive bibliography, which will be of great help to those wishing to pursue the subject further.

In the electronically connected world of today, it is hard to imagine a time (not so long ago) when there was but one medium of electronic information. The rich detail in this solid work helps convey the flavor of that earlier time. Devotees of classic television shows may be surprised to find out that such programs as *Father Knows Best*, *Our Miss Brooks*, *Queen for a Day*, and *Sky-King* all started as radio programs. A worthy addition to most reference collections, this volume is an interesting portrait of a time when radio was more than background music or xenophobic talk shows. Another recent publication, the *Historical Dictionary of American Radio* [RBB Ag 98], covers a wider range of topics related to radio but has far less coverage of individual programs.

Review

"A massive expansion of the same author's much-sought-after 1976 book "Tune in Yesterday." Anyone with even a passing interest in old radio will find this long-awaited work fascinating; for devotees, it will be the new standard reference. But even those unfamiliar with vintage radio could be captivated by this extraordinarily well-researched and interestingly written chronicle of a form of popular culture whose golden age was richly diverse and all too brief."--Los Angeles Daily News

"Written with wit and erudition.... This is the kind of book you hold in your lap and page through at leisure or dip into as if you were casting a line into a placid and nostalgic stream."--The Commercial Appeal

"A massive, 822-page volume that should stand as the all-time standard reference on radio.... Dunning's book is also irresistible, can't put down reading, filled with fascinating facts and amazing anecdotes. To call On the Air complete is to sell it short."--San Diego Tribune

"Worth owning if you love old radio or are a serious historian of contemporary America."--The Rocky Mountain News

"A warning to any old-time radio enthusiast: once you pick up this book, you won't be able to put it down. It's not only the ultimate reference guide to radio's golden age, it's compulsively readable, too."--Leonard Maltin

"John Dunning has compiled the ultimate Radio-phile's encyclopedia: a glorious goldmine of information on the 'golden age' of radio. I was there at the end of that era, both as a young radio actor and as the guy who replaced Jack Benny on CBS--making me the last network radio comedian in America. Many of the shows that influenced my sense of humor growing up--from Vic and Sade to Fred Allen--are written about here in great and loving detail, as is practically every show ever broadcast. A true and marvelous encyclopedia of radio."--Stan Freberg

"John Dunning's new work is the deepest and richest mine of information yet plumbed in the field of old time radio. It may well arrive at classic status not only for its magnitude but for its power to entertain through the vigor and acuity of its assessments. It is the only encyclopedia I know that can be read for pleasure as well as information."--Norman Corwin

"There are certain facets of earlier decades which are largely of interest only to specialists, but radio has been so important in the context of popular communication and cultural influence that nothing less than a full-scale encyclopedic accounting was called for. John Dunning supplies that."--Steve Allen

"Dunning has expertly compiled and organized a massive amount of research data on hundreds of radio shows aired from the 1920s through the 1960s. The entries, listed alphabetically by show title, each contain a treasure trove of information--broadcast dates, casts and personnel, anecdotes, special analyses, and a detailed overview of each show's background, format, and content.... An extensive bibliography and index enhance the book's appeal. For those who once gathered around the console, the more than 700 pages of entries should provide a wonderful stroll down memory lane. Historians and researchers will also find this a valuable reference tool, offering new discoveries and insights."--Library Journal

"The rich detail in this solid work helps convey the flavor of that earlier time. A worthy addition to most reference collections, this volume is an interesting portrait of a time when radio was more than background music or xenophobic talk shows."--Booklist

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Brier:

As people who live in often the modest era should be update about what going on or details even knowledge to make these keep up with the era which is always change and progress. Some of you maybe will probably update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice for you but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know what kind you should start with. This On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Ashley McKay:

The actual book On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio will bring you to definitely the new experience of reading the book. The author style to clarify the idea is very unique. Should you try to find new book to study, this book very appropriate to you. The book On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio is much recommended to you to learn. You can also get the e-book in the official web site, so you can quicker to read the book.

Nola Schroeder:

Your reading 6th sense will not betray you, why because this On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio guide written by well-known writer whose to say well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who have read the book. Written in good manner for you, leaking every ideas and writing skill only for eliminate your personal hunger then you still uncertainty On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio as good book not simply by the cover but also by the content. This is one publication that can break don't evaluate book by its include, so do you still needing another sixth sense to pick this specific!? Oh come on your looking at sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to an additional sixth sense.

David Baker:

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