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America Before T.V.: A Day In Radio: September 21, 1939



Synopsis

These remarkable tapes present a full day of radio, from Arthur Godfrey's "Sunrise" to the post-midnight concert of the Bob Chester Orchestra, with installments from "The Story of Myrt & Marge", periodic news bulletins, President Roosevelt speaking to Congress, words from French Premier Edouard Daladier, the Indians vs. the Senators, "Amos and Andy, Ask-It-Basket" and more. 12 cassettes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Radio station WJSV in Washington, D. C. recorded an entire broadcast day for posterity on September 21, 1939, and some 18 hours of programming are presented here. Most of the material is from the CBS network. The local shows are largely daytime programming. Arthur Godfrey is the morning deejay, years before he shared the microphone with his "family" of resident guests. He spins records ranging from classical to the latest big-band releases, and his informality is charming. (He actually sneezes on the air!) Godfrey is followed by a local man-on-the-street quiz contest moderated by a young Charles Daly -- later John Charles Daly of "What's My Line." We also hear very earnest local news reports rife with war in Europe and its implications -- even Godfrey takes a turn at the news desk. There are also local commercials, as well as most of a Washington Senators baseball broadcast. The CBS shows are soap operas (including one in which the story advances not at all!), recorded and live musical interludes, comedy (Joe E. Brown, The Aldrich Family, and an incomplete Amos 'n' Andy show), quiz programs, drama (an Arthur Kober playlet), and news. President Franklin D. Roosevelt addresses the nation in a special report. The prime-time highlight is

a very enjoyable Major Bowes hour (the original Gong Show, and nobody gets the gong here). Music lovers will especially like three late-night big-band remotes with no commercial interruptions. From New York, Teddy Powell's swing band broadcasts from The Famous Door (good stuff here) and Louis Prima's dixieland gang rouses the crowd at the Hickory House (these guys don't always remember their lyrics but they don't care!). From Dayton, Ohio, Bob Chester's sweet band offers Glenn Miller-esque melodies.

1939 wasn't exactly the most typical year in the life of Western civilization, and September 21 wasn't exactly the best day of the year. The Premier of Romania was assassinated by fascist sympathizers, the fall of Poland was all but a done deal, and France completed its general mobilization of armed forces for the fight that was fated to happen. In America, Roosevelt was preparing to make a speech to a joint session of Congress to revise the neutrality laws in an attempt to offer aid to our allies while keeping the country out of the war in Europe. Possibly because of the nature of what the President was trying to accomplish, the complete broadcast day of WJTV, the Washington DC CBS owned-and-operated station, recorded every minute of their broadcast day on a series of 16 inch transcription discs (which were standard for recordings of broadcasts at the time) and given to the National Archives, where the originals still reside. This cassette album, representing 18 hours worth of material, presents the bulk of this material (deleting the first half hour, which included an emergency signoff for transmitter adjustments, and an evening repeat of Roosevelt's speech). There are several highlights: Arthur Godfrey does the morning show in his influential plainspoken style, George Washington Carver is interviewed on "Strange as it Seems", Major Bowles hosts his "Original Amateur Hour", an excellent "Columbia Workshop" production, and lots of big band music (including Louis Prima's orchestra) take you into the night. In addition, you get to hear the news bulletins, technical goofs, and advertisements of the day. That's not to say that there aren't a few things that will make an unsuspecting modern audience cringe.

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