



Audience Guide



By John Patrick Bray
Commissioned by
Lyric Arts Main Street Stage

Directed by Craig Johnson

Audience Guide prepared by
Education Director, Cassandra Proball

ABOUT THE PLAY

CHARACTERS

The Plain River Radio Players

Alice Welsh, late 20's the middle Welsh sister
Muriel Welsh, early 30s, the oldest Welsh sister
Gloria Welsh, 20s, the youngest Welsh sister
Winston "Buck" Carver, early 30s, also scriptwriter
Max Tyrone, late 20s, a dashing New Yorker returning home
Skip, the announcer, the kind of man who never feels comfortable in anything less than a tux

Studio Team

Philip, 60s, station manager and director
Edna, mid-20s, a young secretary at the WLAG station
Hubert, 20s, provides sound effects, has a French accent
Musical Director, the actual music director for the show
Musicians - Five, including the Music Director



Inspirational image from set designer, Jane Ryan



promotional shot of local radio station KOME in Tulsa, OK in 1938

SETTING & STORY

The action of the play takes place of the course of a single evening national broadcast from the WLAG Radio Studio, a small radio station (a New York affiliate) somewhere in Minnesota. If the broadcast of this holiday radio show is successful, The Plain River Radio Players will have the chance to be heard across the country and possibly even be syndicated, thus securing their financial futures.

TIME PERIOD

December 18, 1944

World War II Timeline

in the years, months, and days leading up to the December broadcast of the Plain River Radio Players

Dec. 7, 1941 - Japanese surprise attack at Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declares war

June 1944 - D-Day Allied landings on the beaches of Normandy

August 1944 - the Allied liberation of Paris

December 16, 1941 - the 11-day Battle of the Bulge begins in the Ardennes Forest of Europe

Infantry/Battered Bulge Village
by Robert N. Blair



The Playwright



John Patrick Bray earned his Ph.D. in Theatre Studies at Louisiana State University, and his M.F.A. in Playwriting from The Actors Studio Drama School/New School for Drama. He has written plays under grants from The National Endowment for the Arts, as well as the Acadiana Center for the Arts in Lafayette, Louisiana. His plays have been produced around the country, and have been published with Smith and Kraus, Applause, Next Stage Press, Indie Theatre Now, Heartland Plays, JACPublishing, and The Riant Theatre.

Bray's research interests include new play development and production, and adaptation studies. He has publications with *Platform: Postgraduate eJournal of Theatre and Performing Arts*, and *New England Theatre Journal*. He has a forthcoming article with *Theatre Synposium*, and a forthcoming book review with *Journal of Screenwriting*. In addition, Bray is a board member of The Plastic Theatre of Lafayette (in Louisiana), a board member of Technoculture: An Online Journal of Technology and Society; and

he is the moderator/director of No Shame Athens (a playreading series under the auspices of the Rose of Athens Theatre), and the moderator/director of the Athens Playwrights' Workshop. He is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America, Inc., Theatre Communications Group, and he is an Equity Membership Candidate. John is a Lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Georgia.

Bray's published works include:

Attic Monster - a one-act play produced at The GOOD Works Theatre Festival (2012)

Eleanor's Passing - 10-Minute Play featured in *The Best American Short Plays of 2010-2011* (2011)

Liner Notes - drama with a monologue published in *The 2011 Best Stage Monologues and Scenes for Women*



Trickster at the Gate - a drama commissioned by the Performing Arts Society of Acadiana under The Big Read Acadiana Grant from The NEA (2009)

As We Speak - a drama commissioned by the (re:)Directions Theatre Company (2008)

Down Low - a drama co-authored with Keith Dorwick and commissioned under grants from the Acadiana Center for the Arts and Acadiana C.A.R.E.S. (2007)



ABOUT THE PLAY

Early 20th Century Radio in America

In the U.S. in 1913 there were 322 licensed amateur radio operators. Just four years later there were over 13,000 - more than 40 times as many. Many people thought that all radio would ever be was a fad, and certainly so long as the public had to build its own radios, put up with poor reception, and listen over earphones, relatively few people were going to be interested in having a radio. Laying the groundwork for making radio a mass medium was Edwin H. Armstrong's invention that made it possible to replace earphones with a loudspeaker. By 1934, 60 percent of U.S. households and 1.5 million cars had radios.

In 1919, Frank Conrad, a Westinghouse engineer, began broadcasting music in Pittsburgh. His broadcasts became so popular that Westinghouse established a radio station, KDKA, and also began broadcasting prizefights and major league baseball. Soon, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), a government-sanctioned radio monopoly, was formed. RCA was owned by a GE-dominated partnership that included Westinghouse, American Telegraph and Telephone Company (AT&T), Western Electric, and others. In 1926, RCA formed the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and a year later a rival network whose name eventually became the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) was also established. By 1938, 40 percent of the nation's 660 stations were affiliated with a network.



early 20th century home crystal radio set

Hear DICK POWELL
as Richard Diamond, Private Detective

on the air for REXALL
NBC • every Wednesday

Since the invention of the telegraph, there had been a well-established system for charging people to send wireless messages, but how was radio broadcasting to be financed? In Europe the government financed it. In the U.S. it soon came to be largely financed by advertising. By 1930 nine out of ten broadcasting stations were selling advertising time. In 1939, more than a third of the stations lost money, but by the end of World War II only a handful were in the red. To avoid the high cost of producing radio shows, local radio stations got most of their shows other than news from the networks, which enjoyed economies of scale. Network costs for radio shows were spread over the many stations using their programming.

In the Golden Age of Radio the programming was very different to the music, news, and talk radio of today. Radio gave us the genre of the "soap opera," so called because the sponsors of these serialized morality plays (aimed at housewives) were usually soap companies. Like reading, radio demanded the use of imagination. Through image-inspiring sound effects, which reached a high degree of sophistication, radio replaced vision with visualization.

This is Nora Drake

Now only on CBS

Radio's most dramatic modern romance. Formerly heard over two networks, now on CBS only! Tune in today. You'll laugh. You'll cry. You'll live the story of "This is Nora Drake."

OTRCAT
Mon. thru Fri.
KXLY 11:30 A. M.

Lyric Arts Costume Design

Design Sketches by costume designer Stephanie Mueller

Gloria



Edna



Muriel



Max



Philip



Buck

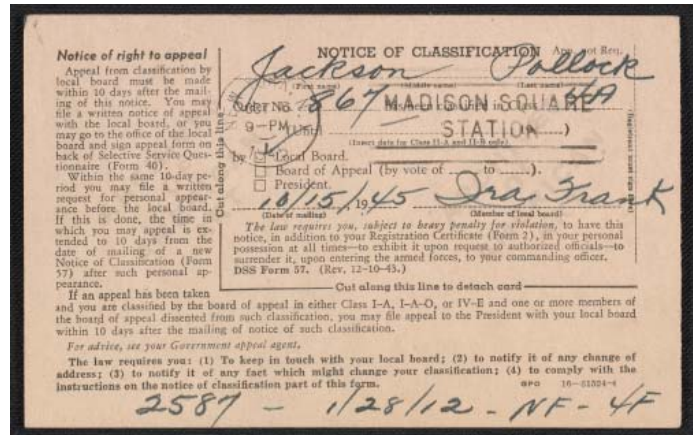


The Impact of the Draft and the War at Home

By the end of the war in 1945, 50 million men between eighteen and forty-five had registered for the draft but only 10 million had been inducted in the military. Once registered and examined by a local draft board, men were assigned to a classification. The most common classifications were: 1-A available for military service; 3-A deferred for dependency reasons; 3-B deferred due to occupation being essential to war effort; 3-C deferred due to agricultural occupation; and 4-F, unfit for military service due to medical reasons.

Thirty percent of registrants across America were classified as 4-F which was given primarily for muscular and bone malformations, hearing or circulatory ailments, mental deficiency or illness and some diseases. Many of these men experienced the shame or ostracization that Buck experiences in the play.

Nobody wanted to date these boys who didn't pass their physicals, and we called them "4-Fers." Now that I think back, that was terrible. . . We all thought they were physically unfit to go and fight for our country. How awful! — Sylvia Chalupsky, Nebraska



notice of classification for American artist, Jackson Pollock, 1945



While Buck is struggling with his feelings about his selective service classification, Edna is coping with the loss of her husband in the attack at Pearl Harbor and Gloria is worrying about a sweetheart overseas. Communication during the war was very unreliable and loved ones might go for months without hearing from servicemen and women. As an example, here's an excerpt from an oral history of one couple's experience.

Question: Did the American government know that you had been captured [by the Germans]?

Mr. Doherty: I was listed as missing in action. My mother was notified in the spring.

Mrs. Doherty: See, he was captured in December and his mother gets a letter the first of April, saying her son is missing in action, and she received telegrams saying that the service was unable to locate his whereabouts. So, for all those months his parents didn't know whether he was dead or alive. It wasn't until they walked out of the prison camp and onto an American base on May 3rd that his parents were notified. They then received a telegram, saying he had been returned to military soil...From all those months [while he was] in prison camp...his mother would sit and write him [un-addressed] letters. Not knowing where he was or even if he was alive. It gets me every time I think about it.

Before the Show

1. Based on what you know about the play, what do you expect to see onstage?
2. Why do you want to come to see this show? Why see it at Lyric Arts?
3. How do you expect the design elements (props, costumes, set, sound, and lighting) will help communicate the setting and help to tell the story?
4. Have you ever attended a live radio broadcast or the performance of a live radio show, such as the *Prairie Home Companion* on tour or at the State Theater? If so, what do you expect to be similar or different from the play's Plain River Players evening broadcast?

After the Show

1. In your own words, what happened in the play?
2. What was the most moving to you? Did anything make you cry or laugh out loud?
3. What surprised you the most? What, if anything, confused you?
4. Which design elements were the most memorable? Why?
5. What, if anything, about the show changed how you feel about the power of radio or the experience of Americans at home during World War II?

PAGE & STAGE - DIG DEEPER

Pre-Show Discussion About the Script

1. What was the most moving to you? Did anything make you cry or laugh out loud? Why?
2. Which design elements (as described in the script) were the most memorable? Why?
3. How does the setting and time period affect how you see the characters and understand the language?
4. What might you expect from a holiday play about a radio broadcast? What might you expect from a play specifically commissioned for Lyric Arts Main Street Stage?

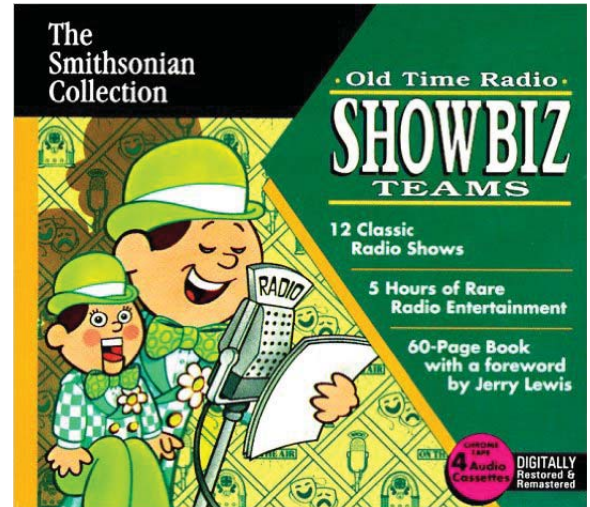
Post-Show Discussion About the Production

1. How believable were the performances of these characters? Did they remind you of people you've met? How?
2. Which aspects of the production (directing choices, acting choices, design choices) were the most successful in conveying the time period, mood, and setting? How were they successful?
3. How did the war abroad affect these characters at home?
4. How were the design elements (props, costumes, set, sound, and lighting) similar or different to what was described in the script? Why do you think the production team made these choices?

The Anoka County librarians have provided resources you might enjoy, to help enrich your experience of *The Spitfire Grill* before or after seeing it. You could:

--Listen to CDs in the Smithsonian Institution's Old Time Radio series—classic radio episodes—with subtitles such as *Comedy and Laughter*, *Detectives and Crime Fighters*, *Showbiz Teams*, *Science Fiction*, and *Westerns*. Or listen to similar CDs such as *The Best of Old Time Radio: Starring Jack Benny* or *The Greatest Old Time Radio Shows of the Twentieth Century*.

--Watch documentary and informational DVDs on radio and radio stars, like *Click & Clack's As the Wrench Turns*, *Garrison Keillor: The Man on the Radio in the Red Shoes*, and *Pioneers of Primetime: Vaudeville Headliners, Radio Superstars, Television Legends*.



--Look into sheet music of old time songs from the library's Songbook Collection, such as *Andrews Sisters' Army, Navy, and Marines Song Folio*, *Great Theme Songs from Radio's Golden Years*, and *Swing Standards*. A broad range of songs are available for copying and checkout in this collection.

--Listen to CDs of modern radio programming, such as *Prairie Home Companion*, *American Chronicles: World War II*, *Traveling Home for Christmas: Four Stories that Journey to the Heart of the Holiday*, and the six disc series *Voices in Our Time: The Original Interviews* by Studs Terkel.

--Watch DVD feature films involving radio such as: *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, *Good Morning, Vietnam*, *NewsRadio*, *Pirate Radio*, *Pump Up the Volume*, *Radio Days*, and *Sleepless in Seattle*.

--Read books on radio and radio personalities such as *830 WCCO: 80th Anniversary—Celebrating a Minnesota Tradition*, *Private Parts*, *Rush Limbaugh: An Army of One*, and *World War Two on the Air: Edward R. Murrow and the Voices that Riveted a Nation*.

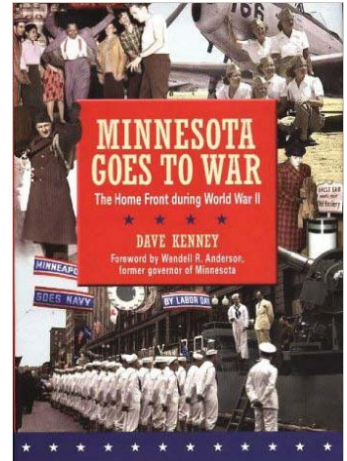
--Explore eAudio through the library's OverDrive media service to hear offerings like *The Very Best of Bob and Ray: Legends of Comedy*, by noted radio duo Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding, and recorded books like *Unbroken: A World War II Airman's Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*—also available to read as an OverDrive eBook.

--Listen to music on CD from the time of the play: *Andrew Sisters Greatest Hits*, *The Best of Tommy Dorsey*, *Doris Day's Greatest Hits*, *Ella Fitzgerald*, *The Essential Count Basie*, *The Essential Glenn Miller*, and *Remember Pearl Harbor: Classic Songs of World War Two*.

www.anokacountylibrary.org

-Enter more into the play's world through the library's wide range of non-fiction books on WWII, exploring such topics as:

- **Biography/Memoir:** *Code Talker*, *Devil at My Heels*, *The Man Who Flew the Memphis Belle: Memoir of a World War Two Bomber Pilot*, *Unbroken*
- **Home Front:** *Farewell to Manzanar*, *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II*, *Minnesota Goes to War: The Home Front during World War Two*, *Our Mothers'-War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War Two*
- **Theaters of Battle:** *Band of Brothers*, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two*, *The Greatest Generation*, *In Harm's Way: John Hersey's renowned Hiroshima*, *The Liberator: One World War II Soldier's 500 Day Odyssey from the Beaches of Sicily to the Gates of Dachau*
- **Air Warfare:** *B 17 Flying Fortress: The Symbol of Second World War Air Power*, *Flyboys: A True Story of Courage*, *Forgotten Fifteenth: The Daring Airmen Who Crippled Hitler's War Machine*, *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s over Germany*
- **Germany:** *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, *The German War*, *Inside the Third Reich*, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*
- **The Holocaust:** *Anne Frank's Diary of a Young Girl*, *The Hiding Place*, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Elie Wiesel's classic *Night*



--Watch feature films on DVD related to WWII, such as *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *Catch 22*, *From Here to Eternity*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *The Longest Day*, *Midway*, *Monuments Men*, *Patton*, *Private Buckaroo*, *The Railway Man*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Schindler's List*, *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*, *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, *The Tuskegee Airmen*, *Twelve O'Clock High*, and *Wallenberg: A Hero's Story*.

--Watch documentary DVDs related to WWII, like *As Seen through These Eyes*, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, *FDR: A Presidency Revealed*, *Fly Girls*, *In Their Own Words: The Tuskegee Airmen*, *The Perilous Fight: America's World War Two in Color*, *Sugihara: Conspiracy of Kindness*, Ken Burns' *The War*, Frank Capra's famed *Why We Fight* series, and *World War II* with Walter Cronkite.

--Use online databases, in-library or from anokacountylibrary.org with your Anoka library card, to learn more about classic radio, WWII, and a host of other subjects, as with the eBook *American Home Front in World War II* in the Gale Virtual Reference Library database. Our dozens of other fine databases include Biography in Context, Britannica Online encyclopedia, Historical New York Times (original scanned pages, 1851-2008), National Geographic for Kids, and ProQuest Newstand Complete.

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The information in this study guide was pulled from the following sources.

Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/selective-service-notice-classification-jackson-pollock-13788>

John Patrick Bray professional webpage: <http://johnpatrickbray.webs.com/>

Nebraska oral history archives from Nebraska.org, a reference website funded by the Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska State Historical Society: http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/frameset_reset.html?http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/0801_0106.html

Prairie Home Companion with Garrison Keillor radio program website: <http://prairiehome.org/tickets/>

The Technological Development of Radio: From Thales to Marconi by Carole E. Scott, State University of West Georgia: <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-history-of-the-radio-industry-in-the-united-states-to-1940/>

Tulsa Historical Society volunteer personal website with information and photographs from Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa/Tulsa County Library/Tulsa Historical Society

War On Their Minds oral history project. Interview with William R. Doherty (Age in 1941: 18) and his wife, Phyllis Doherty (Age in 1941: 14). Interview Team: Jeff Tiberii, Zach Ducharme: http://www.whshistoryproject.org/ww2/Interviews/phpInterviews/mr_mrs_doherty.php