



BARRY SLOAN

The cast of the Landmark Radio Theater's production of "Stage Door" gather round a Truetone Series 7J tombstone radio (circa 1932-1940). ■ Video: newsday.com/act2

Radio takes center stage

Landmark Radio Theater's troupe is putting on a live performance of 'Stage Door,' adapted from a broadcast

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They were the podcasts of their day. From the antics of "The Jack Benny Program" to the chills and thrills of "The Shadow," radio shows were the entertain-

ment equivalent of comfort food for American families during the days of the Great Depression and World War II. Among the most delectable dishes served by broadcast networks was "Lux Radio Theater," a radio staple that would air hourlong adaptations of popular films of the day

performed by top stars. Bringing those memories back to life is Landmark Radio Theater, a troupe of actors who will perform a live radio version of "Stage Door," based on the classic 1937 Katharine Hepburn-Ginger Rogers movie, on Sept. 30 at Landmark on Main Street in Port Washing-

ton. Adapted from the "Lux" broadcast, the stage will be made to resemble a 1930s broadcast studio, complete with standing microphones, a piano for musical accompaniment, even assorted paraphernalia to create such sound effects as slamming doors. To further transport the audience back to those radio days, the actors will be dressed in period garb.

"We have a lot of working actors both from the community and professionals who are

very talented and don't always have the ability to take a month off and do a show in the city," said Elise May, of Port Washington, who is co-producing the show with Landmark executive director Laura Mogul. "This was a good opportunity to focus on doing inventive work in a short amount of time and to do something really good. And that's what radio was like."

The radio show is the brain-

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Staging a radio show

RADIO from E23

child of May and director Pat Lyons, also of Port Washington. Lyons had worked on radio programs with community theater Port Washington Play Troupe until the group went on hiatus a few years ago (it has since been revived).

Anxious to put on another radio production, he contacted May, a longtime friend who runs Expressive Elocution, a company that teaches children voice communication skills in theater arts. Last year they approached Mogul about doing a radio play based on "Stagecoach," the 1939 Western that made John Wayne a bona fide movie star. With numerous sound effects from horses' hoofs to shootouts, songs reminiscent of the Old West, vintage commercials for products like Carter's Liver Pills and an assortment of character actors — mostly from Port Washington — it was a hometown hit.

PLAY WITH STAYING POWER

Although last year's production was heavily male-oriented, "Stage Door," about aspiring actresses living in a New York City theatrical boardinghouse, is skewed more toward women. "It's a great ensemble piece and most of all, it's got this snappy, sparkling dialogue from the best of the golden age of Hollywood," said Lyons, 59, of Port Washington.

The casting couch also plays a role in "Stage Door," said May — who places her birth year somewhere between the premiere of "Stage Door" and the moon landing — giving it a modern sensibility in the #Me-Too era. The hourlong play is made up of three acts with re-creations of commercials for Lux soap and musical numbers by the likes of Cole Porter and George Gershwin during the breaks.

"What they are doing here is preserving history, so that the people who come here to see it and hear it will appreciate what happened in the past and also see a theatrical art form," said Spencer Cohen, 67, of Port Washington who plays multiple roles in "Stage Door."



The cast of the Landmark Radio Theater's production of "Stage Door" rehearses at the Landmark on Main Street in Port Washington.



Members of the Township Theatre Group table read "Sorry, Wrong Number" in Dix Hills.

Landmark isn't the only theater company going with radio. Township Theatre Group in Huntington is presenting a roughly two-program featuring the "Sorry, Wrong Number," "The House in Cypress Canyon" along with an off-off-Broadway play of "The Jack Benny Play" and the Abbott and Costello routine "Who's on First" in November. And at least two other companies — the Port Washington Play Troupe, Port Republic Theatre Group in Lindenhurst, Patchogue Community College — are on "It's a Wonderful Life Radio Play" during the season.

THE APPEAL OF RADIO

Dan Cox, director of casting for WCWP/88, the radio station of Long Beach, admits that the audience for old-time niche group. Still, show



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A Truetone Series 7J tombstone radio (c. 1932-1940)

Golden age of radio will shine in live presentations

WHAT Landmark Radio Theater presents "Stage Door"
WHEN | WHERE 6 p.m. Sept. 30, Landmark on Main Street, 232 Main St., Port Washington
INFO \$10; 516-767-6444, landmarkonmainstreet.org

WHAT Township Theatre Group presents "The Golden Age of Radio"
WHEN | WHERE 8 p.m. Nov. 10 and 2 p.m. Nov. 11, Temple Beth El, 660 Park Ave., Huntington
INFO \$25, \$22 seniors and students; 631-213-9832, townshiptheatre.org

"The Whistler" and "Fibber McGee and Molly" have been a staple of WCPW's two-hour block of programming aimed at seniors each Friday morning.

"They have a special appeal for someone of a certain age. My parents were into those shows and would play them for me. It's a sort of theater for the mind. There was good acting and good imagery," Cox, 56, said.

Sometimes that imagery was too good. Though Larry Maltin, who plays multiple roles in Township's production, says his favorite radio program as a child was anything that came on before his bedtime, it was "The Lone Ranger" that made an indelible impression.

"I thought 'The Lone Ranger' was

some incredible person and then when I saw him on television, it was so disappointing," said Maltin, of Dix Hills. "He wasn't any way like I imagined it. I don't think I ever went back to it in the same way."

For the actors, there are numerous attractions to performing radio plays. "You don't have memorization, you don't have blocking," said Larry Bellman, another Township cast member, who lives in East Northport. "You have a challenge because you have to convince the audience you're the character that's reciting the lines even though you're reading. You're playing multiple roles, so you have to change your voice, the inflection, the delivery. You have to ACT."

ATTRACTING YOUNGER AUDIENCE

While Cox admits the audience for radio plays and programs is primarily older, he's hopeful that younger people will discover their magic.

"I have a 23-year-old son and he listens to podcasts all the time. A radio play can be made into a podcast. Young people today are very much into audio. I would like to get a group of kids together and write an original radio play," Cox said.

It also helps if younger people start listening to those broadcasts at an early age, said Pamela Meadows, president of Port Washington Play Troupe, which produced such radio plays as "The Maltese Falcon" and "Casablanca" earlier this decade.

"These programs have the same appeal as Turner Classic Movies has to its audience," said Meadows, 69, of Port Washington. "When you expose kids to it in their formative years, they'll stick with it."

One of "Stage Door's" younger cast members, Anne DeAcetis of Port Washington, who plays the Ginger Rogers role (her sister Christine DeAcetis has the Hepburn part), became intrigued by backstories of putting on a radio show. "There are a lot of great stories, like how the actors would take the pages of their scripts and drop them on the floor so the sound of paper rustling wouldn't be caught by the microphone. And you can just envision these studios where the stories were just all over the floor," says DeAcetis, who didn't want to give her age, except to say she's "old enough to have a great-uncle who fought in the trenches in World War II."

May is hopeful that audiences of all ages will be just as intrigued by the story taking place on the stage at Landmark.

"There's this sense of intergenerational history," she said. "You still have an older audience that comes and remembers. They come and enjoy it for their memories of childhood. And we hope to have the younger audiences, who will just enjoy being part of a live audience and seeing it happen."

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