

## THEATER OF THE MIND

by Fred Hobbs

For a big slice of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from 1920 to 1960, America's primary source of entertainment was radio. In the latter half of that period by virtue of its immediacy, radio began also to supplement and even dominate newspapers as an instrument to disseminate information. Of course, this was all B.T., before television that emerged in the late 40s and early 50s.

Those forty years encompassed "The Golden Age of Radio," offering comedy, drama, and variety coupled with your own imagination, free of charge in your own living room, kitchen, bedroom and even car...your own personal "Theater of the Mind."

The Radio Historical Association of Colorado (RHAC) is an organization devoted to preserving this rich heritage of radio's contribution to America's popular culture. RHAC maintains a library of more than 22,000 recorded "Old Time Radio" broadcasts which may be checked out for personal use and also aired on a monthly Internet program "OTR from the Rockies."

Recently, RHAC's leaders compiled a list of the ten all time best shows from those golden years. The choices are arbitrary, of course, and you are welcome to agree or disagree. And, if you are too young to have heard the programs live or your Mom and Dad made you do your homework instead, go to [rhac.org](http://rhac.org) on your computer and find out how to access them and discover what you missed.

The top 10:

1. *The Jack Benny Program*. Hilarious interplay between Benny, his cast and guests and the presentation of Jack's on-air character as a vain miser, just the opposite of the beloved comedian's real life personality.
2. *Gunsmoke*. Great tales of a U.S. Marshal in the old west, his cohorts and adversaries.
3. *Our Miss Brooks*. Laugh out loud comedy about a poorly-paid school teacher, surrounded by a bashful would-be boyfriend, a dotty landlady, a bombastic school principal, a mischievous student and his girlfriend, daughter of the principal.
4. *The Lone Ranger*. Everyone's favorite masked law and order man and his faithful Indian companion, Tonto.
5. *Amos 'n Andy*. Historic radio comedy dating back to the 1920s that maintained popularity for 34 years on the air.
6. *Bob and Ray*. The two men voiced all the characters in this truly original romp of satire, silliness and audio slapstick.
7. *Suspense*. Billed as "radio's outstanding theater of thrills."

8. *Lux Radio Theater*. Radio adaptations of popular movies of the day.

9. *Johnny Dollar*. An insurance investigator gets involved in more serious situations, even murder.

10. *Your Hit Parade*. Popular songs of the week as determined by record sales and jukebox plays. Featuring a live orchestra and top singers, including for a time, Frank Sinatra and Doris Day.

“Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear!”