



June 22, 2008

REMEMBERING NORMAN CORWIN, THE POET LAUREATE OF RADIO

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Correspondent

Recently, I agreed to be a guest lecturer at a friend's media class.

How could I refuse, since that night's lesson was about radio and my friend provided a full outline, excellent text and a DVD: "A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin."

Not being familiar with Corwin, I and some very grateful students had a deeply rich experience in store for us that night.

The Web site bearing Corwin's name describes his programs, many of which ran through the most turbulent times in our history — the 1930s and 1940s — as "a master class in how to evoke the greatest possibilities of sound, and of radio." What understatement!

Foremost, Corwin is a gifted writer. Van Gogh fans may recall Corwin's Oscar-nominated movie script, "Lust for Life," about the Dutch painter's tragic life. He's written books, including "Trivializing America" and "Holes In A Stained Glass Window," as well as collections of select correspondence, and many TV and radio scripts and poems.

The WCBS airwaves formed his canvases; everything Corwin said on the air was of the most artfully constructed prose and poetry. "Norman Corwin's Words Without Music," on CBS, was the first time a radio writer or director had ever been billed in the title of a show.

He directed the simulcast "This is War" program, produced radio plays, wrote about injustices and read from literary works. He also entertained the greatest voices of celebrity of the time.

But it was Corwin's tremendous sense of duty to the truth that struck me most.

Toward the end of this documentary, V-E Day was declared and the New York streets outside his studio erupted in sheer joy. But Corwin didn't yield to the obvious. He crafted a one-hour masterpiece titled, "On A Note Of Triumph," a thoughtful analysis that resisted sugar-coating the nightmare the country had come through, dealing instead with the endless questions about what World War II had meant from many perspectives.

Then he assembled a studio of great minds, belonging to writers and actors, and celebrities of the time to share their views about the war on the air.

In Corwin's own words: "What radio has the capacity to offer is an embellishment, is thoughtfulness, is an opportunity to express concepts, to witness a war, to comment upon its ramifications, its progress, its justice or injustice, its horror, its goals, in something approaching dignified language. I don't mean that in the sense of starchy or high falutin,' but something that is not gutter, something that is more than a gut reaction.

"Some day I hope that there will be enough of an audience so that radio, as you and I know it, can be revitalized, can return. It exists in small measure now. That kind of radio has retreated to the high ground, (in) work that is done by dramatists who are broadcast by NPR, by PRI. Public radio is the high ground."

Corwin is 98 now and living in Los Angeles, where he is writer in residence at the University of Southern California Journalism School. He still writes for radio, too.

The 2006 Oscar-winning "A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin" is available on DVD from Noma Films, Corinne Marrinan and Eric Simonson, producers, at www.Tribute.ca/movies and other outlets.

Note on last week's column: Reader George Dealaman of Warren and Lavallette correctly guessed the last song Big Jay Sorensen played on 66 WNBC: John Lennon's "Imagine."

The day and time for Dave the Rave's Relics and Rarities was incorrect. Catch Dave from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. Saturdays at www.TopShelfOldies.Com. Dave invites you to send him (at Dave@davetherave.com) songs from the '60s and '70s that you feel are forgotten or lost. If he gets enough requests, he'll do an all-request Radio Somewhere fans' hour.

Maureen Nevin Duffy created and hosted "Asbury Radio — The Radio Voice of Asbury Park," a weekly public affairs talk show for more than six years at the City's WYGG, 88.1FM station, and on the Web at www.AsburyRadio.com.

Please send your comments and suggestions regarding Radio Somewhere to AsburyRadio@aol.com or 3 Deal Lake Court, Asbury Park, N.J. 07712.
