

Octogenarian Osgood still acclaimed for brightening radio's golden age

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

"At 81, media legend Dick Osgood has been feeling 'kind of hurt' that the book he published last year, 'WYXIE Wonderland — An Unauthorized 50-Year Diary of WXYZ Detroit,' has received no local reviews.

For 36 years on WXYZ Osgood played dramatic roles, reviewed movies, reported news and interviewed the likes of Irving Berlin, Lucille Ball and Red Skelton before retiring in 1971. But he said he has felt "felt very badly" with the dearth of local reviews of his book.

"The book has been reviewed nationally and gotten some good notices in publications, but not locally," laments the Farmington Hills resident.

His faith in the book, and probably in himself, was renewed recently at the Friends of Old-Time Radio convention in Newark, N.J.

Nearly 400 radio buffs from Texas to Maine congregated for a weekend in

New England to attend acting and sound effect workshops; meet collectors; purchase memorabilia; re-enact scripts from dramas such as The Lone Ranger, and honor their heroes.

Osgood ranked among them, and was awarded for contributions he made during radio's golden age.

"I was absolutely surprised," said the author, who autographed dozens of his WYXIE diaries during the convention.

"I've received awards before, but to get this recognition and to sell so many (books) to people from all over the country really renewed my faith."

THE LITERARY WORK penned by the one-time Broadway actor takes off from the torrid '20s when Detroit was dubbed the radio hub of the nation.

It lands in 1975 with WXYZ alive and thriving, having weathered the Great Depression (that Osgood says shunted him into radio), three wars and the onslaught of rock and roll. Pages in between tell of Detroiters Stevie Wonder, Lou Gordon, Sonny Sales, Mike Wallace and Danny Thomas, rigged TV quizzes, sayola and shows like "The Lone Ranger" and "Challenge of the Yukon."

An advocate of letting old-time radio "die its peaceful death," it thrilled Osgood to note the age of many radio enthusiasts who attended the convention.

"Anne (Mrs. Osgood) and I noticed so many young people there. It's amazing to me how interested they are in radio's past," he said.

Youngsters Osgood addressed recently at Warner Middle School shocked him with "their interest, intelligence and curiosity. Their teacher remembered me, and some of the kids even knew that 'The Lone Ranger' is aired in the middle of the night," he said.

During the convention's closing banquet, participants caught a glimpse of Osgood's own youth, as he read a few excerpts from the diary he began keeping in 1918, when he was 16.

"Friday, Feb. 24, 1928," began Osgood.

"On this date I made my debut in radio at station WOH, 1440 Broadway. I was playing across 40th Street at the Empire Theater in Sidney Howard's play Salvation, starring Pauline Lord.

"An agent phoned me to offer me the radio job. It worked out, for the broadcast was from 9 to 9:30 p.m., and I was appearing only in the first and last acts of Salvation.

"So in makeup and stage clothes, I rushed across from the stage door on 40th to the studios of WOH and played the lead in The True Story Hour. We were paid \$25 each.

"Howard Barlow conducted the musical bridges (he later conducted the CBS symphony), Ted Husing was the announcer (later to become a CBS sportscaster), and William Sweets directed.

"It was exciting, but what thrilled me most was the realization that Mother and Dad were hearing me as I

spoke in their living room in Lynnfield Center, Mass."

"I always thought my years in the theater and the 'wonderful '20s' were happy until I read some of that," Osgood said recently.

WRITING STILL keeps Osgood busy. His newest money-making venture was planned 11 years ago when he began recording 500 historical vignettes for Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.

"When I went there to voice them (the radio features) on records, I got a letter of clearance from the museum. It was understood that they were taking the radio rights, and I would have the story rights for publication."

The broadcasting fixture also has obtained publishing rights to 2,000 international stories broadcast in three states during "The Footfinder" series, as well as war-time episodes he wrote for "The March of Victory" show.

"I'm trying to find out how to syndicate them to the newspapers, or put them together for books," he said, "and I might do something with that diary."

Something Osgood doesn't have to research is radio history.



RANDY DORST/staff photographer

WXYZ's Dick Osgood, known as a writer, reviewer, performer and interviewer, is embarking on a new career in publishing at the age of 81. He broadcast 500 historical vignettes for the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn after retiring in 1971 from WXYZ.

Opers singer is finalist

Eastern Michigan University placed one finalist in the Detroit District Metropolitan Opera auditions held recently.

Barbara Willate Youngerman, a graduate from Farmington Hills, was one of six finalists. She also received a contract from the Michigan Opera Theatre to play Cherubino in their January production of "The Marriage of Figaro."

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