

Back in the Day: Artifacts through the Ages

WQXR at 75

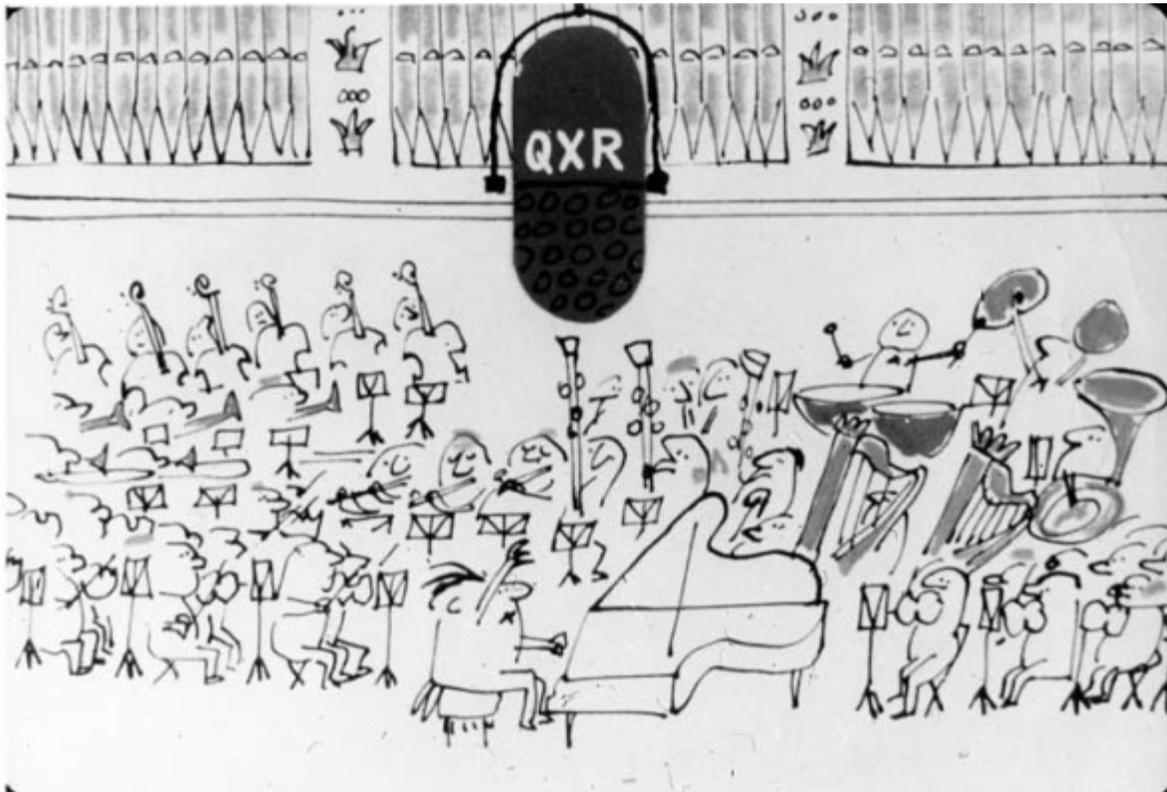
Wednesday, September 28, 2011

- [WQXR at 75](#)

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As we mark WQXR's 75th anniversary, we're feeling pretty curious about our history. Commence the plundering of the archives! We've unearthed a ton of great artifacts to share, some we didn't even know we had, including photos, cartoons, notes, footage, recordings and more. This particular collection of historical items is not only cool to look at, but they help to more vividly tell the story of a New York institution. Let the storytelling begin!

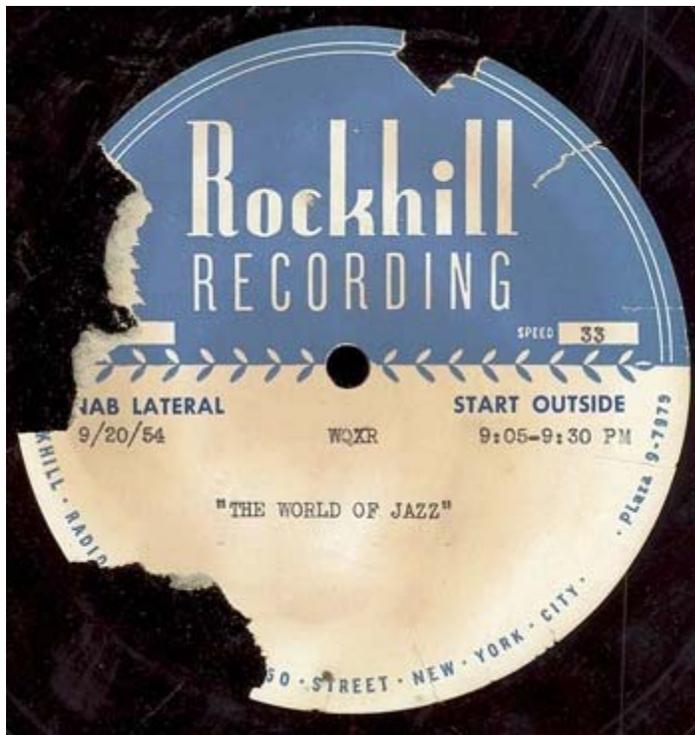


Did you know that WQXR used to have its own, in-house string quartet? Pretty fancy stuff. This photo depicts the quartet's most famous iteration, including Hugo Fiorato and Harry Glickman on violin, Harvey Shapiro on cello and Jack Braunstein on viola. Fiorato assembled the group, which performed at the station for 16 years. Here they are in the early 1950s:



This quartet was a long time coming. WQXR signed a contract with the Musicians Union in the late 1930s, which began our proud tradition of regularly [engaging musicians](#) to educate the public on their artistry through live, on-air performances. Early on, WQXR's Music Director was Eddy Brown, a violinist who brought in many performers and first developed the idea of a staff string orchestra for the station. Beginning with a group of ten players, with Brown as conductor and occasional soloist, the group evolved into the above-mentioned quartet.

An in-house string ensemble wasn't Brown's only bright idea. Ingeniously, he arranged an evening of music at the Waldorf-Astoria to showcase the high level of musicianship in jazz at the time; an effort to sway his classical cohorts' interest in the rapidly-developing genre. Inviting guests like conductor Wilfred Pelletier of the Metropolitan Opera to hear Benny Goodman, Brown's mixing of jazz and classical artists produced a vibe of mutual appreciation that spilled over to WQXR programming. At a time when 80% of airtime was devoted to classical music, the station began broadcasting blues, jazz and swing. Here's an image of a lacquer transcription disc containing the sixth program of *The World of Jazz* hosted by John S. Wilson and George T. Simon.



In the heyday of our in-house string quartet, WQXR host Alma Dettinger was at the helm of one of the stations "Women's Programs," *Other People's Business*. Okay, based on the title, it *does* sound like a gossip show, but Dettinger's interviewees included female artists, like Alvena Seckar. Below, a sketch by Seckar of her own interview on the show in 1952.

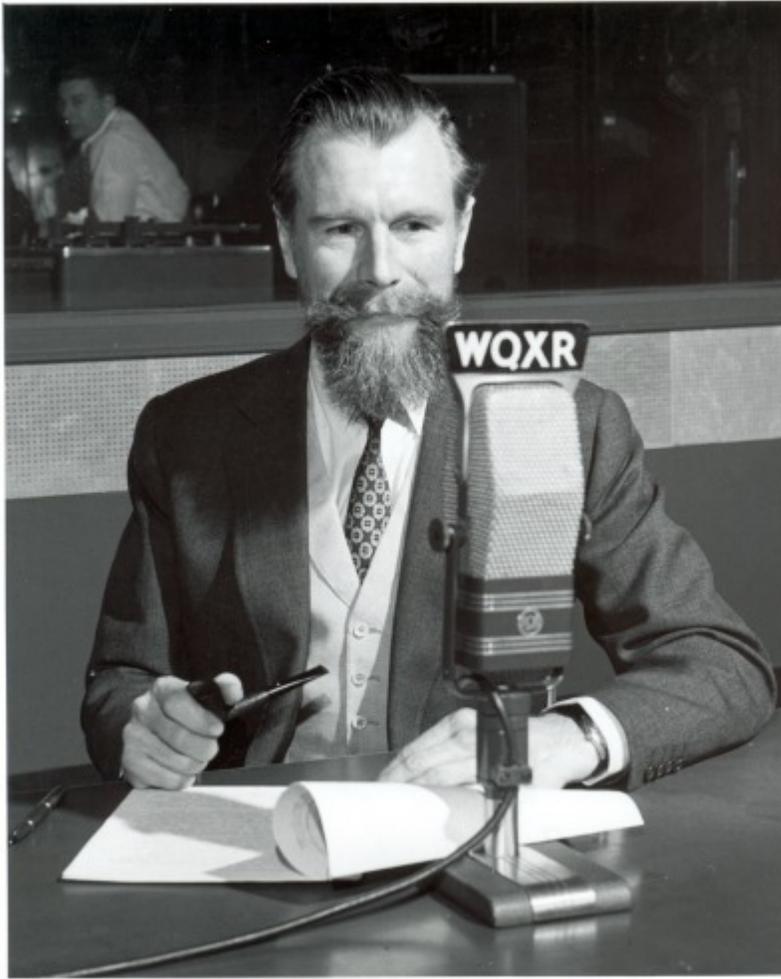


And Alma Dettinger wasn't the only host honing in on the female demographic. For ten minutes every week (and through 1945, every weekday), host Angelina Dougherty hosted

Bloomington's B-Line Shopping News on -- yes, WQXR. Dougherty would review sales and "good buys." If you're scratching your head trying to make the connection between this show and the rest of the classical programming, well, so are we, but in all likelihood, the segment was underwritten by the department store. While we don't know much about it, we did discover four copies of the show on 16-inch lacquer discs from 1945, among the Edward Tatnell Canby recordings in the WNYC archives collection:



Another WQXR host from back in the day was Commander Edward Whitehead, who also had his share of advertising chops. A decorated British naval officer, Whitehead was the host of WQXR's *This is Britain*, from 1959 to 1962. The WQXR program guide described the show as "a program of sounds, music and stories of England. [The host] takes his listeners on a personally conducted tour of the British Isles, with comments based on his personal experiences." In addition to being a naval commander and radio host, Whitehead was perhaps best known as the on-air advertising representative for Schweppes Tonic Water. Whitehead's catchphrase at that time was "WQXR has Schwepperverscence!" Here he is behind the WQXR microphone donning his signature beard:



Another well-known WQXR personality was Abram Chasins. Chasins was associated with WQXR from 1941-1965, and became Music Director for the station in 1946. In addition to helping WQXR become one of the country's most celebrated music stations, and winning a Peabody Award for excellence in broadcasting, Chasins was also an accomplished pianist, composer, and author. Below, we see Chasins' business card. It was found inside a copy of *Conversations with Toscanini* by B.H. Haggin. To whom Chasins gave the book remains a mystery, but on the backside a handwritten note reads, "Please accept this book (Mine, you can buy!) in appreciation of your appreciation of 'Maestro.' Cordially, Abram"

(OVER) -

ABRAM CHASINS

MUSIC DIRECTOR

AM - WQXR - FM

THE RADIO STATIONS OF

The New York Times

229 WEST 43RD STREET, NEW YORK 36, N. Y.

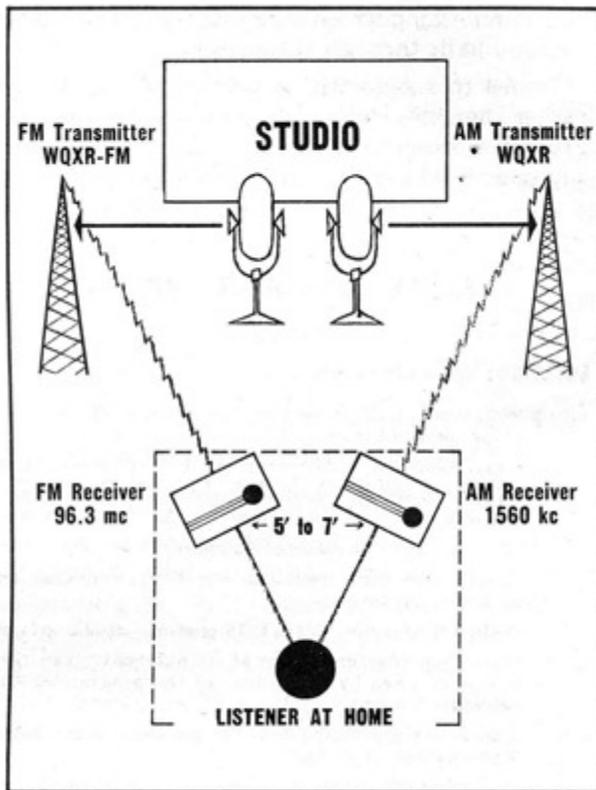
LACKAWANNA 4-1100

Please accept this book
(mine you can buy!) in appre-
ciation of your appreciation of
"Maestro". Cordially

4/29/59

Abram

While Chasins was at the helm of the station, WQXR began its first stereophonic broadcasts, on October 29th, 1952. Just what is stereophonic broadcasting? The drawing below, from the WQXR *Program Guide*, depicts just how it works. To quote the *Guide*: "Just as we see with two eyes and thus get a sense of depth, we listen with two ears....The listener hears with his left ear the sounds designed for the left and with his right those designed for that one. His brain merges the sound to give him full 'stereophonic' sense of depth, just as a stereoscopic camera gives a picture with three dimensions. That's why stereophonic broadcasting is so much more realistic."



Did you know that WQXR was formerly W2XR? John Vincent Lawless Hogan, a Yale grad and communications engineer, started the station in 1929 as W2XR, “an experimental television and facsimile broadcast facility.” The “2” in W2XR indicated it was a non-commercial radio station. Hogan was a founder of the Institute of Radio Engineers in 1912, earning 34 patents between 1910 and 1952 (including the invention of a single-dial radio control). After attracting significant positive public response to his broadcasts, Hogan and his good friend (and loyal listener) Elliott Sanger got a commercial license in December of 1936, and W2XR officially became WQXR. The red Saturn logo, below, made its first appearance in the August, 1936 W2XR program guide and then became WQXR's very first logo with the call letter change in December of that year.



Speaking of call letters, these painted brass call letters were previously affixed to the WQXR transmitter in Maspeth, Queens:



The letters' graphic style comes from *this* personification logo, which came into use around the same time the station was sold to *The New York Times* for \$1 million in January 1944. The *Times* began broadcasting news on the station in 1946.



Cool, huh?

All sourced from the WQXR Archive Collections.

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