

The "Capitol Family" Passes Its Fifth Radio Birthday

By Julia Shawell



FOR five years, the world's largest "family" has never missed a single Sunday evening without getting together in groups of untold thousands to hear the voice of its "daddy" and to enjoy the entertainment provided by its talented members.

Every Sunday night, Montana meets its New York cousins, while Major Edward Bowes' "Capitol Family" joins around a continent of loud speakers for its weekly family gathering. For five whole years this enormous unit, bound by a common tie, has been growing in leaps and bounds; until now the weekly session of the great clan means that a million ears heed the same voice at 7.20 o'clock, Eastern Standard Time. For two hours these radio brothers, sisters, cousins, and some of their great-grandmothers, span thousands of miles and drop off for the family conclave on Broadway.

Five whole years on the ether have solidified the "Capitol Family" into a perma-

nently-adopted group that has brought into the fold every interest, every type, every color and every creed. Recently the "Capitol Family" observed its fifth anniversary of broadcasting, and the deluge of congratulatory messages that came in from all over the world was testimony enough to its multitudinous growth from a tiny circle of less than a dozen members, who timidly sent out their first greetings over WEAF's wave in November of 1922.

Now fifteen of the country's biggest stations help to carry the Sunday message of good cheer to every man and woman who belongs to this circle.

The magical growth of Jack's famous beanstalk was the limited idea of some stilted imagination compared to the wonders of the multiplying of the "Capitol Fam-

ily." With the size of this family grown beyond the computation of statisticians, the National Broadcasting Company now and then adds another station to the chain and another hundred thousand drop into the fold.

Imagine a million children sitting, quietly waiting for the word of their father, and heeding it with satisfaction and enjoyment, without any duty or obligation for their time and attention. Well, this is exactly what happened last Sunday night, what will occur next Sunday night, and what has been the regular occurrence every Sunday for five years.

"Good evening, Family," Major Edward Bowes greets the listening hordes, and the family circle is joined once more with every program bringing in new converted cousins to the clan.

A MODEST BEGINNING

Any event typifying the spirit of broadcasting, any mention of radio entertainment, would be incomplete without considering this enormous "family" and its artist members. When radio was a crawling infant, just feeling its way into the pioneer homes where newly-built receiving sets testified to enthusiastic conquests made by this latest of the world's sciences, the daddy of the "Capitol Family" was introducing his wondering children to the newcomer and helping to guide its way into a path of permanent development and worthwhile purposes.

The first symphonic music ever broadcast from a theatre was sent out to the "Capitol Family," and also marked the premiere radio program from the Capitol Theatre. That was on November 19, 1922, when Major Edward Bowes, as managing direc-



Top of page: The Capitol Theatre, 51st Street and Broadway, New York City. At the bottom of the page: left, Sylvia Miller, soprano; right, Dr. William Axt. Top center: Eugene Ormandy, violinist. Bottom center: Westell Gordon, cellist.

tor, and S. L. Rothafel, the popular "Roxy," as director of presentations, arranged with WEAf to broadcast the first number by the Capitol Orchestra, which Erno Rapee then directed.

That was in the way of an experiment, with Roxy's voice introducing itself to a continent, which was later to receive him as one of the most popular personalities who ever took to the ethereal waves. Montana and Nebraska responded to the first effort and the following Sunday, in addition to the orchestral music, Betsy Ayres and William Robyn sang to their unseen and newly-organized "family" in a special presentation, "Where the Volga Flows."

Names and voices have come and gone in these Sunday night programs since that occasion, and a few of the charter members have remained. But every new entertainer has had his or her followers; while some of them have risen to fame on the strength of their popularity with their Capitol listeners in every state in the Union.

That first Christmas Eve on the air! Thousands of the original "Capitol Family" members recall it, with Roxy's beautiful message of Yuletide cheer, and its special greeting for the convalescent soldiers in service hospitals. Evelyn Herbert, now a popular musical-comedy prima donna, was then a newcomer and sang "Agnus Dei," with Erik Bye. The voices of Betsy Ayres and Daddy Jim Coombs in a Christmas fantasy entered hundreds of happy homes and gave a little joy to not a few lonely hearts. That was the first "Merry Christmas" which followed Roxy's "Good night, God bless you."

Roxy has now become the leader of his own "Gang," and Major Bowes, who was then the silent parent in the early days of the young broadcasters, has taken his place at the microphones. It is his voice which each week leaves its kind thought with all the listeners and directs the artists.

One of the first members of the Capitol group, Frederick Jagel, is now a member of the Metropolitan Opera Company. Roxy has his own theater. Caroline Andrews, Marjorie Harcum, Yasha Bunchuk and others have added to their laurels on the concert stage through their radio associations.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Probably the accomplishment to which



Major Edward Bowes, head of the "Capitol Family."

the "Capitol Family" alludes with most pride is the list of hundreds of radio sets which members throughout the world sent to bedridden soldiers when the plea for help was broadcast.

Last Christmas alone, Major Bowes received more than 30,000 cards and letters from his young and old "boys" and "girls" in nearly every place where the "Capitol Family" has a member. More than 10,000 poems have been sent to him, during the past year, by listeners who have enjoyed the poetry he reads every Sunday night.

Often some unusually interesting episode
(Continued on page 924)



Top: Yasha Bunchuk, cellist. Center: Waldo Mayo, violinist. Left: Marjorie Harcum, contralto.

Above: Caroline Andrews, soprano. Lower center: Carlo Ferreti, baritone.

"Capitol Family" Passes Fifth Birthday

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—pathetic, happy or humorous—comes to the "Family's" headquarters in the theatre. Early in December of last year, Major Bowes read "A Little Journey"; eight verses, of which the last two were

*"Why must there be hatred?
Greed and strife?
Do we need such shadows
Here in life?"*

*"Tis a little journey
Soon gone by,
Let's be friends together
Ere we die."*

At least a dozen estranged mothers and fathers wrote for copies of that poem.

One mother in a small Massachusetts town wrote the Major that she and her son had quarreled and that she wanted to send him that poem in the hope they would be reconciled for Christmas. The copy was forwarded to her and, at New Year's, one of the most treasured letters which the "Family" received was from this mother, who was happy once more. She penned her own gratitude, because her son had responded to the spirit of the poem and they had spent Christmas Eve together.

On another program, the "Family" heard "Around the Corner," carrying the idea that putting off calls until tomorrow and then tomorrow continues, until sad news comes and "around the corner there's a vanished friend."

The influence of broadcasting kind thoughts was emphasized by the number of those who wrote in to say that the program had made them realize their carelessness toward old friends and relatives, and that they had followed the admonition and had bridged the gaps which time had been allowed to make.

AGED AND FAR-OFF MEMBERS

So far as is known, the oldest listener to the Capitol programs is Mrs. Miriam Sparks Banister of St. Louis. On her most recent birthday, when she celebrated her 110th anniversary, the "Family" broadcast its best wishes to her. She is feeble and blind, but she is one of the "Family's" most enthusiastic members and never fails to tune in on Sunday nights.

Another Capitol "son" of ninety-seven years is John Brown of Gloucester, Mass., and because of his ardent adherence to the Capitol group he had a special number broadcast for him by Westell Gordon. He chose "The Bells of St. Mary's," and was quite proud when he heard his favorite sent out directly to him on the ethereal waves.

Those listeners comfortably seated in their own homes, near or far from the Capitol Theatre, never know under what circumstances and in what climate some other listener is made part of their group by the wonders of radio, which takes them all together to a little microphone in the Capitol studio at Broadway and Fifty-first Street, New York.

For instance, one December night, when the "Family" was thanking its stars for heat and comfort and hoping that its scattered members were also faring well, George S. Chuscher was joining the family for the

first time, under considerable disadvantage. Here's how he writes of that initial reception of the Capitol programs:

ACROSS THE SEAS

"I have listened to your concerts, 3,000 miles away, and this may interest you. Picture an amateur wireless station situated among the hills of Scotland. The time is two a. m.; outside, a gale is roaring. Seated before a radio receiver an operator is anxiously turning dials and trying to pierce the barrage of static and ship-to-shore Morse traffic. After listening for thirty cold minutes, the operator stops to warm his benumbed hands and drink some hot coffee. It is bitter cold, there being no fire nor heat in the room, except that coming from an oil lamp. Back to dial turning again by the wave-meter; the receiver is tuned dead on to the wavelength of WEAf, when suddenly the static is cleared and behold over the ocean and hills comes the voice of one of the 'Family.' Muffled in a big overcoat, I listen during the 'Family' period. Sometimes lucky, often unlucky. Over here WEAf comes in fairly strong, modulation good, but night distortion and fading always take their toll. The 'Family's' voices were weak, but what a thrill they gave me and I want to thank you and to be one of your 'family' in this radio circle."

Besides WEAf, the stations which carry this Sunday night feature from 7.20 to 9.00, E.S.T., are WRC, Washington; WJAR, Providence; WWJ, Detroit; WCAE, Pittsburgh; WHO, Des Moines; WTAG, Worcester; KSD, St. Louis; WHAS, Louisville, Ky.; WSB, Atlanta; WSM, Nashville; WMC, Memphis; WGY, Schenectady; WOW, Omaha, and WBT, Charlotte, N. C.

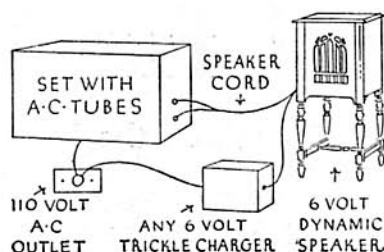
Now for a brief sketch of some of the best-known members of this huge "Family," which fills the air with talent and cheer every week.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

To his multiple duties as managing director of the Capitol Theatre, the daddy of the "Family," Major Edward Bowes, adds the important one of serving as liaison between the theatre and the radio public. In 1918, in association with Messmore Kendall and others, he built the Capitol, then the world's largest theatre. The presentation of motion pictures is not the only phase of Major Bowes' activity in the industry. He was vice-president of the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation and, since its merger into the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company, has served as vice-president of the consolidated company and a member of the executive committee. For his efforts as impressario for the "Family" radio programs, he was especially honored by the Sojourners at a dinner dance last June and presented with a jeweled sword by that organization.

ARTISTIC SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Every ear tuned in on these feature hours is familiar with the name of "Dr. Billy," otherwise known as William Axt. He began his studies in the National Conservatory of Music and went abroad, working with Dr. Paul Ertel in Berlin. Axt's operatic work began as assistant conductor under Oscar Hammerstein at the Philadelphia



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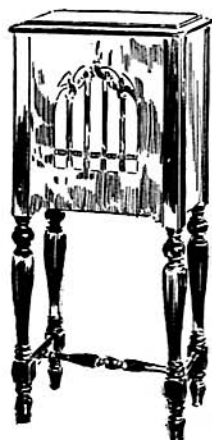
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Opera House and continued until that impresario sold out to the Metropolitan. Victor Herbert then appointed him conductor for Emma Trentini in "Naughty Marietta;" and later he conducted for Alice Neilson, when that famous singer made her last attempt at light opera.

About this time, Morris Gest engaged him for the Century Theatre, where he conducted the big productions for three years. When the Capitol first opened he was chosen to assist in putting on the operatic numbers. He has been in charge of the training and coaching of the soloists and the preparation of the vocal numbers. He is rapidly gaining a reputation as a composer.

"Our David," as Major Bowes calls David Mendoza, is the youngest conductor of a large symphony orchestra. He began his studies at the age of seven, studying the violin with Franz Kneisel. During his career he was with the Russian Symphony for two years as a first violinist, and later with the New York Symphony in a like capacity.

Discarding the bow for the baton, he served his apprenticeship as a conductor in several motion-picture theatres on Broadway and, until Roxy organized his orchestra, had the distinction of conducting the largest theater orchestra in the world.

Prominent among the younger generation of musicians now attracting attention in New York is Eugene Ormandy, associate conductor of the Capitol Grand Orchestra. He has been affiliated with this group for the past four seasons. Born in Budapest and a pupil of Eugene Huby at the age of three and one-half years, Ormandy completed his studies ten years later, winning the prize medal of the Royal Hungarian Academy of Music. He gave his first concert when only nine years old, and at the age of nineteen received an invitation to play before the Royal Family in Vienna. Soon afterwards he was appointed court virtuoso by Archduke Josef. The World War limited his concert activities to Central Europe, where he gained much fame as the soloist of Berlin's popular Bluetliner Orchestra. After the war, he came to America and has been a member of the Capitol "Family" ever since.

If a canvass of all the feminine artists on the air were made, it is doubtful if one would find a much more popular voice than that of Caroline Andrews, the "lark" of the group. She can boast of musical connections with such organizations as the De Koven Opera Company, the Philadelphia Opera, the St. Louis Municipal Opera and the "Student Prince" operetta. She began backstage at the age of five with the company in which her mother was singing. Her coloratura voice is really a delight, whether heard in an ambitious operatic aria or in a simple ballad or folk song.

Another young artist recently added to the "Capitol Family" is Sylvia Miller, youthful soprano. Although only sixteen years old, the natural beauty and unusual power of her voice have attracted much attention. She first came to public notice by winning the first gold medal in New York's music week. The award was made by a committee composed of Alma Gluck, Sophie Braslau and other stars.

Max Herzberg, pianist, began his studies with Rafael Joseffy, Rudolph Ganz and, later in Germany, with Bussoni. He studied theory with Max Spicker and in 1905 toured as Schumann-Heink's accompanist. For two

years from 1913 he was musical director for Victor Herbert, and he served in the navy during the war. From 1919 to 1922 he spent in Germany and in 1924 joined the Capitol staff as assistant musical director. The piano duets by "Dr. Billy" and Max are one of the popular features on these programs.

Marjorie Harcum is an attractive contralto, who came to New York from Richmond, Va. By sheer hard work and perseverance she won a following for herself at the Capitol and has entrenched herself as one of the popular members of Major Bowes' artistic family.

When the Major announces that Westell Gordon, tenor, cellist and composer, is to be featured, he can always be assured of an attentive listening public. In the period of less than a year since he joined the Sunday night group, Gordon has proven himself a versatile and valuable addition to the circle. He is a son of the late James Westell, well-known London publisher, who was an intimate friend of Gladstone. He has toured the world in concert and his repertoire includes many ballads of his own composition.

One of the "Family's" most remarkable artists is Yasha Bunchuk, Russian cellist. A pupil of the Petrograd Imperial Conservatory and a protege of Glazounoff, the famed Russian composer, he achieved an European reputation through appearance in England, France, Austria and Germany, prior to the war, in which he participated.

He arrived here two years ago and made his American debut in the Town Hall, New York. He instantly received recognition and is now a featured artist of the Victor Phonograph Company. His Guarnerius cello, which is 350 years old, and valued at \$18,000 was presented to him by General Limoff, then commander of the Russian Army, when he completed his studies in the University of Petrograd.

These are just a few who have become familiar to America as artist-members of the "Capitol Family" and who have helped, by their talent, to swell the size of the Capitol circle to a gigantic clan of Sunday-night, stay-at-home music lovers.

AMAZING STORIES IN OUR
FEBRUARY ISSUE:
**THE MASTER OF THE
WORLD** (A Serial in 2 Parts),
Part 1, by Jules Verne. In
1905, the year of Jules Verne's
death, this sequel to "Robur
the Conqueror" was published.
The inventive power of this aged master
and his skill in conceiving and portraying
a dramatic climax remained unimpaired in
this story, even to the end.

BARON MUNCHHAUSEN'S SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURES. (1. I Make a Wireless Acquaintance. 2. How Munchhausen and the Allies took Berlin), by Hugo Gernsback, in which the author introduces the wily Baron's "reincarnation." You will chuckle with glee over the entire series, but you will gain plenty of good scientific instruction, too. These are the first two instalments of THE scientific serial of the year.

THE REVOLT OF THE PEDESTRIANS, by David H. Keller, M.D. Signs of the truth of parts of the story can be seen already in the larger cities.

THE FOURTEENTH EARTH, by Walter Kateley. Scientists have steadfastly maintained that there must be other inhabited planets besides our own. This author has woven a charming tale around his idea.

And other stories.