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UD'S INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING IN RETIREMENT OFFERS CLASS ON RADIO'S 'GOLDEN AGE'

DAYTON, Ohio — As a lad in the 1940s, Phil Harwood owned no flashy video games or costly computer software to engage his young mind. All he had was a boxy Zenith radio and the unbound imagination of youth.

That was plenty.

The room pitch black, his heart in his throat, Harwood would climb into bed and await the portentous phrase: "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" which prefaced every episode of *The Shadow*, a popular crime drama that aired from 1937 to 1954.

"Your imagination would run wild, and I mean wild," says Harwood, an associate professor of communication at the University of Dayton. "The sound effects, the voices, the imagery — there's nothing like radio to give you that feeling of being there."

Harwood relives that feeling in a course he teaches called "Tune in Yesterday: The Adventures of Old-time Radio," which runs from March 18 to May 15 through the University's Institute for Learning in Retirement.

The class will hear and discuss radio programs that aired from the late 1920s to the early '60s, the period known as the medium's "Golden Age," Harwood explains, and will cover every genre from dramas, soap operas and news to comedies, variety shows and sports.

Thanks to the Internet, Harwood has downloaded a sampling of classic programs for his class, including *Amos 'n' Andy*, a popular comedy of skits that relied on the bantering of two African-American sounding characters; *Fibber McGee and Molly*, a situation comedy about a bumbling husband and his stalwart wife; and *Night Beat*, a drama starring a crime-solving reporter.

Harwood also plans to have the class re-create shows from original scripts from the dramas *The Witch's Tale* and *The Shadow*. He'll also offer contemporary programs from Canada and England to illustrate that this type of entertainment still exists.

"This a lot of fun for myself and the class," says Harwood, who is teaching the course for the third year. "Students get a chance to offer personal memories of their radio days and it helps bring back those memories for all of us."

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Of particular fondness for Harwood were the action adventure shows, including *The Adventures of Superman* and *Captain Midnight and His Secret Squadron*, starring invincible heroes whose antagonists often were Japanese soldiers or German Nazis, threading a patriotic “good versus evil” theme through many American radio programs.

“Radio was like that — with its conversational tone and patriotism, listeners felt close to one another ... it brought a country together,” Harwood says. “Radio, at one time, was a very intimate, shared medium.”

Jack Rang, professor emeritus of communication at UD and a guest lecturer for the class, got his first professional on-air radio job as a Northwestern University student for a Chicago NBC affiliate in the mid-'40s.

“You were able to create some marvelous pictures for your audience with just a few words,” says Rang, who freelances for local radio stations today. “You needed to have more than one voice. You had to be able to do several characters to get much work,” he adds, breaking off into a German intonation then an Irish accent.

But radio as a family entertainment vehicle eventually succumbed to a newer, visual medium. By 1962 virtually every show, including such staples as *Gunsmoke*, *Superman* and the *Jack Benny Show*, had made the jump to television.

“Radio could make you laugh or it could scare you to death with just a voice and a sound. Your mind did the rest,” Harwood says. “You can’t do that as easily with television — it’s too involving,” says Harwood. “I’m not saying there aren’t good programs on television. It’s just that television really doesn’t challenge your imagination the way radio does.”

UD’s Institute for Learning in Retirement offers senior adults, 55 and older, opportunities to join other seniors in a variety of informal seminar-based programs. Each program, which runs six to eight weeks, costs \$45, and no college experience is required to participate. The ILR has registered more than 430 people for its spring session. For registration materials, contact the office of continuing education at (937) 229-2347.

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For media interviews, contact **Phil Harwood** at (937) 229-2341 or via e-mail at harwood@riker.stjoe.udayton.edu; and **Jack Rang** at (937) 229-2028 or at home (937) 439-1931. For more information about the Institute for Learning in Retirement, contact **Julie Mitchell** at (937) 229-2347 or via e-mail at mitchell@udayton.edu.