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This American Life

The article first appeared in The Nation on November 27, 1997, and is reprinted with permission of its author, Bill McKibben.

The best job I ever had was at the old *New Yorker*, in the years it was run by William Shawn. I wrote all kinds of things, but mostly "Talk of the Town" stories. And what I liked most about them was that they could be about anything -- about the things that people wrote on typewriters when they were trying them out, about taking the police exam, about the first person who thought to make earrings out of plastic sushi, about cleaning up the Holland Tunnel.

Shawn placed only one real restriction on content: He was not interested in things that seemed timely and topical. This seemed insane to many people, maybe most, because they believed that journalism, by definition, concerned the timely and the topical. But I liked his approach, because it granted much greater latitude. Journalism could be about all manner of "news" that never got written about because it was not controversial, or it could be about daily life in all its particulars, just as a poem or short story or novel can be about daily life.

All of which leads me to say that my favorite piece of new journalism is a weekly radio program, **This American Life**. It originates from WBEZ in Chicago, and airs on 350 stations nationwide, courtesy of Public Radio International. It takes as its beat, well, *life*. For instance, it did a show recently on "The Kindness of Strangers": Four segments, each about fifteen minutes long, each set in New York. One was about a locksmith rescuing a stranded motorist; one about a white teenager who ran away from home to move in with a black actor/father figure in fifties Harlem; one about a crazy lady who tormented the people in the apartment next door, posting notices accusing them of being drug dealers; and one about a guy who entertained his block once a week with Sinatra songs.

"There is something about the judgment of strangers -- when the clerk at the record store seems unimpressed by your choice of CDs," said host Ira Glass as the show began. "It's as if by their status as strangers they have some special instantaneous insight into who we are." Which is true: It gets you thinking. But that was about it for the summing up, the philosophizing. Mostly,

week after week, the show is just stories -- an 18-year-old covering a local audition for a movie about Selena that she herself was trying out for; a Christian husband and an atheist wife talking about their marriage; a pair of best friends (one black, one white) visiting South Africa on vacation; a hypnotically powerful piece by one of the show's producers, who spent weeks in Colorado Springs with fundamentalists who were praying, block by block, for the city's soul and who were also trying to convert her. It's all simultaneously "light," in that it doesn't discuss Madeleine Albright/global warming/the Teamsters election/budget deficits/the Gephardt campaign, and "deep," in that it gets at what matters to us most of the time.

(continued on page 4)

FROM WBEZ CHICAGO

This
American
Life

Sunday at 4:00 pm
Wednesday at 7:00 pm

Program Listings for the Month of January

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN	
Mid.						Jazz Explorations with David Evans	Jazz Explorations with Doug Butchy	
1:00								
2:00								
3:00						Jazz on WYSU	Jazz on WYSU	
4:00								
5:00								
6:00						Hearts of Space	Musings	
7:00						New Dimensions	Weekly Edition	
8:00	Morning Edition					Weekend Edition	Weekend Edition	
9:00								
10:00						Car Talk	Classical Music with Eve Fisher	
11:00	Classical Music with Barbara Krauss					Whad 'Ya Know?		
Noon								
1:00						Says You!	Pittsburgh Symphony	
2:00								
3:00	Classical Music with Michael Cervone					Metropolitan Opera	Car Talk	
4:00							Living on Earth	
5:00							This American Life	
6:00	All Things Considered					Weekend ATC		
7:00						Hearts of Space	E-Town	
8:00	Classical Music	Focus	This American Life	Commentary Cafe	Jazzscapes with Rick Popovich	Jazzscapes with Rick Popovich	Thistle and Shamrock	
9:00	Performance Today							Folk Festival with Charles Darling
10:00								Cinema Sounds
11:00	Classical Music Overnight						Classical Music Overnight	
Mid.						Piano Jazz	Now's the Time with Martin Berger	

Jazz on the Weekend

Jazzscapes, with Rick Popovich Friday and Saturday, 7:00 pm

1/1 Reflections. The mood is contemplative in this first show of the year.

1/7 New Releases. Michael Brecker's latest, *Time is of the Essence* is featured.

1/8 Freddie Hubbard. Powerhouse trumpeter who came into his own in the '60s, still revered by those in the know today.

1/14 Dynamic Duos. Two can play at this game.

1/15 Stephon Harris. Latest vibraphone wiz making a lasting impression.

1/21 Namely You. The curiosity of names as titles is the subject of this installment.

1/22 Brad Mehldau. Influenced by Bill Evans, classical training, and his own introspective manner, this young pianist is carving out an individual niche.

1/28 Pick of the Month. Chris Potter's 1996 Concord Jazz release, *Moving In*, is featured.

1/29 Larry Goldings. Today's frontrunner of the jazz organ resurgence.

Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz Friday, 11:00 pm

1/7 Max Morath. Max Morath and Marian McPartland kick off the new year by looking back to the beginning of the century and the earliest form of piano jazz — ragtime. A pianist, humorist, and historian, the versatile Morath is almost single-handedly responsible for the revival of interest in ragtime and stride piano.

1/14 Harry "Sweets" Edison. Piano Jazz remembers both the late Harry "Sweets" Edison and the late bassist Andy Simpkins with this encore broadcast. Edison perfected his legendary style of jazz trumpet in his days as a favored soloist in the Count Basie Band.

1/21 Pamela Hines. Pianist and composer Pamela Hines brings her modal ideas to the fore with authority and finesse. This Boston-area performer credits teachers George Russell, Paul Bley, Danilo Perez, and Charlie Banacos for expanding musical possibilities.

1/28 Eddie Palmieri. Virtuoso pianist Eddie Palmieri is often called "the madman of Latin jazz." This five-time Grammy Award winner has thrilled audiences all over the world for more than 35 years with his infectious amalgam of Latin, African, and Caribbean jazz elements.

Jazz Explorations, with David Evans, Friday, Midnight and Doug Butchy, Saturday, Midnight

Join David Evans on Friday night and Doug Butchy on Saturday night for **Jazz Explorations**. Each week David and Doug take you on a musical exploration into the entire realm of jazz. Sit back, relax, and enjoy two hours of some of the finest jazz music available. **Jazz Explorations**, Friday and Saturday nights at midnight, only on Classical 88.5, WYSU-FM.

1/1 Milt Jackson. Late master of the vibes — soul of the Modern Jazz Quartet and innumerable other groups.

1/8 John Coltrane. Transcendental saxophonist, a different sort of genius than the other great jazz figures.

1/15 Benny Carter. Multi-instrumentalist, arranger, leader, and possessor of the smoothest, most elegant alto sound of all.

1/22 Dizzy Gillespie. Innovator, entertainer, and inspiration to generations of trumpeters.

1/29 Duke Ellington. The one and only; we'll concentrate on his earlier bands, particularly the Okeh recordings.

Cinema Sounds, with Jim Metzendorf Sunday, 9:30 pm

1/02 Second Anniversary. We'll celebrate two years and over 100 episodes of **Cinema Sounds** with some of the most memorable themes written for the silver screen.

1/09 Aliens. This quartet of films from 20th Century Fox has been accompanied by the musical talent of Jerry Goldsmith, James Horner, Elliot Goldenthal, and John Frizzell. Join us for a sampling of their unique contributions to this popular movie franchise.

1/16 New Releases. Tune in for an all-new batch of soundtrack recordings.

1/23 Hollywood's Golden Age. Erich Wolfgang Korngold took the world by storm with his adventurous film scores during the 1930s and '40s. We'll be listening to music from *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Sea Hawk*.

1/30 Jeff Rona. Composer of scores for *White Squall* and *Chicago Hope*, Jeff Rona joins us on the program to discuss the art of film music.

This American Life

(continued from page 1)

It is, for instance, almost the only journalism I've ever come across that manages to cover religion as the *experience* it is in contemporary America. And at the same time there's room for a report from a rock-and-roll fantasy camp; what it's like to be one black person taking a tour of a Tennessee plantation with an all-white group; what it's like to drive around Utah interviewing schizophrenics for the Medicaid authorities. You hear well-known writers like David Sedaris, new voices like Sarah Vowell and Nancy Updike, and just plain people who send in tapes.

These stories float right into your brain and lodge there. And they are *stories* in the true sense of the word, not stories in the recent journalistic tradition of balance and precision but stories in the old sense of more-or-less true tales you tell one another to spread insight, meaning, pleasure. For me, as a *journalist*, it's an important hour every week. Because I come away thinking just how much there is to do with this art form. Because I come away desperate to get to work.

This American Life airs Sundays at 4:00 pm and Wednesdays at 7:00 pm on WYSU-FM.

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Sunday, Noon

1/2 ROUSE: The Infernal Machine; DVORAK: Violin Concerto in A minor; BERLIOZ: Symphonie fantastique; Mariss Jansons, conductor; Midori, violin.

1/9 STRAUSS: Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks; SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 6 in B minor; BRAHMS: Violin Concerto in D major; Mariss Jansons, conductor; Anne-Sophie Mutter, violin.

1/16 On Tour with the Pittsburgh Symphony.

1/23 BACH: Violin Concerto in A minor, BWV 1041; NEIKRUG: Violin Concerto No.2 (Departures and Remembrance); SCHUMANN: Symphony No. 2 in C major; Pinchas Zukerman, conductor and violin; Marc Neikrug, conductor.

1/30 MUSSORGSKY/RIMSKY-KORAKOV: Prelude to *Khovanschina*; RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor; SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 10 in E minor; Thomas Sanderling, conductor; Vladimir Feltsman, piano.

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Charles Darling—Folk Festival
Bob Fitzer—Commentary Cafe
Dale Harrison—Focus
Jim Metzendorf—Cinema Sounds
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All programs are subject to change without notice.

You Art, Music And Theater

1/6-1/8, 1/14-1/15 THEATER *Veronica's Room*, by Ira Levine, Spotlight Arena Theater, 8:00 pm (1/9 matinee, 3:00 pm)

1/7-1/23 ART YSU Winter Graduating Seniors Show, McDonough Museum of Art (Public reception, 6:00 - 8:00 pm)

1/23 MUSIC Randy Fusco, piano, Bliss Recital Hall, 4:00 pm

1/24 MUSIC Roman Rudnytsky, piano, Bliss Recital Hall, 8:00 pm

1/27-1/29 THEATER BlackBox Productions, *If Only Briefly*, by Robert D. Joki, Spotlight Arena Theater, 8:00 pm (1/30 matinee, 3:00 pm)

For information: 742-3624

Sunday Night Folk

E-Town with Nick Forster Sunday, 6:00 pm

E-Town features live music by some of today's finest singers, songwriters, and musicians along with informative interviews and conversations revolving around today's social and environmental issues.

The Thistle and Shamrock with Fiona Ritchie Sunday, 7:00 pm

1/2 Iona: 1,000 years of Peace. A sacred spot since history began, the island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland, was visited by St. Columba in 536 A.D., and the abbey he founded there became the site from which Christianity spread across Northern Europe. At this time, the dominant Celtic tribe in Scotland was the Picts, and St. Columba (Colum Cille) had many legendary battles of will with Briochan, chief of the Pictish king's druids. We'll hear music which transports us to Iona, and helps us to mark the millennium of peace the island has enjoyed since those troubled early times.

1/9 An Ancient Tradition. This week we travel well back into the last millennium, with music dating from before 1700, and some from much earlier. Included is the music of the 12th-century Benedictine Abbess Hildegard von Bingen, arranged for Irish vocals and uilleann pipes.

1/16 Celtic Wilderness. An hour of music written to transport you to wild places in the Celtic lands.

1/23 Celtic Guitars. We meet both Soig Siberil of Brittany and Tony MacManus of Scotland, guitarists with unique styles.

1/30 Burns Supper 2000. The legacy of Robert Burns, Scotland's National Bard, is celebrated throughout the world at the end of every January. We'll look at some of the traditions of the Burns Supper, and hear the songs of Burns sung by some of today's leading interpreters.

Folk Festival with Charles Darling, Sunday, 8:00 pm

1/2 Double Ought Sampler. You can call it double nil, double zero, or double nothing, but it's still a folk sampler.

1/9 20th-Century Nostalgia. Back to Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, the Weavers, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Odetta, Kingston Trio, and more.

1/16 Contemporary Folk, Part XXV. Loreena McKennett, Harry Lester, Jim Henry, Katy Mofatt, Patty Larkin are showcased.

1/23 Story Songs. Bob Dylan, Don McLean, Maddy Prior, Lee Murdock, Gordon Bok, et al, pursue the art of balladry.

1/30 COUNTRY COOKIN', Part XLIX. Musical ingredients by: Benny Martin, Tara Nevins, Blue Ridge, Ricky Skaggs, Dolly Parton, and more.

New Dimensions Saturday, 7:00 am

1/1 A New Dimensions Vision of the Future: Jean Houston Interviews Michael Toms. Author and futurist Jean Houston engages Michael Toms in a dialogue on his views about how we can support one another to co-create a future that works for us all.

1/8 Honoring Your Longing, with Oriah Mountain Dreamer. Oriah Mountain Dreamer is the author of the meditative poem about longing and desire, *The Invitation*, unexpectedly copied and shared by thousands around the world via bulletin boards, the Internet, and workshop readings.

1/15 Being in the Zone, with Chungliang Al Huang. This internationally recognized authority on Taoism believes we need to better appreciate the natural flow of the life force. Huang also speaks about conscious and successful aging, and how the Tao and I Ching are related.

1/22 Re-Inventing Money, with Bernard A. Lietaer. Prepare to have your current understanding of money completely transformed in this dialogue with Bernard Lietaer. He reveals how we can enter a new era of "sustainable abundance" for all.

1/29 Affirming Your Spiritual Destiny, with James Redfield. According to the author of *The Celestine Prophecy*, "we are in the throes of a spiritual renaissance," just beginning to discover and unleash the untapped potential that resides in all of us.

List of Premium Values for Calendar Year 1999

Following is a list of fair market values for WYSU-FM premiums used during calendar year 1999. If you made a gift to WYSU-FM between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 1999, your gift is tax-deductible minus the value of any premium you have received. Please call Catherine Cala at (330) 742-3363 for the value of any special prizes you might have won.

Premium	Fair Market Value
Car Talk <i>Latin</i> tee-shirt	\$ 9.30
Car Talk <i>World Tour</i> tee-shirt	\$10.00
The Flick Clique, one-year single membership	\$20.00
Hearts of Space CD, any title	\$ 8.00
Thistle & Shamrock tee-shirt	\$ 8.00

The value of all other premiums fall below the IRS minimum amount for deductibility. Therefore, the full amount of your gift to WYSU-FM is tax-deductible.

NPR'S PERFORMANCE TODAY PRESENTS
"A KING CELEBRATION 2000"

Concert Features World Premiere Arrangement of
"Lift Every Voice and Sing"

On January 17, at 10:00 am and again at 8:00 pm, WYSU-FM celebrates Martin Luther King Jr. Day with "A King Celebration 2000," a two-hour special from NPR's *Performance Today*. The program features the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Morehouse and Spelman Glee Clubs, and special guest S. Epatha Merkerson, the actress who portrays Lt. Anita Van Buren in the NBC television drama *Law and Order*.

"A King Celebration 2000," the seventh of *Performance Today's* annual Martin Luther King concert tributes, recognizes several musical centennials occurring in 2000. This year's program honors the centennial of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," considered by many to be the Black National Anthem, with the world premiere NPR commission of the anthem arranged by James Weldon Johnson. To mark another celebration -- Aaron Copland's centennial year -- Ms. Merkerson will narrate Copland's Lincoln Portrait.

"A King Celebration 2000" also includes a tribute to the late Robert Shaw, a performance of William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*, and *Drums* by James P. Johnson, all conducted by Andre Raphael Smith, the assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra. The program will be hosted by *Performance Today's* Lisa Simeone.



Yolanda King will be the guest artist on the January 22 Youngstown Symphony concert at Powers Auditorium. She will be the narrator for *New Morning for the World (Daybreak of Freedom)*, a composition by Joseph Schwantner that incorporates excerpts from the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. Music director Isaiah Jackson will also lead the orchestra in Antonin Dvorak's *Symphony No. 9 (From the New World)*, and the *Poem for Orchestra* by William Grant Still.



Panelists (l to r) Barry Nolan, Francine Achbar, and Tony Kahn bluff their way through definitions on NPR's *Says You!*, which airs Saturday afternoons at 1:00. Public radio's hot new game show is co-produced by Pipit & Finch and WGBH Radio Boston.

Metropolitan Opera
Saturday,
1:30 pm

1/1 HARBISON: *The Great Gatsby*. James Levine, conductor. Cast: Dawn Upshaw, Susan Graham, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Jerry Hadley. John Harbison's musical setting of F. Scott Fitzgerald's great novel of the American jazz age receives its world premiere broadcast.

1/8 PUCCINI: *Tosca*. Daniel Oren, conductor. Cast: Carol Vaness, Richard Leech, James Morris. A Roma diva and her lover fight a brave but losing battle with a sadistic chief of police and the forces of political repression.

1/15 VERDI: *Rigoletto*. Vladimir Jurowski, conductor. Cast: Sumi Jo, Victoria Livengood, Marcelo Alvarez. The unhappy plights of the melancholy hunchback Rigoletto, the ill-fated Gilda, and the debonair but ruthless Duke of Mantua unfold in Verdi's glorious melodies.

1/22 MASCAGNI: *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Carlo Rizzi, conductor. Cast: Dolora Zajick, Fabio Armiliato, Kim Josephson. LEONCAVALLO: *Pagliacci*. Carlo Rizzi, conductor. Cast: Veronica Villarroel, Dennis O'Neill, Dwayne Croft. A quiet Easter morning in Sicily culminates in murder, and the tragic tale of Canio who must play the clown while his heart is breaking are portrayed with dramatic realism in opera's most popular double-bill.

1/29 R. STRAUSS: *Der Rosenkavalier*. James Levine, conductor. Cast: Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, Heidi Grant Murphy, Stuart Neill. A Viennese noblewoman takes a philosophical attitude as she begins to realize the changing effects of time's passage on her life. Begins at 1:00 pm.

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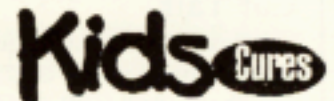
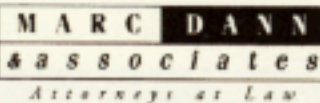
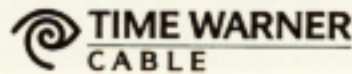


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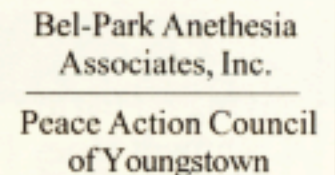
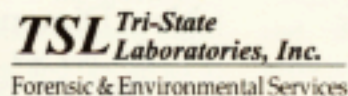
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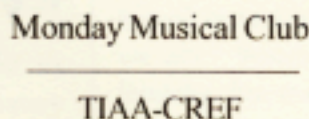
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