

Joe Frank Tribute

Curated by
John F. Barber

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Season 10, Episode 07 of Re-Imagined Radio
Curated by John F. Barber

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Episode Synopsis

Re-Imagined Radio pays tribute to Joe Frank, a French-born American writer, teacher, and radio storyteller and performer. Frank is noted for his philosophical, humorous, surrealist, and sometimes absurd monologues and radio programs. We sample from multiple monologues and radio productions--he is credited with 250--by Frank to demonstrate his work from early to near the end of his career.

Frank's radio style is distinctive . . . A resonant voice providing sincere delivery of ideas and stories. Subject matter included religion, life's meaning, death, and relationships with women. It wasn't for everyone, but thousands of listeners tuned in and still listen to recordings of Joe Frank.

Frank's monologues frequently included music, often repetitive or looped, and drones which mixed well with his dry, announcer-like delivery. He frequently included recorded phone calls or live, slow burning conversations with actors and friends like Larry Block, Debi Mae West, and Arthur Miller. These were broken into segments throughout the hour-long episodes.

Ira Glass (This American Life), Jad Abumrad (RadioLab), David Sedaris, Francis Ford Coppola, Michael Mann, and Martin Scorsese all credit Frank for inspiring their own work.

Resources

Oppenheimer, Mark. "Joe Frank Signs Off." Slate, 19 Jan. 2018, <https://slate.com/culture/2018/01/joe-franks-last-interview-before-his-death.html>
The last interview before his death.

Joe Frank--Frequently Asked Questions

https://wfmu.org/JF/joe_fran.html

Provided by WFMU Radio

JOE FRANK TRIBUTE

COLD OPEN

SFX: ACTUALITY. SAMPLE FROM
"MEMORIES" (1990). FRANK TELLS OF
HIS PLANS TO VISIT THE RETIREMENT
PLACE FOR RINGLING CIRCUS ANIMALS
ON THE FLORIDA COAST. HE WILL CLIMB
A CLIFF! AND CONTEMPLATE LIFE.
MUSIC FADES OUT AT END.

MUSIC: RIR THEME, FADE IN AND UP
FULL, FADES OUT UNDER THE FOLLOWING

RIR ANNOUNCER

Welcome to Re-Imagined Radio, a program about radio storytelling. I'm Jack Armstrong. With each episode we combine dialogue, sound effects, and music to engage your listening imagination. This episode is no different, and here to tell you about it is John Barber, producer and host.

MUSIC: RIR THEME FADES OUT

HOST ANCHOR INTRO

HOST

Thank you Jack . . . hello everyone . . .
. welcome to Re-Imagined Radio!

This episode is about Joe Frank. A radio storyteller and performer noted for his resonant voice and sincere delivery of ideas and stories that often were just at the edge of believability.

This "Joe Frank Tribute" samples from monologues and radio productions by

Frank from early to near the end of his career. You should be able to hear Joe Frank's ability to create art from personal fears and insecurities.

That was Joe Frank you heard at the episode opening. A monologue from a short film called "Memories." More about that in a moment. AND more Joe Frank stories coming up in the next hour. You're in for a treat here. Thanks for joining us as we present our "Joe Frank Tribute" with this episode of Re-Imagined Radio.

MUSIC: RIR THEME STINGER/TRANSITION

HOST INTRODUCTION

HOST

Born in 1938 in Strausbourg, France, Joe Frank and his parents moved to New York City to avoid Nazi persecution during World War II. He studied at Hofstra University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. ~~He taught writing, philosophy, and literature at New York City high schools.~~

In 1977, he volunteered at WBAI, New York's legendary, free-format radio station. He was inspired, he said, by radio's power to reach distant audiences with shared listening experiences. His program was "In the Dark." Each episode was a narrative collage of dreamlike, angst-ridden, mesmerizing monologues . . . Improvisations and dramatic scenes . . . and moody ambient music. A look at the

dark side of human nature. Disturbing but compelling, Drawn from deep personal experiences.

SFX: JOE FRANK ACTUALITY #1. JOE FRANK EXPLAINS THE SOURCE OF HIS WORK IS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

ACT 1: JEWISH BLUES

HOST

For this "Joe Frank Tribute" we sample his stories from early career to just months before his death in 2018. Let's start with samples from "Jewish Blues," one of the earliest known recordings of Joe Frank while at WBAI. Joe Frank and friends are answering telephone calls from listeners . . .

SFX: SAMPLES FROM CALL IN SEGMENT OF "JEWISH BLUES."

MUSIC: MUSIC BED PROLOGUE FOR UPCOMING SEGEMENT FROM "MEMORIES" BEGINS FADING UP UNDER THE FOLLOWING

HOST

This is Re-Imagined Radio with our tribute to radio storyteller Joe Frank. That was a sample from "Jewish Blues," broadcast in 1978 while Joe Frank worked at WBAI radio in New York. His program, "In the Dark," attracted attention from listeners. And National Public Radio as we'll see in a moment.

But first, let's sample again from "Memories," a short film made by Paul Rachman for CBS Television, broadcast September 14, 1990. We heard one Joe Frank monologue from "Memories" at the beginning of our episode. Let's listen now to two more . . .

ACT 2: MEMORIES

MUSIC: MUSIC BED PROLOGUE FOR UPCOMING SEGMENT OF "MEMORIES" FADES UP UNDER THE PROCEEDING INTRODUCTION. REACHES FULL VOLUME JUST BEFORE JOE FRANK BEGINS TO SPEAK IN RECORDED SAMPLE.

SFX: RECORDING OF THIS SAMPLE FROM "MEMORIES."

HOST

These stories from Joe Frank's film "Memories" showcase his use of radio storytelling to process personal fears and insecurities.

In a 1989 episode of NPR's "Fresh Air" program, host Terry Gross questioned Joe Frank about this practice . . .

SFX: JOE FRANK ACTUALITY #2. TERRY GROSS QUESTIONS FRANK ABOUT HIS USE OF PERSONAL INSECURITIES IN HIS PROGRAMS. FRANK RESPONDS.

HOST

In 1978 Joe Frank was invited by National Public Radio to co-host *Weekend All Things Considered*. At the end of

each episode, he was to deliver a five-minute monologue. It wasn't a good fit for Joe Frank. Or NPR. He resigned and worked the remainder of his year-long contract producing programs for NPR's *Options: A Radio Experience*. When his contract wasn't renewed Joe Frank continued independently producing radio storytelling for *NPR Playhouse*, building on what he started at WBAI . . .

SFX: JOE FRANK ACTUALITY #3

HOST

In 1986, Joe Frank moved to KCRW, the NPR radio station in Santa Monica, California. There he wrote, produced, and performed a weekly hour-long radio program. And, he became famous. ~~His program was heard around the country.~~ *The Wall Street Journal* called Joe Frank, "radio's prince of darkness." In 1989, *Spin* magazine trumpeted . . .

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING QUOTE CAN BE SPOKEN BY EITHER THE HOST, OR ANOTHER VOICE, PERHAPS WITH MORE GRAVITAS

"Joe Frank is an invaluable warrior who stands in defense of our fears, our vanities and our forever-eroding sense of ourselves. He transforms the everyday banality of the human comedy into an inspired weirdness that feeds on pathos and irony, and feels a lot like revelation. Sartre would have called it nausea; Frank makes it art."

MUSIC: RIR BREAK THEME

BREAK 1--THE FUSEBOX BREAK

HOST You are listening to Re-Imagined Radio. This is John Barber, producer and host. We'll hear more of our "Joe Frank Tribute" in just a moment. But first I want to tell you about The Fusebox Show . . . A different kind of radio storytelling we are proud to support. Here's a sample . . .

SFX: THE FUSEBOX SHOW TEASER

HOST As you heard, ~~the cast is colorful . . .~~
~~The sound design and voice acting shows~~
~~real talents at work doing things the~~
~~rest of us mortals dream about. And the~~
~~way Fusebox responds to the things that~~
~~supposedly smart people do that are~~
~~anything but . . .~~ Well, when Fusebox broadcasts you can reach out your hands and feel the power coming through your radio. Learn more at *The Fusebox Show* website, [www dot thefuseboxshow dot com](http://www.thefuseboxshow.com).

**SFX: ELECTRICAL SHORT CIRCUIT,
BUZZING**

**MUSIC: RIR THEME, FADE OUT UNDER
THE FOLLOWING**

ACT 3: GREEN CADILLAC

HOST This is Re-Imagined Radio's "Joe Frank Tribute." Welcome back. This next

example of Joe Frank's radio storytelling is from "Green Cadillac," broadcast in 1993. Let's listen as Joe Frank describes how he became friends with a car thief.

**SFX: RECORDING OF SAMPLES FROM
"GREEN CADILLAC"**

HOST

That was a sample from Joe Frank's "Green Cadillac." It demonstrates well Joe Frank's distinctive radio style . . . A mesmerizing voice providing sincere delivery of compelling ideas and stories just at the edge of believability.

**???MUSIC: SURREALISTIC BRIDGE/
TRANSITION???**

ACT 4: REALITY CHECK

HOST

Joe Frank left KCRW in 2002 and worked as an independent radio producer.

He returned to KCRW in 2012 . . . creating half-hour shows for the new "UnFictional" series produced by Frank Carlson.

"Reality Check" is an example. Broadcast June 21, 2013, this program features Joe Frank considering the human condition . . .

**SFX: RECORDING OF SAMPLES FROM
"REALITY CHECK"**

MUSIC: RIR BREAK THEME

BREAK #2--THE RE-IMAGINED RADIO
BREAK

HOST

You are listening to Re-Imagined Radio's tribute to the radio storytelling of Joe Frank. I'm John Barber. Producer and Host.

Excellent radio storytelling, like that by Joe Frank, combines voices, sound effects, and music to spark your imagination. That's the effect we strive for with each episode of Re-Imagined Radio . . .

SFX: RE-IMAGINED RADIO BILLBOARD

Upcoming episodes of Re-Imagined Radio include short stories by local independent radio producers and stories that may have influenced the most famous radio story ever broadcast, "The War of the Worlds." I hope you will join us for interesting radio storytelling.

Let's return now to our "Joe Frank Tribute."

MUSIC: RIR BREAK THEME

ACT 5: A LIFE WELL LIVED

HOST

This final example of Joe Frank's radio storytelling is taken from "A Life Well Lived," broadcast October 4, 2013, as part of KCRW's UnFictional Series. In this monologue, Joe Frank talks about

the hardships of love and personal fragmentation.

SFX: RECORDING OF SAMPLES FROM "A LIFE WELL LIVED"

HOST You are listening to Re-Imagined Radio's tribute to radio storyteller Joe Frank.

MUSIC: RIR THEME, TRANSITION

BREAK 3 -- THE SUPPORT BREAK

HOST Hi everybody. John Barber here to encourage your support of community radio. Re-Imagined Radio and other thought provoking programs heard on this station are made possible by your support. ~~And when you support community radio you support not only the local radio programming you HEAR but also the local economy and culture in which you LIVE.~~ The money you invest in community radio stays local. It WORKS for your community. It BUILDS something that benefits everyone. If you already support community radio thank you for your generosity. If not, please contact your community radio station and learn how to support their efforts. ~~Your support is vital, benefits your community, and may be tax deductible.~~ Thank you for your support.

MUSIC: RIR THEME, RETURN

HOST CONCLUSION

HOST

This is Re-Imagined Radio. Our episode is a tribute to radio storyteller Joe Frank.

~~The official "Joe Frank website" estimates he produced 250 hours of radio storytelling. We couldn't listen to everything. So we sampled from "Jewish Blues," "Memories," "Green Cadillac," "Reality Check," and "A Life Well Lived" to demonstrate Joe Frank's efforts to invent new story forms by combining monologue, improvised dramatic scenes, and music loops.~~

~~His stories are philosophical, humorous, and sometimes just on the edge of believability. Joe Frank stories are sometimes criticized for being too dark. But they are always keenly drawn observations of life, relationships, and death.~~

~~Joe Frank was honored with several awards including the Peabody Award, broadcasting's highest honor, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Third Coast International Audio Festival.~~

Joe Frank died in 2018. His legacy continues, however, as thousands of people listen to Joe Frank's stories whenever they are broadcast.

I hope you enjoyed our Re-Imagined Radio "Joe Frank Tribute." Please visit our website and learn more about Joe Frank and his radio storytelling, [www \[DOT\] reimagedradio \[DOT\] net](http://www.reimaginedradio.net).

MUSIC: RIR THEME, ESTABLISH, THEN DUCK UNDER THE FOLLOWING

HOST CREDIT ROLL

HOST

Content curation and script by John Barber.

Music composition and post-production by Marc Rose.

Our presence on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram is coordinated by Regina Carol Social Media Management.

Graphic design by Kathryn Kl-ous (Klaus).

Our announcer is Jack Armstrong.

This is John Barber, producer and host. In addition to our website, look for Re-Imagined Radio on SoundCloud, and the Internet Archive. Thanks again for listening.

MUSIC: RIR THEME UP, THEN DUCK UNDER THE FOLLOWING

ANNOUNCER

This is a production of Re-Imagined Radio. Our radio broadcasts are heard on local, regional, and international community radio stations.

For on demand streaming, point your browsers to our website, reimaginedradio (all one word, no punctuation) DOT net. While there, subscribe to our snappy email Program Guide.

Thank you so much for listening, and please, join us again for another episode of Re-Imagined Radio where we will continue our exploration of radio storytelling.

MUSIC: RIR THEME UP, AND TO END.