

A Mighty Span

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First Draft

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"A Mighty Span"
an episode of
Re-Imagined Radio

February 2022

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Synopsis

Re-Imagined Radio samples early examples of dramatized news events (*The March of Time* and *You Are There*) to contextualize its own dramatization of the opening of the Interstate Bridge linking Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington, across the Columbia River, February 14, 1917.

Color Code

SFX = sound effect(s), either pre-recorded or created for episode. Pre-recorded audio is used as content in this episode.

~~Magenta highlighted text with strike through~~ = content deleted in post-production for episode timing

MUSIC = pre-recorded

MUSIC = bespoke, created for this episode

COLD OPEN

SFX: AUDIO SAMPLE FROM "A MIGHTY SPAN" OUTCUE: "AND A FIRING OF SALUTE FROM GOVERNMENT WHARF"

MUSIC: RIR THEME, FADE UP UNDER PREVIOUS, ESTABLISH, THEN OUT

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.

HOST OPEN

HOST

Thank you Jack. Hello everyone. Welcome.

As Jack told you, Re-Imagined Radio is a program about radio storytelling. But more than simply *telling* stories, we explore their backgrounds, histories, connections, and inspirations.

This episode of Re-Imagined Radio, "A Mighty Span," explores some early examples of dramatized news events. ~~In the early days of radio, news reporting was a challenge since international telephone links were difficult and remote broadcasting was impossible.~~

~~To counter these challenges, radio networks created dramatizations of news events using voice actors, sound~~

~~effects, and music.~~ We offer examples from the two best radio programs of this kind, "The March of Time" and "You Are There."

Then we create our own dramatization of the opening of the Interstate Bridge, an important fixture of the Portland-Vancouver community.

Re-Imagined Radio, originates from KXRW-FM. Vancouver, Washington's community radio station. We thank them for their support.

And we thank YOU for joining us as Re-Imagined Radio presents "A Mighty Span."

MUSIC: CINEMATIC TRANSITION

ACT 1--BEGINNING OF RADIO NEWS

HOST

On February 14, 1917, The Interstate Bridge was officially opened between Portland, Oregon, on the southern side of the Columbia River, and Vancouver, Washington, to the north.

~~The Interstate Bridge was the first automobile bridge across the Columbia River, and only the second to span the river at all, after the Wenatchee Bridge, built in 1908.~~

Our re-imagined story of what happened and what you might have seen and heard

had you been there is an interesting bit of radio storytelling. But before we tell that story, we should provide some background and context.

MUSIC: CINEMATIC TRANSITION

HOST

In the 1920s, the first decade of radio broadcasting, radio producers sought to define the new medium, and attract listeners. ~~Previously, the only way to share an experience with others was to attend it together. But radio broadcasting changed that dynamic with its ability to share content with listeners across the country. Although separated by distance, and sitting in their own homes, audiences could listen together, at the same time, to radio programs.~~

But what types of programs would make for compelling listening experiences? Music, reading of literature, and drama were early radio favorites.

News was different. The lack of international telephone networks made live, on-the-scene radio news reporting difficult. Location recordings were impossible. Radio audiences were accustomed to getting their news from reading newspapers. How to get them to listen to news on the radio?

One answer was to read the news. An early example of this approach was *The Pop Question Game*. Begun in 1924, this

was the first radio quiz game. The 15-minute weekly program was heard on WJZ radio, New York City, until 1925.

The Pop Question Game was created by Briton Hadden, who co-founded *Time Magazine* with Henry Luce, in March 1923, and revolutionized American journalism. But that's another story.

With *The Pop Question Game*, Hadden asked questions about current news events drawn from the current issue of *Time* magazine. He would wait ten seconds before giving the answers. Listeners were encouraged to write their answers on paper before Hadden announced the answers. During each waiting period, Roy Edward Larsen, *Time* circulation manager, banged three notes on a gong. What began as a promotion for *Time* magazine developed into one of the most successful formats for radio programming, the quiz show (Wilner 110,).

MUSIC: CINEMATIC TRANSITION

ACT 2--THE MARCH OF TIME

Beyond reading, another approach to radio news was re-creation through dramatization.

MUSIC: CINEMATIC TRANSITION

The most memorable radio news dramatization program was . . .

SFX: 00:17 AUDIO SAMPLE, (MUSIC OPEN) "THE MARCH OF TIME . . . (MUSIC) . . . ON A THOUSAND FRONTS, THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD MOVES SWIFTLY FORWARD" . . . (MUSIC TO END)

~~Launched by Smith and Larsen and broadcast on CBS and NBC radio networks, each episode of *The March of Time* used, at Smith's suggestion, the "10 best radio actors," an "announcer extraordinary," a "splendid orchestra" and a "clever director" (Smith Obituary).¹~~

The first episode, broadcast March 6, 1931, began with the announcer describing the intent of the program.

SFX: 00:38 AUDIO SAMPLE FROM MOT FIRST EPISODE. ANNOUNCER SAYS, "TONIGHT, THE EDITORS OF TIME, THE WEEKLY NEWS MAGAZINE, ATTEMPT A NEW KIND OF REPORTING OF THE NEWS, THE RE-ENACTING AS CLEARLY AND DRAMATICALLY AS THE MEDIUM OF RADIO WILL PERMIT, SOME MEMORABLE THEMES FROM THE NEWS OF THE WEEK. FROM THE MARCH OF TIME. FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE WORLD COME NEWS FACTS ABOUT POLITICS AND SCIENCE. PEOPLE, TIME AND RELIGION. ART AND ECONOMICS. THERE IS ONE PUBLICATION WHICH WATCHES, ANALYZES AND EVERY SEVEN DAYS REPORTS THE MARCH OF HUMAN

HISTORY ON ALL ITS FRONTS. IT IS
THE WEEKLY NEWS MAGAZINE, TIME.
TONIGHT, WITH THE MARCH OF TIME AND
A NEW KIND OF REPORTING OF THE
NEWS, LET'S REVIEW SOME OF THE
DRAMATIC EVENTS OF THE WEEK."

The March of Time was THE pioneer news dramatization series, and is often cited as the best such program ever to be heard on radio.²

The format for each episode featured between seven to eight reenactments of memorable news events, each 90 seconds to four minutes in length. A fast-talking narrator provided terse comments between the reenactments. This narrator was known as "The Voice of Time." The earliest "voices" were Harry Von Zell and Ted Husing. The best known voice was Westbrook Van Voorhis.

This sample from the October 5, 1934 episode, features a dramatized interview by Van Voorhis with Bruno Richard Hauptmann, arrested and executed for the March 1, 1932 kidnapping and killing of the 20-month-old son of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh.³ Let's have a listen .

. .

SFX: 05:18 AUDIO SAMPLE FROM THE
MARCH OF TIME, 5 OCTOBER 1934.

HOST

Now, here's a sample from the January 18 1937 episode of *The March of Time*, about the arrest and trial of Frederick E.

Peters on charges of forgery and fraud. Peters impersonated famous persons to buy expensive items, always writing checks for more than the sale amounts. He pocketed the change from his purchases and disappeared, eluding arrest for 30 years.

SFX: SAMPLE FROM ANOTHER JANUARY 18, 1937 EPISODE OF THE MARCH OF TIME

MUSIC: CINEMATIC TRANSITION

ACT 3--YOU ARE THERE

HOST

As communication between distant parts of the world became more practical, *The March of Time* dramatizations were replaced by live "actualities," news reports and interviews, provided by *Time* reporters. In 1945, *The March of Time* series ended.

Two years later, in 1947, another program of dramatized news events, *CBS Is There*, picked up the legacy of *The March of Time* and carried it forward (Sterling) 4.

Created by Goodman Ace (noted for *Easy Aces*, a long-running serial comedy), early episodes of *CBS Is There* began with the announcer intoning . . .

SFX: 00:9:5 AUDIO SAMPLE FROM
EPISODE OPENING, "COLUMBIA ASKS YOU
TO IMAGINE THAT OUR MICROPHONE IS
AT THIS FAMOUS EVENT. ALL THINGS
ARE AS THEY WERE THEN, EXCEPT FOR
ONE THING, CBS IS THERE!"

The program name was changed to *You Are There* ~~with episode 28, "The Surrender of Sitting Bull,"~~ May 2, 1948.

Each episode relied on verified historical facts, sound effects, and the professional CBS news staff. John Daly, Richard C. Hottelet, and Don Hollenbeck, noted for their overseas reporting for CBS during World War II, and other distinguished reporters, described what they witnessed on scene. ~~The intended result was to make listeners feel present at an historic event, hearing it unfold.~~

For example, here is a sample from Episode 02, "The Storming of the Bastille," broadcast July 14, 1947. The Bastille is a medieval fortress in Paris used as a political prison by the French monarchy in 1789. Revolutionary citizens captured the Bastille on July 14 that year, in protest of royal authority, and the monarchy's abuse of power. ~~Storming the Bastille was the first step in the French Revolution.~~

SFX: 26:35 AUDIO SAMPLE FROM
EPISODE 02, "STORMING THE
BASTILLE," YOU ARE THERE.

MUSIC: RIR THEME, INTRO

BREAK #1--THE FUSEBOX BREAK

HOST Re-Imagined Radio introduces you to new and different forms of radio storytelling. The Fusebox Show is one you should know about.

SFX: THE FUSEBOX SHOW TEASER

MUSIC: RIR THEME, OUTRO

HOST Learn more wherever you get your podcasts, or at *The Fusebox Show* website, thefuseboxshow dot com.

SFX: ELECTRICAL SHORT CIRCUIT, BUZZING?

MUSIC: RIR THEME, FADE OUT UNDER THE FOLLOWING

ACT 4--A MIGHTY SPAN

HOST You are listening to Re-Imagined Radio. I'm John Barber, producer and host. Our episode is "A Mighty Span," which imagines a live radio broadcast of the opening ceremonies for the Interstate Bridge, February 14, 1917. This single-span bridge was the first to connect Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington, across the Columbia River, and only the second to span the river, after the Wenatchee Bridge, built in 1908.

The term "Interstate" described the bridge's location, at the border of Oregon and Washington, and its function: to carry traffic on The Pacific Highway, from Mexico to Canada, across the Columbia River.

The content of "A Mighty Span" is factual. Reports and editorials published in Washington and Oregon newspapers provided historical details about the opening ceremony, the setting, the speeches, and what was seen and heard.

The container, however, the radio broadcast, is fictional. There was no radio coverage, or broadcast, associated with the bridge opening ceremonies. In truth, there was no radio technology available in Washington or Oregon in 1917.

SFX: 00:12 AUDIO SAMPLE, KDKA
STATION ID. "THIS IS KDKA, OF THE
WESTINGHOUSE CORPORATION, IN EAST
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA. WE SHALL
NOW BROADCAST THE ELECTION RETURNS
. . ."

Operated by engineer Frank Conrad, KDKA, East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became the first licensed radio station in the United States, October 27, 1920. On November 2, KDKA delivered its first scheduled broadcast: returns for the 1920 Presidential election between Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox. Allegedly, the broadcast was heard by

~~listeners as far away as Canada.~~ Leo Rosenberg announced that first broadcast, and it's his voice you heard in this re-creation, the voice of the first radio announcer.

One of Portland's earliest radio station licenses was granted to *The Portland Telegram* newspaper. Their first broadcast was November 21, 1921. *The Oregonian* was granted the ninety-eighth radio license issued in the United States and began broadcasting as KGW on March 22, 1922. Vancouver's first radio station, KVAN, began broadcasting in 1939. Singer-songwriter Willy Nelsen was an announcer for a short time before launching his musical career.

Inspired by *The March of Time* and *You Are There*, Re-Imagined Radio conceived "A Mighty Span" as a live radio broadcast from the lift span of the Interstate Bridge where a temporary platform was erected in the roadway. State and local leaders delivered speeches there. The ceremonial ribbon was cut. The bridge was officially opened. Automobiles and pedestrians moved across the new bridge, back and forth between Oregon and Washington.

~~We placed the main news announcer-commentator near the speaker platform, where he would see and hear and report everything. Mobile reporters were at each end of the bridge.~~

Like with episodes of *The March of Time* and *You Are There*, the purpose of "A Mighty Span" is to engage listeners in an historical event. To simulate "being present at the center of the news." To experience, through speech and sounds, the spectacle and community pride associated with the opening of the Interstate Bridge across the Columbia River. Let's listen to "A Mighty Span."

SFX: 17:16 AUDIO SAMPLE, A MIGHTY SPAN

MUSIC: RIR THEME, INTRO

HOST

You're listening to Re-Imagined Radio. I'm John Barber, producer and host. With each episode we explore radio storytelling using voice, sound effects, and music.

MUSIC: RIR THEME, INTRO

BREAK #2--THE RIR BREAK

SFX: RE-IMAGINED RADIO AUDIO TRAILER

HOST

Visit our website for more information and listening opportunities, reimagedradio dot net

MUSIC: RIR THEME, RETURN

HOST CONCLUSION

HOST

This is Re-Imagined Radio. Our episode is "A Mighty Span," a recreation of events surrounding the opening of The Interstate Bridge spanning the Columbia River between Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington, February 14, 1917. To provide context for this bit of radio storytelling we reviewed examples of how early radio producers, faced with technological challenges providing news reports to listeners, created dramatic recreations of important events. I hope you enjoyed our episode.

**MUSIC: RIR THEME, FADE UP,
ESTABLISH, THEN DUCK UNDER THE
FOLLOWING**

HOST CREDIT ROLL

HOST

This is a production of Re-Imagined Radio.

Content curation and script by John Barber.

Music composition, sound design, and post-production by Marc Rose.

Graphic design by Holly Slocum Design.

Our announcer is Jack Armstrong.

Re-Imagined Radio is produced with support from KXRW-FM. Vancouver, Washington's community radio station.

This is John Barber, producer and host. Thanks for listening. I hope you will

join us again as we continue exploring
radio storytelling.

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.

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.

Notes

1. The program took its name from its theme song, "The March of Time," composed by Ted Koehler and Harold Arlen. (Re-Creation of Events)

2. Each Friday night 30-minute episode was sponsored and produced by *Time* magazine, except from 1933-1935 when it was sponsored by Remington-Rand, and 1936, when it was sponsored by Wrigley's Chewing Gum. Between 1931 and 1937, *The March of Time* was broadcast over CBS radio and between 1937 and 1945 it was broadcast over NBC radio except for the 1939 to 1941 period when it was not aired. (History of Branding)

3. This episode also included a dramatized interview with General Hugh Samuel "Iron Pants" Johnson, Director of the National Recovery Administration from June 16, 1933 until his firing by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in September 1934.

4. "83 Episodes of You Are There," Internet Archive,

<https://archive.org/details/you-are-there-1950-04-16-87-thermopolae>

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_March_of_Time_\(radio_program\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_March_of_Time_(radio_program))