

Did Msgr. Shannon Start The Singing-Nun Rage?

New York — He could claim fame as the man who gave Dennis Day, Gordon MacRae, Bill Lundigan and songwriter Jimmy Van Heusen their start in show business — or better yet, as the original singing seminarian.

But in the months ahead, most of Msgr. William J. Shannon's claims will simply be for baggage as he begins an extensive diocese-hopping campaign for the National Catholic Office of Radio and Television. Recently named NCORT's "office coordinator," he will be spending most of his time on the road, working with diocesan radio-TV directors to help improve the quality of religious broadcasting.

"We will try to initiate on the diocesan level what we now have on the national level," Msgr. Shannon said, referring to the 70-man board of advisors that is now assisting NCORT in every phase of broadcasting — from audience research to public relations.

As a starter, he and NCORT's lay executive director, Charles Reilly, will greet "between 50 and 60" diocesan directors who will attend a two-day seminar in New York Oct. 26 and 27.

When Msgr. Shannon talks about broadcasting to diocesan directors, he does so with a highly unusual combination of credentials. For the last 12 years he was radio-TV director for the Diocese of Syracuse and in the early 1950's he was a program director for radio station WFBL in Syracuse. And to top that, he was from 1935 to 1939 a coast-to-coast radio personality, with his own network show on CBS: "Jack Shannon Sings."

"I was a tenor, and I used my middle name then," said Msgr. Shannon, who is now 55. "I was usually on the air three nights a week, and one summer I was on every night at 11."

He recalls that Chevrolet and Standard Brands were among his sponsors and that his musical director was Mark Warnow, who led the old Lucky Strike "Hit Parade" orchestra. Jack Shannon's announcers included Bill Goodwin, later a film actor, and TV's "Miss America" emcee, Bert Parks.

His singing career started in Syracuse, "where I used to sing quite a bit as a kid." He soon got an announcing job with WFBL, a CBS affiliate, where he became a staff singer and then a program director before CBS beckoned him to "Radio City."

"One of my announcers in Syracuse was Bill Lundigan," Msgr. Shannon recalls, "and one day a boy of about 11 or 12 came to the station to audition. That was Gordon MacRae and we put him on a kids' show."

While at WFBL, he hired George Perkins as an announcer — he went on to become a familiar network voice and is now vice president of CBS Radio — and "broke into the business" Jimmy Van Heusen.

"People would send in song titles they had made up and he would write a song to go with the title," Msgr. Shannon said. Since then, Van Heusen has been taking song titles from such lyricists as the late Johnny Burke and now Sammy Cahn and has written the music for such songs as "Swinging on a Star," "The Magnificent Seven," "Unforgettable," "The Second Time Around," "Love and Marriage" and "All the Way."

While in New York doing his network show in the late 1930's, Jack Shannon attended by Manhattan College, operated by the Christian Brothers. There, a year ahead of him, was another student with a fine tenor voice. With not a thought of professional competition, "I recommended him to Arthur Hull Hayes at CBS," he said, referring to the president of CBS Radio, who is now a member of NCORT's eight-member executive committee.

The singer Jack Shannon recommended was hired by



Monsignor William Shannon, in a CBS publicity photo circa 1935.

CBS, and when "The Jack Benny Show" began looking for someone to replace Kenny Baker, it was Jack Shannon's find who got the job and has kept it ever since: Dennis Day.

After graduation from Manhattan, singer Jack Shannon chose the priesthood and returned to Syracuse, where he entered the seminary. The summer following his first year of studies, CBS persuaded him to resume his network show via a special hookup with the Syracuse station.

Thinking back to that summer and the great number of nuns and priests who have taken to guitars and recording sessions in recent years, Msgr. Shannon suggests that he just may have made musical history: "I must have been the first singing seminarian." (Catholic Press Features)

Catholic Hour Drama, TV Lists 'The Priest'

A three-part drama by award-winning author Robert Crean, "The Priest," will be presented by the "Catholic Hour" on the NBC Television Network in color on successive Sundays starting Oct. 16 (1:30-2 p.m.).

It will be produced by the Television Religious Program Unit of NBC News in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men.

In the words of an NCCM spokesman, the play "focuses on the current re-identification of the clergy in the light of the Vatican Council and the human problems facing a priest in a changing Church."

Fred J. Scollay will portray the priest, Lidia Prochnicka will

play the nun who is serving as his nurse, and Stephen Joyce will be Connors, one of his friends.

In Part One, "My Youth," the priest is hospitalized "somewhere in France." He feels he is the victim of changes within the Church. "The Church has changed," he says. "The people have changed. The structure is falling apart. And I am the victim!"

Part Two, "My People," will be presented Oct. 23 and Part Three, "Myself," Oct. 30.

At the workshop, Sister Edwina, S.S.J., spoke on "Practical Methods of Teaching." Sister

Edwina is now launching a catechetical program at Holy Spirit Parish in Penfield.

Sister Ellen Joseph, from the Atonement Convent in Elmira, spoke of "Catechetical Methods and Courses."

After the luncheon, Father Daniel F. Holland, Assistant Diocesan C.C.D. Director, spoke on the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Father Thomas F. Nellis, who represented the parish at the recent C.C.D. Congress in Pittsburgh, was recently appointed

principal of the newly formed Parish School of Religion.

The School of Religion will be open on Sunday during the 8:45 Mass to care for the first grade children. Saturday morning will be devoted to the younger students and Monday evening will be set aside for the older students.

The Bible, the Liturgy, and the Vatican II documents will have an important part in the courses of study. A teachers' conference will follow each session for the sake of mutual assistance.

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Rotary Sets Kerr Comedy, 'Mary, Mary'

"Mary, Mary," by Jean Kerr, the most popular non-musical stage hit of the early 1960's, is being brought to the East High School Auditorium for seven performances beginning Friday night, Oct. 14 by the Community Players.

The production is sponsored by Rochester Rotary Club for the benefit of Rotary Sunshine Camp for physically handicapped children.

Kathy Robinson will have the central role of Mary; Ronald Pedrone will be seen as Bob; Katherine Chasey as Tiffany. Others in the cast will be Paul Kaltenbach as Dirk, and Donald Simpson as Oscar Nelson.

Harriet Warren is the comedy's director and Betsy Hall is designing the setting.

This is the 34th annual Rotary play to be staged by the Community Players. There will be a total of seven performances—Oct. 14, 15, 16 and October 21, 22 and 23 with a matinee on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 23.

Tickets for the play are available at the Rotary Club office in the Chamber of Commerce or at the Community Playhouse, corner of Meigs and Clayton Ave.

Family Rosary Radio Leaders

The Family Rosary for Peace is broadcast nightly at 7 p.m. by Rochester's radio station WSAY, Auburn's WMBO-FM and through the facilities of the TV cable companies in the following cities: Elmira (Channel 8), Hornell (Channel 5) and Corning at 88.75 M.C.

Friday, Oct. 7 — Leo Saum of St. Thomas the Apostle parish, accompanied by the Kolping Society.

Saturday, Oct. 8 — (Mass will be celebrated.) Robert Heuther, Holy Family, with St. Patrick's Fraternity of the Third Order of St. Francis.

Sunday, Oct. 9 — John W. Mattle, St. John's, Knights of Columbus Council 178.

Monday, Oct. 10 — Representative of St. Joseph's Holy Name Society.

Tuesday, Oct. 11 — Angelo DiNieri, St. Philip Neri.

Wednesday, Oct. 12 — Representative of Holy Family Men's Club.

Thursday, Oct. 13 — Representative of St. George's Holy Name Society.

Theater News

A Delicate Balance

by RUPHEMIA WYATT

A DELICATE BALANCE — Drawing-room comedies transferred to living-room rely more on characterization than story. Bante there is but with a morose overtones as for instance in Edward Albee's latest which opens with the wife playfully discussing with her husband the advantages of insanity.

Such plot as there is, is related to the adjustments between friends and members of a family. Agnes and Tobias are a reasonably happy prosperous couple with a daughter who experiments in husbands. Between marital bouts, Julia always seeks refuge with her parents. Agnes also has a sister, Claire, who refuses to admit she is "A Alcoholic" and describes herself as "A Drunk." Mutually they infuriate each other.

Relishing Claire's astuteness, Tobias stands on neutral ground between them. Crashing in suddenly one evening upon this family trio, Edna and Harry ring the bell asking for help and refuge. They are Tobias and Agnes' best friends and something has "scared" them. What the scare was is never explained.

Edna and Harry are not very sure themselves but they are very sure they need the shelter of Tobias' home and settle down in Julia's room.

When Julia arrives just as suddenly next day she loses her temper when she finds she has lost her room and, after indulging in hysterics, orders Harry and Edna out of the house. They calmly go up to bed.

The last act, very early the next morning brings the family down, one by one, to the living room where Tobias has spent the night trying to come to some decisions.

Directed by Alan Schneider, the play moves along smoothly with pungent lines and clearly drawn characters. Jessica Tandy is cool and poised as Agnes. Hume Cronyn has the solvent

part of Tobias and one dextrously delivered story of how he tried to keep the affection of a pet cat. Marion Seldes gives Julia the irritating high tension of a very spoiled child.

Carmen Mathews is perfect in her gentle inflexibility; her Harry in his adolescent reliance on Tobias but above them all is Rosemary Murphy's tipsy Claire as commentator by Mr. Albee becomes the crux of the comedy with Miss Murphy.

DINNER AT EIGHT—After a frivolous opening scene, this episodic drama by Edna Ferber and George Kaufman closes as high melodrama with a villain, sudden death, a tragic hero but no heroine; each of its ten scenes having more story in it than a dozen of the current psychological plays.

It ran for eight months on Broadway in 1933-34 and for a season in Chicago with the same cast except that Marguerite Churchill first played Paula followed by Margaret Sullivan and Jane Wyatt. In it Sam Levene as Max first revealed his talents as comedian.

The hook on which the scenes are hung is the dinner party Mrs. Jordan decides to give Lord and Lady Ferneloff of London when she reads in The Times that they are on their way to New York. The invitation and acceptance are by cablegram. The close-ups of the guests reveal their problems including the Jordan kitchen where the lobster soup suffers annihilation as the chauffeur draws a carving knife on the butler over the parlormaid; then comes the faded actress; the fashionable doctor; the profiteering capitalist and hat-check girl; wife; the alcoholic screen star of silent pictures; Mr. Jordan's financial and physical crisis.

Walter Pidgeon's Jordan is the most believable and only unblemished character. June Haver as Mrs. Jordan does well by her hysterics; Robert Burr is inclined to be almost too tough as the long-haired Tyron Guthrie has staged Dinner at Eight as a period piece but I never remember a 1933 drawing room that so closely resembled a mortuary chapel with its stands of white lilies. The audience showed its appreciation of action by its gusty applause.

THE COUNTRY GIRL—Clifford Odet's back stage drama of the rejuvenation of an alcoholic actor failed to involve me emotionally in 1960 when Paul Kelly played the actor and Lita Hagen the stoically patient wife. It now seems even less convincing except for Rip Torn as the young director who insists that Frank Elgin is still the one man he needs for the play already in rehearsal.

Joseph Anthony is known as a great director but his Frank Elgin, who looks like a seedy grandfather, never made me believe that he had been and was still a great actor. Jennifer Jones as the country wife from Hartford was mostly impassive. Her one passionate scene with Rip Torn was a bubble that burst.

Directed by Martin Fried under supervision of Leo Strangberg, The Country Girl, fails to sustain the interest of Act I but that is Odet's fault not Jean Malrymples'. At least it offers the unusual in an idealistic ending. Rose Tito and Elisabeth, the Queen will follow in the series of American revivals.

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HERE'S WHERE TO DINE Ben's CAFE SOCIETY Manhattan Restaurant SELLITTO'S RESTAURANT THE REDWOOD Naples, N.Y. Pilgrims Landing Eagle Tavern EGLESTON RESTAURANT The Manger Hotel Hearth and Embers Runds' "House of Good Food" DANCING 7 NITES A WEEK