

Elliott Lewis (radio)

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Elliott Lewis (November 28, 1917 – May 23, 1990) was active during the Golden Age of Radio as an actor, producer and director, proficient in both comedy and drama. These talents earned him the nickname "Mr Radio".

Elliott Lewis was born in New York City, New York, on November 28, 1917. He headed west to Los Angeles to take a pre-law course in his twenties but found himself drawn to acting. During WWII, Lewis was a master sergeant who supervised shows for the Armed Forces Radio Network.

In 1943, while on leave from the Army, Lewis married Cathy Lewis, his first wife; they shared the common surname before their marriage. Cathy Lewis, who began in radio as a singer on Kay Kyser's radio program, was best known to audiences as Jane from *My Friend Irma*, both on radio and television. Together, the couple produced such old time radio classics as *Voyage of the Scarlet Queen* and *Suspense*. The couple divorced in 1958. In 1959, Lewis married actress Mary Jane Croft, and the couple remained together until Lewis' death from cardiac arrest in Gleneden Beach, Oregon, on May 23, 1990. His stepson, from Croft's first marriage, was killed in Vietnam.



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Radio

As a voice actor, Elliott Lewis was in high demand on radio, and he displayed a talent for everything from comedy to melodrama. He gave voice to Rex Stout's roguish private eye Archie Goodwin, playing opposite Francis X. Bushman in *The Amazing Nero Wolfe* (1946). He played adventurer Phillip Carney on the Mutual Broadcasting System's *Voyage of the Scarlet Queen*.

But perhaps Lewis' most famous role on radio was that of the hard-living, trouble-making left-handed guitar player Frankie Remley on NBC's *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show*. This character, based on a former band mate of Harris', served only one purpose: To get Phil into trouble. The trouble usually began when Frankie, in response to a request, complaint or musing from Harris, would speak the line that was to become his signature: "*I know a guy...*". Later on in the series, the character went by the name Elliott Lewis. It seems use of the name "Frankie Remley" on radio belonged neither to the real Mr. Remley nor to Phil Harris, but to the Jack Benny radio show, on which Harris was a cast member.

When Benny moved his show from NBC to CBS in 1949, rights to use references to Remley went with him. So when the new season of the Harris show began, suddenly the character "Frankie Remley" became the character "Elliott Lewis."

Lewis' other most famous voicing was not on radio but on record. He is the narrator and male lead of Gordon Jenkins' musical narrative album "Manhattan Tower," both the original 10 inch lp and the later recorded, expanded 12 inch LP version of the musical story.

During the run of *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show*, Lewis took over as a director of the well-known radio series *Suspense*. On the May 10, 1951, broadcast, Lewis reversed roles with Harris in the play *Death on My Hands*. A band leader, played by Harris, is horrified when an autograph-seeking fan accidentally shoots herself and dies in his hotel room. A singer (played by Harris' wife and radio costar Alice Faye) comes to his aid as the townsfolk blame him for the girl's death and call for vigilante justice against him.

Lewis was also heard on episodes of *The Clock*, *The Adventures of Maisie* and literally hundreds of other shows. He claimed that acting came to him too easily, and that he preferred to write and to direct. As a producer, director and writer, Lewis also worked on such radio programs as *Broadway Is My Beat*, *Crime Classics* and numerous other shows. He was considered one of the top talents in the radio world. In all, Lewis was involved in over 900 radio productions.

In the 1970s, Lewis produced radio dramas during a brief reincarnation of the medium. In 1973-74, he directed Mutual's *The Zero Hour*, hosted by Rod Serling. In 1979, he produced the *Sears Radio Theater* with Sears as the sole sponsor. In 1980 the series moved from CBS to Mutual and was renamed *The Mutual Radio Theater*, sponsored by Sears and other sponsors.

Films

Lewis did work in film, although radio was his great passion. On the big screen, Lewis narrated *The Winner's Circle* (1948) and portrayed Rod Markle in *The Story of Molly X* (1949). He also appeared in *Ma and Pa Kettle Go to Town* (1950) and *Saturday's Hero* (1951).

Television work

As the Golden Age of Radio ended, Lewis shifted his focus to television, where he worked on such shows as *The Mothers-in-Law*, *Petticoat Junction* and *The Lucy Show* (on which his wife Mary Jane Croft costarred as Lucy's sidekick Mary Jane Lewis — her married name). His final credited work was as an executive script consultant for *Remington Steele*.

External links

- Elliott Lewis (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0507163/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- "Full Steam Ahead" (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,818482,00.html>) (Elliott Lewis); *Time*, May 18, 1953
- Elliott Lewis radio programs (<http://www.otrcat.com/s/search.php?keyword=elliott+lewis>)

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