

# Roger Bower

Roger Bower was born on January 8, 1903, in New York City. He attended the City College of New York and New York University. But he was more interested in entertainment than education and aspired to be an actor, performing in vaudeville, minstrel and road shows.



In 1928, Roger joined radio station WOR in New York where he worked for 24 years. Early on he was involved as a combination announcer, director, producer, actor and sound effects man. During his tenure at WOR, he also produced and directed programs for other stations, including CBS and NBC. At WOR Bower produced, directed, acted, and created sound effects. In total Bower directed several thousand radio and television programs, including: *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Treasure Hour of Song*, *Famous First Facts*, *Name Your Poison*, *Say It With Words*, *Mystery Sketches*, *Music Pastels*, *Crime Club* and *Court of Literary Justice*.

Bower's range of programs was practically unlimited. He did sports casting, including the Army-Navy games and the Rose Bowl; through this, he met Knute Rockne, and sports announcer Ted Husing. He directed quiz shows, both comedic and straight, including *Twenty Questions*. Mystery/detective programs were also among his credits, including *The Crime Club*. Bower directed *The Witch's Tale*, first heard in 1928, one of the earliest radio horror programs; he also provided sound effects and the "voice" of Satan, the black cat. His *Bamberger Symphony* was one of the first symphony programs on the radio. He also directed operas and popular music programs, working with Rudy Vallee, the Dorsey brothers, and Benny Goodman, among others.

Bower's most famous credit was the comedy panel program *Can You Top This?*, with "Senator" Ed Ford, Joe Laurie, Jr., Harry Hershfield and Peter Donald, first heard in 1940. Bower directed and produced this program, and also served as moderator and scorekeeper for five years. Listeners submitted jokes to the show, and the best ones were read to the panel by Donald. The panelists then tried to "top" the joke, with one of their own on the same subject. A "laugh meter" hooked to a microphone gauged audience response to the jokes, determining the winners.

In the early 1930s, Bower announced the first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, which he continued to describe for many years. He gave the first (closed circuit) television demonstration of station WOR in 1933, in a Macy's department store window. He also directed the musical entertainment feature during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday celebrations at the Waldorf-Astoria from 1941 to 1944.

In 1960, the State Department sent Bower to the United Arab Republic for a year, to set up television stations in Cairo, Egypt, and Damascus, Syria. Shortly after his return from this mission in 1961, NBC International asked him to assist in the development of Nigerian television and radio. Bower agreed, and he and his wife stayed in Lagos, Nigeria for six years. Bower served as Managing Director of the Nigerian Television Service from 1962 until he left the country in 1967. Immediately after the end of this assignment in 1967, NBC International sent Bower to Saigon, Vietnam, where he stayed for two years, working with the television and radio services.

During his career, Bower received many accolades. New York radio columnists voted him Best Announcer for two years (1930-1932). He was made an honorary member of Rho Tau Sigma, a professional fraternity, for his work in collegiate broadcasting. He was a member of the Lamb's Club, one of the oldest theatrical clubs in the world, and contributor to their newsletter, *The Lamb's Script*. Bower

was also the first president of the American Guild of Radio Announcers and Producers, and a past director of the Radio and Television Director's Guild.

Roger Bower died in Sharon, Connecticut on May 17, 1979 at the age of 76.

*Credits: Univ. of Maryland Library of American Broadcasting*