

Nelson Olmsted
Ryan Ellett and Patrick Andre

Leroy Nelson Olmsted, Jr., was born January 28, 1914, in Minneapolis, MN and moved to Texas as a child. After high school Olmsted studied at the University of Texas where he got experience in the Austin theater scene, notably with the Little Theatre. While an undergraduate Olmsted joined the Texas Curtain Club in 1935 and the amateur actors performed in weekly plays over an Austin radio station. This experience led to his first part-time radio job in 1935 as an announcer on Austin's KNOW. Several months later in 1936 Olmsted was promoted to program director and then the next year Fort Worth's WBAP hired him away.

In a turn from his announcing and sports coverage for the station, on October 31, 1937 he was featured in the debut of WBAP's mystery drama *Black Night*. It also featured Harry Hoxworth, May Robson, Johnny Sullivan, and script adaptations by Virginia Wiltten. As his radio career gained steam in 1938 Olmsted married Alma Rae Holloway. *Black Night*, which aired between 1937 and 1939, attracted a lot of attention from regional listeners. Olmsted also created *The World's Greatest Short Stories* while at WBAP. The program caught the ear of NBC executives who lured him to Chicago in the fall of 1940 to continue the series, which was sometimes referred to as *The World's Greatest Stories*. Between October 1940 and 1944 he also starred on 15-minute *Dramas By Olmsted* (or *Story Dramas By Olmsted*). Whether original episodes continued to be produced during this entire span or whether part of that run was reruns is not clear.

During World War II Olmsted went to work for the Armed Forces Radio Service where he continued broadcasting his dramas to overseas listeners. In late 1947 Olmsted relocated to New York where one of his first programs was the eponymous *Olmsted & Co.*, a light musical program with Tom Scott and Norman Cloutier Orchestra over NBC. Other New York series included the quarter-hour *Your Story for Today* on ABC.

By 1949 Nelson Olmsted was testing the television waters. One of his earliest known television broadcasts was *What Happens Now?*, a show over WOR that focused on feeding a troupe of improv actors material to spontaneously create sketches. Olmsted served as emcee for the effort.

Olmsted continued to make appearances on dramatic radio programming throughout the 1950s, notably on such series as *X Minus One* and *The Eternal Light*. From 1952 until December 29, 1955 he narrated *The Ohio Story* for Bell Telephone and followed that as host of *Sleep No More* between November 1956 and the summer of 1957. *Sleep No More* reportedly started as a quarter-hour show in 1952 but documentation for that claim is scant. He continued with dramatic radio through the 1960s and 1970s as the narrator for *Stories of Pacific Powerland*, sponsored by Pacific Power & Light. The five-minute historical dramas aired three times per week until 1977.

Nelson Olmsted was increasingly focused on television throughout the 1950s and 1960s on beloved series including *The Philco Television Playhouse* (1949-1952), *The Phil Silvers Show* (1956-1958), *Perry Mason* (1960-1963), and *McHale's Navy* (1963-1966). He was cast in over a dozen motion pictures between 1959 and 1977, most notably *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* in 1969.

Nelson Olmsted had one daughter, Lynn Bell, and two sons, Ross and Marc. He died April 8, 1992, from complications after suffering a stroke.