

Biography for Elliott “Mr. Radio” Lewis

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Elliott Lewis was born November 28, 1917 in New York City. He first made his mark as an actor, writer, producer, and director on radio in the late 1930's. Lewis, who became Phil's Frankie Remley, was also one of the most talented men in radio. He began with bit parts on the *Jack Benny Program*. He later acted straight roles and produced several shows including *Suspense* in the early 1950s. Lewis is a lost jewel of the acting field.

A superb dramatic actor on radio shows like *Suspense*, he reached his comic height on *The Phil Harris – Alice Faye Show* playing Frankie Remley, Harris' guitarist in the band. Together, Lewis and Harris could rip the side off a virgin building with their dialogue or dig into each other like earth loaders. Elliott Lewis as Frankie Remley was the band's left handed guitar player with a sardonic sense of humor out of left field. The character was first done on *The Jack Benny Show*, and on a show about the band itself Frankie was even more obnoxious. Famed radio actor Elliott Lewis played the character with relish. In fact, later in the run the writers actually started calling the character Elliott! Lewis changed his name on the show from Frankie Remley to Elliott because Harris stopped leading Jack Benny's band - so he wasn't connected to Remley anymore.

Looking back on his career, Elliott Lewis recalled "In one week I did 20 shows. I was doing the Harris show as an actor, I was producing and directing *Suspense*, I was producing, directing, editing, writing openings and closings, and co-starring in *On Stage*. I was producing and directing *Broadway's My Beat* and I was producing, directing and writing the openings and closings and editing *Crime Classics*."

In contrast to his prodigious radio career, in which he worked either alone or in tandem with his first wife Cathy Lewis from 1943 until his divorce from her in 1958, his movie career – like those of most radio actors of the period – wasn't nearly as prolific, with only three films to his credit.

After Cathy and Elliott divorced, Mary Jane Croft, the only performer to appear as a "semi-regular" on Lucille Ball's series *I Love Lucy*, and Elliott found themselves to be kindred spirits. They knew the same people, went to the same parties, and laughed at the same jokes. They began dating and quickly fell in love. They were married in 1960 and until Elliott's death 31 years later, were one of the happiest couples in show business.

Lewis was heard on Gordon Jenkins' classic recording of "Manhattan Tower" on Decca Records in 1945. As the 1950s wore on he drifted away from acting to concentrate on the writing, producing, and directing end of the business. After the Golden Age of Radio ended, Lewis moved to television as a producer of such shows as *The Lucille Ball Show* (1962) and *The Mothers-In-Law* (1967), and director of all but one episode of the final season of *Petticoat Junction* (1963); however, radio remained his first love and he continued to direct the occasional radio play well into the 1970s.

After a long and successful career Elliot Lewis died of cardiac arrest on May 23, 1990 in Gleneden Beach, Oregon.