

Change the Station

*By Wade Bradford
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DEDICATION

To Randy Aronson, the original cast and crew, and the co-author's wives.

STORY OF THE PLAY

It's the 1930s, the glory days of radio. Radio dramas are thriving! Well, everywhere except Portland's local station KOD. This run-down station is struggling to stay on the air. After receiving a cease-and-desist letter, the long-running show "Stan Shade, Private Eye" must come to an end. In an effort to save the station, owner Fredrick Glass has secretly worked out a deal to become an NBC affiliate. All he has to do is introduce a new hit show that will keep the advertisers happy until the contract is signed. Finally, all the success Fred has always wanted... that is, if he can keep it a secret from the employees to prevent them messing everything up. Egotistical, rising-star Jack, knowing the new show is his big break, demands a younger leading lady. He mistakes Nora, a young intern related and sent by the NBC executive brokering Fred's deal, for his new actress and assigns her the leading role. Unfortunately, as far as acting talent goes, she has none. Meanwhile, Virginia Moorehead, the station's seasoned actress, who's keeping a few secrets of her own, returns from lunch and learns she's been demoted. She quits and storms off. William Wells, the legendary, veteran leading man, begins to fall apart, unable to handle being cast as the co-starring villain of the new show. Lester Foley, the station's gopher and sound effects artist becomes immediately and awkwardly smitten with Nora. Leaving Agnes, the station's all-purpose secretary, assistant, and copywriter, to try to hold everything together, but only if she is made an equal partner. Madcap comedy ensues with a wild and raucous "on-air" finale. Will the new show be a success? Will Agnes save the day? Will Fred be able to change the station?

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The original production was on November 4, 2016 at the Repertory East Playhouse in Newhall, CA. It was the inaugural production of The Big Sandwich Theatre Company, would not have been possible without the drive and desire of its producer Randy Aronson, the hard work and dedication of the original cast and crew: Randy Aronson, Tyler Joy, Wade Bradford, Christopher Flowers, Nancy Lantis, Marcus Langston, Sanya Arnold. Directed by Christopher Flowers.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 3 w)

FRED GLASS: An occasionally high-strung, middle-aged, station owner, manager and stand-in narrator. Believes people should be on a need-to-know basis. Ready for a change. Naive to big business and likes fish themes. Tall Nathan Lane type.

LESTER FOLEY: A likable but shy Foley artist (before there were Foley artists). Doesn't say more than two words to anyone he doesn't trust. A good-hearted employee who usually does what he's told and tries to please most everyone. Harpo Marx meets Johnny Depp type.

WILLIAM WELLS: A classically trained and experienced actor from the 1920's. Has won many awards and has seen and done it all. An air of superiority surrounds him and he is not afraid to be blunt. Near the end of his run, but is having trouble admitting it. Orson Welles meets David Ogden Stiers type.

JACK DONOVAN: A radio actor on his way up, and he knows it. A cocky ladies' man who cares little for anyone else's needs. A little unstable, with a mean streak. Young Sean William Scott meets Jack Black type.

VIRGINIA MOOREHEAD: Older, seasoned radio actress. Prim, always acts like a lady. Claims to have a perfect relationship with her husband. Occasionally declares the opposite of the truth as a defense. Julie Andrews meets Maggie Smith type.

AGNES PAYNE: Staff writer, station secretary, and occasional board operator. Hard-nosed, but really soft-hearted. Serious stage fright. Backbone of the whole operation. Katherine Hepburn meets Tina Fey type.

NORA HARVEY: Young, beautiful, network executive's niece. Very un-talented farm girl. Stars in her eyes. Here for her big break. Has some self-confidence issues. Goldie Hawn meets Gracie Allen type.

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SETTING

A struggling mid-sized radio station just inside the city limits of Portland, Oregon. Complete with enclosed control booth, station manager's office, and Foley artists station.

TIME

The 1930s.

ACT I: Inside the rundown radio station after a weekly broadcast. Also, the same place, the following week.

ACT II: The same place, the following day.

EPILOGUE: Also, the same place. Two years later.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The four "On-Air" scenes of the play are intended to be recorded and played during performances with the actors lip-synching through the action, simulating a radio broadcast. This allows for unusual moments and sound effects that cannot be accomplished live. Directors are encouraged to be creative with action and SFX, especially during the play's climax and epilogue. However, the script can be altered to be performed entirely live.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: In spotlight, FRED GLASS, station manager of KOD Portland, stands by a tall microphone. Above the control booth window, an On-Air sign shines brightly. The actors lip-synch the dialogue and mime any and all SFX as a recording of the entire broadcast plays.)

FRED: Ladies and gentlemen, I want to remind you that tonight's broadcast is brought to you by Haley's Orangeade. Enjoy the real, that's real, orange flavor of Haley's. Delightfully refreshing and delicious. Haley's Orangeade. *(SFX: Sound of baseball bat hit.)* Wow! Haley's hits the spot! We return you now to the final installment of KOD Portland's favorite adventure detective show. He's tough. Hard-boiled. He could lead a host of angels and outsmart the devil. He's Stan Shade, Private Eye. And now, the thrilling conclusion.

(LIGHTS UP on the interior of a 1930s radio station. WILLIAM, JACK, and VIRGINIA, the actors, are downstage standing before tall microphone stands. AGNES, staff writer and station secretary, sits in a booth behind a large glass window. FRED runs into the booth and sits beside her. LESTER, a Foley artist, stands in a corner, amid a hodgepodge of gadgets and noisemakers. He produces the sound of a door opening.)

WILLIAM: Well, well, well. Boss Crudo. Nice little warehouse you got here.

JACK: Shade! You're supposed to be dead.

WILLIAM: Your trigger man was all wet. I dropped him for breakfast. It took me awhile, but I finally figured out what that stink was you've been leaving all over town.

JACK: I didn't leave anything behind, Shade. Not a box of matches or stick of chewing gum. Not even a scrap of cigarette paper. How'd you find me?

WILLIAM: Oil.

JACK: What are you talking about?

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WILLIAM: Not black gold, or smashed olives. Fish oil, Crudo. Fish oil. With all the pieces finally together, it all made sense. You've been stuffing hip flasks into halibut and shipping them out from this very dock. Selling the hootch at every port down the river. The gin joints would keep jumping and no one would ever be the wiser.

JACK: Until you came along, Shade.

WILLIAM: Until I came along, Crudo. Where's the dame?

VIRGINIA: Oh Stanley! Here I am. Here! Tied to this rusty old ship's anchor.

(LESTER shakes a chain violently.)

VIRGINIA: *(Cont'd.)* I knew you'd find me!

WILLIAM: Stay calm, Mary Sue. Now that I got the drop on him, we can make tracks and be out of here before the bulls arrive. Now, you gonna let her go? Or do I start throwing lead?

JACK: Don't blow your wig just yet, Shade. Who's got the drop on who? Brick. Anvil. Crowbar. Take care of the gumshoe, then call him a meat wagon.

FRED: *(In three voices.)* Yeah, boss. Sure thing. Okay boss, you got it.

(LESTER is a whirlwind of sounds effects and grunts as a "fight ensues.")

WILLIAM: Your thugs are finished, Crudo. Hand over the broad.

VIRGINIA: Oh Stanley!

JACK: One more step, Shade, and I pull this lever and she heads to the bottom of the river.

VIRGINIA: Oh Stanley!

WILLIAM: Don't do it, Crudo. You'll only make your stay in the big house longer. Let her go and I'll talk to the judge.

JACK: On second thought, why don't you go for a swim while I bust out of here. I'll get you next time, Stan Shade, Private Eye.

End of Freeview

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