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GORD ATKINSON'S SHOWBILL

A Golden TV Anniversary

It has been within the life time of senior citizens that television has developed from "rabbit ears" antenna reception on heavy tube sets to cable-digital reception on sleek flat screen TV sets. During that period an Ottawa broadcasting institution has informed and entertained people of all ages. On March 12 CTV Ottawa, formerly CJOH-TV, will celebrate its 50th anniversary with its staff and countless viewers.

When the station began telecasting in 1961 it was after a lengthy competition had taken place for the capital's first private English language signal. In the late 1950's The Canadian Radio & Television Commission began accepting applications from interested groups. I had been with CFRA for a few years and at that time was involved in preparing a presentation on behalf of our company and its founder Frank Ryan. I remember well formatting programs and features for what would have been a companion TV station for CFRA. The Commission, however, was inclined to grant licences to applicants with no other broadcast interests in the same community. The licence was eventually awarded to another veteran broadcast executive, Ernest Bushnell, known informally to all in the business as just, "Ernie". Considering the multi-ownerships in today's communications industry, the decision made 50 years ago by the CRTC not to grant multi-ownership seems rather quaint.

Despite losing the bid for the TV licence a bond between CFRA and CJOH personnel soon developed. We all knew one another and worked well together. Two of CFRA's personalities, Max Keeping and Les Lye, made career defining moves to CJOH. Max became Ottawa's respected news anchor and tireless fund-raiser for worthy causes. Les, with his alter ego "Abercrombie", captured the imagination of radio listeners of the 1950's and '60's and then went on to repeat his inventive flare for comedy on television.

Les in time became the lovable eccentric half of CJOH's popular, long-running "Willy & Floyd Show", the irreverent Floyd. Bill Luxton played the role of the wise old philosopher, Willy. Designed as a "kid's show" it developed into a

popular off beat program with adult appeal. The two veteran performers also hosted popular CJOH morning shows with media guests and visiting celebrities. As CFRA's showbiz reporter I was a frequent visitor to their Merivale Road studios. My most embarrassing moment as their guest movie reviewer was in 1974 when I predicted that "Godfather II" would not win back-to-back Oscars for Francis Ford Coppola. The following year Bill and Les took pleasure in re-playing my unfortunate prediction that "sequels never win Oscars". When *Godfather II* won the Academy Award I humbly put my crystal ball back in storage.

Another ongoing assignment that I had at CJOH was as a judge on the talent program, "Take a Bow". Every Sunday night during the early 1970's I joined a group of panellists to pick a winner from a group of local amateur performers. Bill Luxton was the program host and the late Champ Champagne was the musical director.

During the period that I was the MC of CFRA's "The Campus Club", I had a memorable encounter with a young TV announcer who went on to become the popular and respected news anchor on ABC-TV, Peter Jennings. He had just been assigned to host a pop music program on CJOH and asked me if he might observe one of our on-location shows. He picked me up in his low-slung sports car and we sped down The Driveway to Lansdowne Park where I was broadcasting "The Campus Club". He was reluctant to be on stage with me as he preferred to just be an observer. Years later whenever I saw him on TV my thoughts drifted back to our youthful night at the Ex.

Sincere thanks to Michael O'Byrne and CTV for including me in the celebration of their 50th anniversary. Congratulations to my old broadcast pals, Bill, Max, TV director Bill McKee and all their colleagues at CJOH.

Contact and share your memories with -- gorda@rogers.com