

JANUARY 2011

FOREVER YOUNG

## GORD ATKINSON'S SHOWBILL

## In Remembrance

As we begin a new year and a new decade, it is a time for thoughtful reflection. 2010 was a bittersweet year on the entertainment scene. Betty White (89) inspired healthy seniors to keep active and not to lose their sense of humour while at the same time we sadly said farewell to old favourite performers. Throughout the past 12 months several of our columns were tributes to these fallen personalities. Now, we fondly remember three additional names from the distant past, a musician, a program host and a prominent local raconteur.

Mitch Miller, the bearded maestro of the podium, kept the world singing for over 40 years. His sing along LP collections made him one of the best-selling recording artists of all time, while his TV appearances made him one of North America's most recognizable figures.

He was only 11 when he began oboe lessons, "It was the only instrument left in the school lockers," he told me with a smile. As a scholarship student at the Eastman School of Music in his native Rochester, NY, he played professionally with the Syracuse Symphony and the Rochester Philharmonic.

Born in 1911, on the same day as George M. Cohan, July 4, Miller reflected almost every aspect of music during a remarkable career that spanned over six decades. His greatest hit was the rousing 1955 gold recording of *The Yellow Rose of Texas*".

As a record producer, Miller was one of the most influential artist and repertoire executives of the 1940s and 1950s. He introduced a unique line-up of popular



singers and musicians including Tony Bennett, Rosemary Clooney, Johnny Mathis, Vic Damone and Jerry Vale.

Not all the artists that were under his supervision at Columbia were pleased with the songs he assigned to them. Rosemary Clooney was directed to a big hit with her novelty number, *Come on-a My House*, but Miller also had her record off-beat songs that she liked to forget. But as Rosemary often said “You can’t argue with success and Mitch had a lot more hits than misses.”

While he had hoped that his first sing-along LP would be well received, he was astonished at its overnight success. “It came out at the height of the early popularity of rock ‘n’ roll, but we felt that the time might be right to hit a responsive chord with the public for a collection of old favourite campfire songs.” Mitch Miller was 99 when he died July 31<sup>st</sup> following a brief illness.

Children of the first television generation and their parents lost a fondly remembered TV friend when Art Linkletter passed away on May 26<sup>th</sup>. He was a remarkable 97 year-old who was active until the last two years of his life. A reporter once asked him how old he was; “The question you should ask”, he replied, “is not how old are you, but how are you old? – which tells you if there is any purpose in a person’s life.” He was 94 when he wrote his best selling book on aging, *How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life*.

Art Linkletter was born in Moose Jaw, Sask. His amazing career on radio and TV began in the 1940s as the host of the audience participation program “House Party”. He was the emcee of popular game shows and variety programs. He is perhaps best remembered for his amusing interviews with young children on the long running family feature “Kids Say the Darndest Things”. A successful author of 20 books, he wrote mostly about children and aging. He coined a well-quoted saying when he titled one of his publications, “Old Age is Not for Sissies”. He once said half in jest, “The four stages of life are infancy, childhood, adolescence and obsolescence”.

The recent death of one of Ottawa’s most likeable and prominent raconteurs, Jake Dunlap, at 85, brought back to my mind a favourite memory of the colourful sports and judicial personality. It happened at a busy downtown intersection during my early Ottawa radio days. While I was standing waiting for a red traffic light to change to green a booming voice from across the street began singing a pop ballad. It was Jake, who then challenged me by saying, “Okay, deejay Gord A, what year was it popular and who made it a hit?” As startled pedestrians looked on I called back, “Don Cornell, 1950!” It was a touch of irony that the song was

entitled, “*It Isn’t Fair*”! Jake was a loveable fellow to all who were privileged to know him.

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