

Ladies and Gentlemen . . .

# Webley L. Webster

. . . at the console.

by Bob Atkins and Ken Ladner

Readers of this publication have noted occasional items describing radio programs devoted to the theatre organ and its music. The New York metropolitan area, with one notable exception, has no such program appearing on a regular basis. This exception is *The Bob and Ray Show* which is aired Monday through Friday from 3:15 p.m. to 7 p.m. on

WOR-AM. This is an afternoon variety program featuring music, both current hits and standards; helicopter traffic reports and transit bulletins; newscasts and weather reports; and, of course, commercials. So far, the format may sound like other programs originating in various cities, but the Bob and Ray show has additional features which make

it unique. In addition to organist Webley Webster (more about him later) the frequent dramatic presentations during the show are eagerly awaited by regular listeners. *Mary Backstayge*, *Noble Wife* is a continuing story about the struggles of a husband and wife acting team against the concrete heart of Broadway. Others appearing regularly are

Webley L. Webster at the console of WOR's huge 4-manual pipe organ.







Ray Goulding (left) and Bob Elliott broadcasting *The Bob and Ray show* from WOR's Studio 2 in New York.

*Wing Po*, about a Chinese philosopher in the old west; *The Pittmans*, family life during the Great Depression; and *Squad Car 119*, about two low-key detectives. If these are vaguely reminiscent of *Kung Fu*, *The Waltons* and *Dragnet*, it isn't pure coincidence. Also high in listener popularity are *The Gathering Dusk*, *Anxiety*, *Widen Your Horizons* and, for the kids, the *Charlie Chipmunk Club* and *Mr. Science*.

The Bob and Ray regular who is the subject of this article plays the organ almost daily. Webley L. Webster currently appears exclusively on the Bob and Ray show and, to date, has made no personal appearances in the area. A versatile artist, he also shows up on some of the dramatic portions of the show where his distinctive speech pattern makes him instantly recognizable. Webley, a native New Englander, has been Bob and Ray's musical director almost since they first teamed up in 1946 in Boston. However, their move to WOR in 1973 finally brought him together with an instrument worthy of his skill. The WOR studio organ, a 4/38 Gallagher & Shean, was installed when WOR moved to New York from Newark. Unused since the

days at the soap operas, it was restored by the authors working under Webley's skilled direction.

Knowledgeable organ buffs never cease to be amazed by Webley's ability to make the organ's sound duplicate that of a Wurlitzer, a Morton or other classic makes. Most of the arrangements he plays are those of George Wright or Dick Leibert. He also supplies background music for some of the dramatic offerings; needless to say, he is not cast in a speaking role during those portions of the show.

Of course, Bob and Ray fans who have seen them on television, in the movies, or in their stage presentation *The Two and Only* have realized that the foregoing is a blend of fact and fantasy. Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding and their radio show, do, indeed, exist, as does WOR. All of the characters on the show, however, (Webley Webster included) are played by Bob and Ray themselves. In spite of what you hear on the show, WOR's studio 2 has no picture window, no buffet table, no studio audience — all these are conjured up in the minds of the audience by Bob and Ray. The same is true of WOR's beautiful 4-manual pipe organ. The organ music is all

taken from recordings (which is why it sounds like Wright or Leibert playing instruments by different makers in different accoustical settings).

Ray (who is the voice of Webley on the show) and Bob both grew up and got their start in radio in Massachusetts. Bob Elliott was born in Boston and grew up in the suburb of Winchester. After high school he went to drama school in New York, supporting himself by working nights as an usher at Radio City Music Hall, certainly a good place to become familiar with the Mighty Wurlitzer's sound. Upon his return Boston, he got a job at WHDH, and returned there in 1946 after his three year stint in the Army. Artistic ability runs in Bob's family; his hobbies include painting and constructing furniture, and his son, Bob Elliott Jr., drew the portrait of Webley which accompanies this article.

Ray Goulding was born and raised in Lowell, Massachusetts. He got his start on a local radio station in Lowell, moved up to WEEI in Boston, and then he, too, went into the Army. Incidentally, WEEI's program director at that time was ATOS's own Del Castillo whose knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the theatre pipe organ is well known to THEATRE ORGAN readers. Like Bob, Ray was discharged in 1946 and got a job at WHDH. Thus, their mutual employment at the same radio station was the catalyst that began their long association. They worked together on a morning music and news show where their ability to improvise humorous material led to the formation of the team. In the early 1950's they moved their base of operations to New York where they proceeded to become a fixture on local and network radio, TV (including the very successful "Bert and Harry" commercials for Piel's beer) and movies. The aforementioned *The Two and Only* ran for six months in New York and then toured the country. Their afternoon show on WOR-AM, produced by genial and efficient Bob Theile, gives residents of the New York Metropolitan area their only regular exposure to the theatre pipe organ. If you live or visit within range of WOR (710 on the AM dial), tune in. It's a most entertaining and informative show. □