



THE MUSICKER'S GAZETTE



No. 6

WALKING BOXES PRODUCTIONS

DONOVAN'S BRAIN

Written in 1943 by German-born Curt Siodmak (who also wrote 'The Wolf Man', 'Son of Dracula', and others) 'Donovan's Brain' was presented on the radio program SUSPENSE in 1944 with Orson Welles giving a brilliant performance as Dr. Patrick Cory. Walking Boxes will pay homage to that great 1944 production by giving the audience the opportunity of being right in the studio as the drama (with all its sound effects) is being created. Cast notes and reflections are on Page 2...

MORAL OF THE STORY

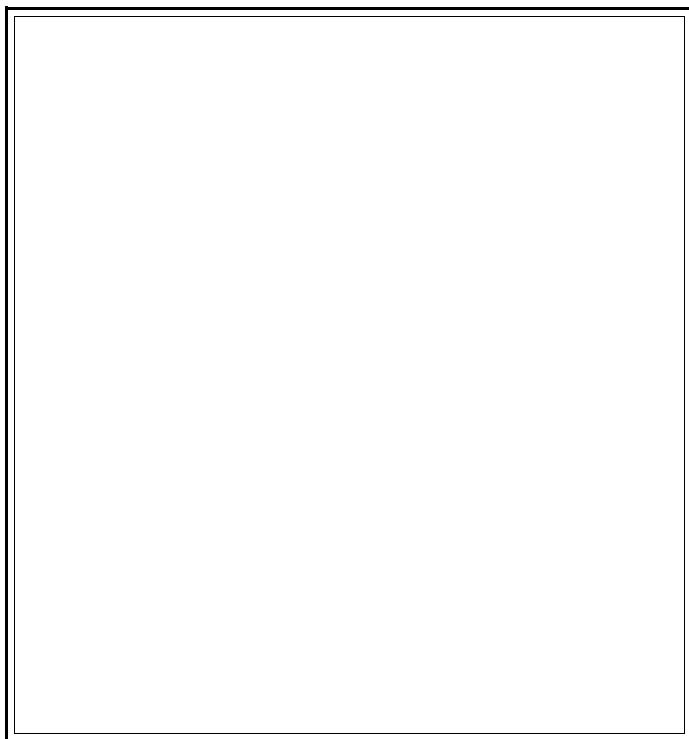
'Donovan's Brain' is certainly no Shakespearean tale for the ages, but should we disregard it as simple nostalgic fare for an afternoon's diversion? What meaning for our modern lives might we find in this sixty-year-old story of the tragic fate of Dr. Cory and his family? The Musicker's Gazette explores some ideas on Page 3...

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Perhaps the most interesting part of viewing a radio drama performed live is getting to see the various sound effect tricks in action. Coconut shells creating a galloping horse is classic. Learn more about the rest of the thing-a-ma-jigs on the sound effects table on Page 4...

HALLOWEEN SHOW AT FORT SNELLING

Walking Boxes will be presenting 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' at Historic Fort Snelling's Visitor Center Theater on Saturday, October 29th. Live dialogue, music, and sound effects will all be added to the screening of this silent film classic. Come dressed as your favorite character from history, enjoy refreshments, and delve into the enigmatic intrigue of one of the first horror films ever made. For more information about the event and other happenings of Walking Boxes Productions, log on to www.walkingboxes.com



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THE CAST OF DONOVAN'S BRAIN

Jeffry Nordin.....Dr. Patrick Cory
or
Schratt/Zanger
David Geister.....Dr. Patrick Cory
or
Schratt/Zanger
Christine Nordin.....Janice/Reporter
John Knauss.....David
Paul Cameron.....The Brain
Dave Simanek.....Schratt/Zanger (understudy)
J Roth.....The Man in the Black Hat
-Original Music Soundtrack by J Roth-

THE CAST REFLECTS BACK...

Walking Boxes Productions' main man, Flyhard Jenkins, had an informal interview with the 'Donovan's Brain' players. He asked them to tell of any childhood memories they had of listening to radio dramas.

Jeff Nordin: When I was in junior and senior high school, radio plays were still alive and well at 1:00 A.M. on KAY Little Rock's Beaker Theatre. All the classic performers of drama and suspense from Orson Welles to Vincent Price enacted great works like those of H.G. Wells and H.P. Lovecraft.

Dave Geister: I was probably nine years old. It was Halloween, and after an evening of trick-or-treating I sat on the living room floor, surrounded by my loot, and listened to a rebroadcast of 'War of the Worlds'. I am pretty sure my father, who was really just a large kid in disguise, was there with me, and I remember

being intrigued by the whole affair. My appetite already ran towards the fantastic and macabre. Good Stuff!!

J Roth: I remember being half-asleep in the back seat of the family car coming home late from a visit to the relatives and hearing the creaking door and ominous sounding host of some radio drama program in the '70s. More powerful though was scrolling through the stations one late night on my small radio and discovering a version, perhaps by BBC, of Tolkien's 'Two Towers' being broadcast. It was the scene in Shelob's Lair and I was put into a trance.

Dave Simanek: For me the most memorable is the voice of the announcer introducing 'The Shadow'. He was riveting and ominous. "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The shadow knows."

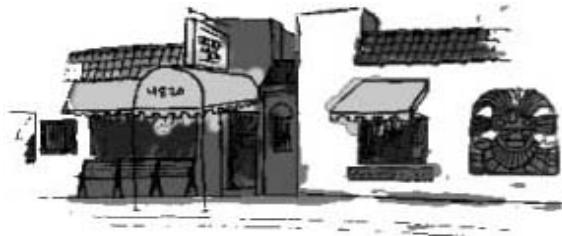
Paul Cameron: The closest thing to radio dramas I heard growing up would probably be listening to 'Prairie Home Companion' after church on Saturday evenings, when my family was living in North Carolina.

John Knauss: It wasn't until I was in high school that I heard my first radio drama. One of my teachers had us listen to 'War of the Worlds'. Truthfully... I fell asleep during it.

Chris Nordin: I too heard a rebroadcast of 'War of the Worlds' when I was in school. Years later I would be exposed to radio drama again when I played in a troupe called 'Company of the Unicorn'. We did radio plays as if in the studio, very much like the work we are doing with Walking Boxes. I love what a radio play can stir in a person if they close their eyes and let themselves be carried by the story!



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DANGEROUS RATIONALIZING

If you prefer your 1940s-style retro radio dramas to be quaint and charmingly uncomplicated, then read no farther. 'Donovan's Brain' and most other old radio plays can be taken as just light, nostalgic entertainment to briefly distract oneself from an often perplexing and frustrating world. But for those who can't resist trying to wring some meaning out of an arguably meaningless existence, let us contemplate...

There are many different tacks one can take when trying to find some relevance from 'Donovan's Brain' to apply to our modern lives.

One could seek to find symbolic meaning in the brain and its destruction of Dr. Cory and his family. The list of possible symbols is endless: the woes of addiction; the corruptive quality of capitalism; growing dependence upon computers/technology; and so on...

One theme the scriptwriters obviously had in mind was the "religion vs. science" schism, with Schrott representing the sentiments of religion imploring Cory to show some reason and compassion and to stop "profaning life". One can imagine similar pleas to doctors today from religious-minded individuals in regard to abortion, euthanasia and other concerns.

Others might bemoan that the amoral "scientists" are creating monsters that will turn around and destroy their makers and all of us with them. Many carry such fears in regard to stem cell research, genetic modification of foods, and technologies that contribute to greenhouse warming.

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Jeff Nordin, in a reflective article published for Walking Boxes' premier presentation of 'Donovan's Brain' (autumn '04) focused his contemplations on considering who the real villain was, Donovan or Dr. Cory? Since we listeners are guided through the story by Cory, we tend to sympathize with him and feel that Donovan is the evil one, but quite disturbing is Dr. Cory's ability to rationalize taking Donovan's life ("He would die anyway.")

It is known all-too-well by most, that humans can rationalize anything. Some of the most extreme examples come from the time that this radio drama was aired in the '40s. The cruel and inhumane experiments by Nazi and Japanese scientists upon their captives during WWII are nearly impossible for us to believe and too horrible to be recounted here. How can any man's brain rationalize such sinister behavior against a fellow human being?

But one need not be a scientist to be confronted by human efforts to rationalize behavior; within the brain of every man is the ability and temptation to rationalize some act or behavior one knows to be wrong or harmful to oneself or others. What is it within the brain that allows us to do this? Most intriguing perhaps is the brain's apparent willingness to create rationalizations that could allow its very own host to be harmed or even destroyed. Those who smoke cigarettes, take harmful narcotics, or eat an unhealthy diet must constantly rationalize their behavior as they give in to temptation ("Just one"; "I'll cut back tomorrow"; "Some people smoke and still live to a ripe old age.") One must be vigilant of one's own brain or risk meeting the fate of Dr. Cory.

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ABOUT THAT ANTENNA THINGY

The theremin was invented in 1919 by Lev Sergeivitch Termen. Termen was in the midst of researching proximity sensors; his research was sponsored by the Russian government. When he demonstrated his invention to Vladimir Lenin, Lenin is said to have been so impressed that he began taking lessons upon it. Lenin sent Termen on a trip around the world to demonstrate this latest Soviet technology and the invention of electronic music. In the late 1920s, Termen emigrated to the US, but was later kidnapped by Soviet agents and forced to return to the USSR. He was put to work in a labor camp and designed the first 'bug' (covert listening device.)

The theremin can be heard in many old sci-fi productions for film and radio. Playing the theremin requires no physical contact with the 'instrument' to produce music. Pitch and volume are controlled by theremin players simply by moving their hands through the air. The theremin used in Walking Boxes' production of 'Donovan's Brain' is a simpler version of Termen's original, which had two antennae.

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ON THE SOUND EFFECTS TABLE

The tiny door, like something out of 'Alice in Wonderland', used to be a door of normal proportions. It was rescued from a garbage dumpster and sawed down to its current height. The bubble effect is created simply by an old fish tank bubbler. The brain's jar held pickles in its younger days. The three pairs of shoes would normally be worn by those technicians creating the walking effects. The crash boxes are simply a collection of kitchen wares.

The cast has talked about doing a detective drama in the future. This inevitably will require using some kind of blank pistol. They should take caution; there is an amusing incident that happened on a show called: 'Gangbusters'. During one live broadcast, an actor playing a hoodlum gave this line: "This is the end; take this lead, you rat." Two shots were supposed to immediately follow, but the blank pistol jammed. As the sound effects man frantically tried to fix it, the actor, quick on his toes, improvised the line: "Nah, shooting is too good for you; I'm going to stab you with this knife." Just then the sound man got the pistol to fire.



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