

'Gunsmoke' on Radio Sets High Standard

By JOHN CROSBY

NEW YORK, Aug. 25.—There seems to be a small trend I'd like to explore today toward a higher level of culture on radio these days. And what's more important it seems to be paying off. Prime exhibit is "Gunsmoke," (KCBS, 6 p.m. *Tuesdays*), CBS's highly literate western radio drama which has been called the "High Noon" of broadcasting.

"Gunsmoke" plots are characterized by realism, intelligence, and honest characterization. Perhaps its most surprising aspect is that its hero, Marshal Mat Dillon, whose job is to keep order in Dodge City, Kan., is cast in something less than heroic mold—at least not in the tradition of Hopalong Cassidy.

Marshal Dillon (William Conrad) is a composite of some of the most famous men of the early West—Wild Bill Hickock, Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp and the Younger brothers. Norman MacDonnell, producer-director of the program, says of him: "He is a lonely, sad, tragic man—a quiet, unhappy, confused Marshal. These days, we'd send him to an analyst."

Shades of William S. Hart! The gratifying thing about "Gunsmoke," which is as far removed from the average western as "Dragnet" -is from the average cops-and-robbers epics, is that it has attracted a healthy audience and a wealthy sponsor — (Chesterfield). It was fourth in the last Nielsen ratings, which just goes to show that there are more egg-heads around than you might suppose.

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