

Inner Sanctum Mysteries

The [anthology series](#) featured stories of mystery, terror and suspense, and its tongue-in-cheek introductions were in sharp contrast to shows like [Suspense](#) and [The Whistler](#).^[1] The early 1940s programs opened with [Raymond Edward Johnson](#) introducing himself as, "Your host, Raymond," in a mocking sardonic voice. A spooky melodramatic organ score (played by Lew White) punctuated Raymond's many morbid jokes and playful puns. Raymond's closing was an elongated "Pleasant dreeeeaaams, hmmmmmm?" His tongue-in-cheek style and ghoulish relish of his own tales became the standard for many such horror narrators to follow, from fellow radio hosts like [Ernest Chappell](#) (on Wyllis Cooper's later series, [Quiet, Please](#)) and [Maurice Tarplin](#) (on [The Mysterious Traveler](#)).^[2]

When Johnson left the series in May 1945 to serve in the Army, he was replaced by [Paul McGrath](#), who did not keep the "Raymond" name and was known only as "Your Host" or "Mr. Host". (Berry Kroeger had substituted earlier for a total of four episodes). McGrath was a Broadway actor who turned to radio for a regular income. Beginning in 1945, [Lipton Tea](#) sponsored the series, pairing first Raymond and then McGrath with cheery commercial spokeswoman Mary Bennett (aka the "Tea Lady"), whose blithesome pitches for Lipton Tea contrasted sharply with the macabre themes of the stories. She primly chided the host for his trademark dark humor and creepy manner.

The creaking door

The program's familiar and famed audio trademark was the eerie creaking door which opened and closed the broadcasts. Himan Brown got the idea from a door in the basement that "squeaked like Hell." The door sound was actually made by a rusty desk chair. The program did originally intend to use a door, but on its first use, the door did not creak. Undaunted, Brown grabbed a nearby chair, sat in it and turned, causing a hair-raising squeak. The chair was used from then on as the sound prop. On at least one memorable occasion, a staffer innocently repaired and oiled the chair, thus forcing the sound man to mimic the squeak orally.^[3]

Guest stars

Its campy comedy notwithstanding, the stories were usually effective little chillers, mixing horror and humor in equal doses. Memorable episodes included "Terror by Night" (September 18, 1945) and an adaptation of "[The Tell-Tale Heart](#)" (August 3, 1941). The latter starred [Boris Karloff](#), who was heard regularly in the first season, starring in more than 15 episodes and returning sporadically thereafter.

Other established stars in the early years included [Mary Astor](#), [Helen Hayes](#), [Peter Lorre](#), [Paul Lukas](#), [Claude Rains](#), [Frank Sinatra](#), [Orson Welles](#). Most of the lead and supporting players were stalwarts of [New York](#) radio. These included [Santos Ortega](#), [Mercedes McCambridge](#), [Berry Kroeger](#), [Lawson Zerbe](#), [Arnold Moss](#), [Leon Janney](#), and [Mason Adams](#). Players like [Richard Widmark](#), [Everett Sloane](#), [Burgess Meredith](#), [Agnes Moorehead](#), [Ken Lynch](#), [Anne Seymour](#), also found fame via the Inner Sanctum Mysteries

Out of more than 500 programs broadcast, only about 200 remain in circulation, sometimes minus dates or titles.

Materials for this audio brief was taken from www.wikipedia.org

For the Old Time Radio Researchers, I'm _____, your announcer

