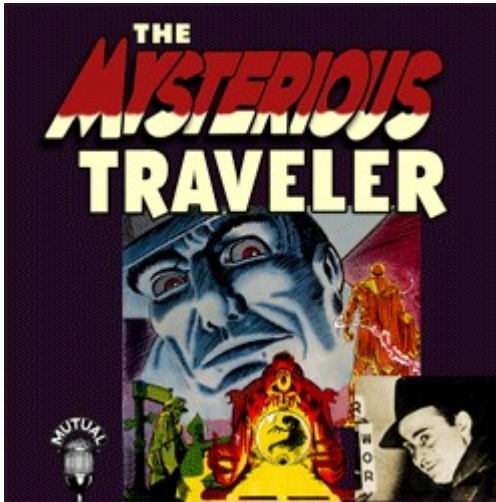


The Mysterious Traveler Radio Program

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Mysterious Traveler MP3 Cover Art



The Mysterious Traveler was another of WOR's great locally produced dramas

Background

The Mysterious Traveler was the second outing for the prolific writing team of [Robert Arthur, Jr.](#) and [David P. Kogan](#), two successful pulp fiction writers and publishers. Their first effort was a 27-program run of *Dark Destiny* (1942-43). Most of the *Dark Destiny* scripts are heard again in *The Mysterious Traveler* (1943), *The Sealed Book* (1945) and *The Teller of Tales* (1950).

The team of [Robert Arthur, Jr.](#), [David Kogan](#), producer/director [Sherman 'Jock' MacGregor](#), and actor [Maurice Tarplin](#) was a very successful one for both *The Mutual Broadcasting System* and Radio station *WOR*. Between 1944 and 1952, *The Mysterious Traveler* eventually became one of the sixteen highest rated Radio programs of their era. *WOR* and *MBS* took great pride in putting together a program that could rival Radio giants *CBS*, *ABC*, and *NBC* throughout the era. During its heyday, *The Mysterious Traveler* spawned several similar thriller genre programs such as [The Strange Dr. Weird](#) (1945), [The Sealed Book](#) (1945), [Dark Venture](#) (1946), *Murder Experts* (1949), and *The Teller of Tales* (1950).

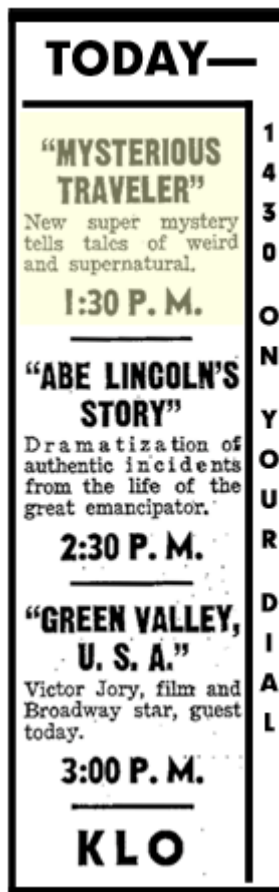
The thriller genre was not new to Radio in the 1940s. *The Witch's Tale* had aired from 1931 to 1938 over The Mutual Broadcasting System and *WOR*. *CBS* had tried--and failed--at their own *The Witching Hour* for three months in 1932. Oklahoma Radio station *WKY* had successfully aired their own [Dark Fantasy](#) (1941) anthology of thrillers, which was immediately picked up by *NBC* for a national run. But clearly, The Mutual system and *WOR* appear to have acquired the inside track for the thriller genre for almost two decades during The Golden Age of Radio.

This is not to discount in any way the suspense thrillers from *CBS* and *NBC* during the same period. *Inner Sanctum* (1941-1952) aired very successfully over *NBC Blue*, *ABC*, and *CBS* during much the same period as *The Mysterious Traveler*. *Arch Oboler* brought *Lights Out!* (1936-1952) to the air as well for *NBC Red*, *CBS*, *NBC* and *ABC*. But for much of the period during which it aired, *The Mysterious Traveler* was providing most of the competition to 'the big three's' more widely heard and promoted thrillers. Enough competition that the same big three networks were forced to continually shuffle their offerings back and forth on the Radio dial to continue to fend off the upstart *Mysterious Traveler*.

The proliferation of such late afternoon and late night thrillers on the radio dial did not seem to discourage the listening audience in the least. These programs were so popular that people reminiscing about the era tend to conflate [Maurice Tarplin](#) and [Raymond Edward Johnson](#) in their respective roles as narrator for many of these scary programs from The Golden Age of Radio. The formula was so popular that it played a role in the restructuring of the type of Radio programming that could be heard during prime-time. With the voluntary adoption of curfews on thrillers and crime-based mysteries by *The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)*, these programs were forced to air after 9:30 p.m. Eastern time from 1948 on. This is the reason behind the many anecdotal stories from the era of young children listening to their radios under the covers during the Post-World War II era. It was the only way they could continue to hear their favorite thrillers on school nights.

The Mysterious Traveler had much to recommend it for atmospheric alone. [Maurice Tarplin](#) opened each program with the following mood setter:

"This is The Mysterious Traveler, inviting you to join me on another



Spot ad for *The Mysterious Traveler* from April 30, 1944



Mysterious Traveler recording session at WOR-MBS Studios, ca. 1948



Maurice Tarplin in the guise of *The Mysterious Traveler* at the WOR mike,

journey into the strange and terrifying. I hope you will enjoy the trip . . . that it will thrill you a little and chill you a little. So settle back, get a good grip on your nerves, and be comfortable . . . if you can . . ."

That introduction, accompanied by the now famous sound of the rushing train and whistle served as the chilling prologue to every episode of the run. The train whistle and doppler sound seemed to improve with each new season--as did much of the work throughout the series. *Maurice Tarplin* for his part, leant a provocatively nuanced sense of anxiety to each new program, both framing the script to follow an interjecting key exposition during most episodes. The *Mysterious Traveler* was apparently a former medical doctor, a history *Tarplin* refers to a few times throughout the broadcasts.

The Mysterious Traveler eventually found itself up against an even more daunting body than the National Association of Broadcasters and their programming guidelines. Both *Robert Arthur, Jr.* and *David Kogan* were activist members of the Radio Writers' Guild, a popular writer's union that was deemed *subversive* by the infamous House Un-American Activities Committees (HUAC) between 1945 and 1954. This was by means unusual for the era. The HUAC systematically attacked most significant collective bargaining organizations of the era for their union and organizing activities which the predominantly right-wing Republicans in control of Congress at the time deemed a threat to Big Business in *any* form. The larger, older unions managed to weather the scrutiny of the HUAC. It was predominately the smaller artists' and trade unions that the HUAC seemed most successful at bullying throughout the era--with Hollywood moguls' full support.

Arthur and *Kogan's* very visible lobbying, organizing and picketing efforts on behalf of the Radio Writers' Guild during the late 1940s and early 1950s ultimately brought the HUAC down on Radio station WOR and the Mutual Broadcasting System. Both WOR and MBS predictably caved under the innuendoes and allegations of the HUAC and terminated *The Mysterious Traveler* at the arc of its national success. While simply a road-bump to MBS, the blacklisting of one of Radio's greatest writing teams effectively ended their Radio writing careers with the cancellation of *The Mysterious Traveler*.

Though having broken up the team of *Arthur, Kogan* and *MacGregor*, *Jock MacGregor* appears to have weathered the storm, continuing on to a modestly successful career in Television. *Arthur* and *Kogan* for their part, launched the *Mysterious Traveler Magazine* with relative success for a year; both writing and publishing the magazine on a shoestring. Some of Hollywood's less intimidated Television producers continued to employ *Robert Arthur's* services for another ten years. *David Kogan* continued to manage and publish the magazine.

It's worth noting that the success of the *Robert Arthur/David Kogan* team resulted in national awards during the early 1950s. [Both *The Mysterious Traveler* and *Murder By Experts* garnered Edgar awards--*Murder By Experts* for 1950 and *The Mysterious Traveler* for 1953.](#) In the end, the overarching influence of both The National Association of Broadcasters and the HUAC ultimately disintegrated. But they did result in a premature demise for many of Radio's thrillers from the era.

Thankfully, *The Mysterious Traveler* remains one of the highly collected examples of the genre from the era, in many instances introducing new fans to The Golden Age of Radio for the very first time.

ca. 1947

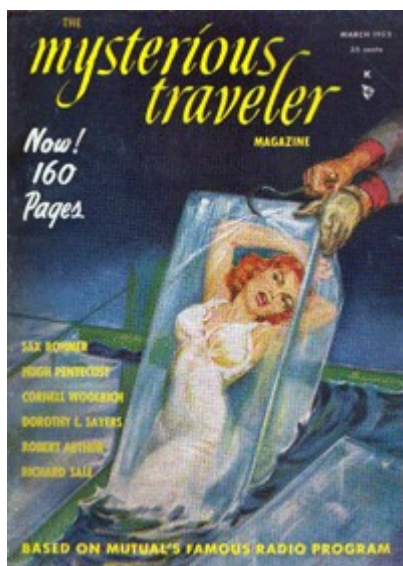


Vol. 1, No. 1 issue of Mysterious Traveler Comics 'as featured on the Mutual Broadcasting System', ca. 1948



For a taut and thrilling half hour of entertainment journey into the realm of mystery and the unknown with THE MYSTERIOUS TRAVELER, heard weekly over the world's largest network . . . the Mutual Broadcasting System.

Spot Ad for Mysterious Traveler on back cover of Mysterious Traveler Comics, ca. 1947



*The Mysterious Traveler fiction digest
magazine, issue #3, published March
1952*