

Lon Clark
By
Lynn Willis

Lon Clark was born January 12, 1911 in southern Minnesota. His grandfather had emigrated from Norway and founded the town of Frost, Minnesota, where Lon lived after his father died in World War I. His mother later remarried and relocated the family to a farm near Lakefield, Minnesota.

While in high school, he involved himself in the music and drama departments, and once took second place in the Minnesota State Music Contest playing the saxophone. He won several dramatic competitions, and once won both dramatic and humorous competitions.

After graduation, Lon found himself at the Macthail School of Music in Minneapolis, where he met a private music teacher that would greatly influence his life. She agreed to teach him without charge, as she recognized him as a student who truly loved music and was eager to learn.

His first radio appearance was as a soloist in the Macthail School choir during a Christmas program in 1928. He and a friend teamed up to do musical programs for local radio stations in Minneapolis. Soon after, he joined a tent show that would move to a town, perform different plays for a week, then move on to the next town.

In 1930, the director of the tent company encouraged Mr. Clark to move to Chicago where he could ply his talents in radio. He auditioned for station after station with little success. One radio director even told him, "Radio can do very well without you!" Finally after some time at various Chicago stations, he received an offer from WLW in Cincinnati, Ohio to join a stock company of ten actors. He had the opportunity to play a large number of roles, earning nice reviews for his work.

To further his career, he was faced with a decision: Hollywood with the chance of breaking into films, or New York where he could do legitimate theater. He chose New York, and he and his wife moved there in 1941. He earned close to a thousand dollars in his first month, an unusually large sum for an aspiring actor. Clark was in great demand on the New York radio scene.

In 1943, he received a call to audition for the Mutual Broadcasting System in a new production based on the Nick Carter dime novels. There were about 50 others auditioning for the role. He was thrilled when Jock MacGregor called him with the news that he had won the leading role for the fledgling series, which lasted until 1955.

He also appeared in several other roles in many different shows. During his peak, Lon appeared in an average of twenty radio shows a week, including "The March of Time" and "Report To The Nation". He also garnered the leading role in "The Comic Weekly Man", although he remained uncredited for the role. He did all the voices with the exception of the female voices, doing many different dialects and accents.

There was one role in particular that stood out in Lon Clark's mind. There was a program that aired during World War II that was sponsored by the Catholic Church, featuring programs about men in the service. He was asked to portray Lt. O'Shay who served in the Navy, and whose ship was sunk with him on board. Prior to the voyage, Lt. O'Shay had written a letter to his son, which was published in newspapers across the country. It was a very emotional Lon Clark who read the letter for the broadcast. The director approached him later, thanking him for saving the show. Ironically, this was the same director who had told the young Lon Clark that ". . . radio can do without you."

We here at the Old Time Radio Researcher's Group are particularly glad that Lon Clark went on in spite of such discouraging words to give us Nick Carter, Master Detective. This has been _____ for the Old Time Radio Researcher's Group. Enjoy the episodes!