

The Railroad Hour – overview of the series, bio of Gordon MacRae

Background of *The Railroad Hour*

The series was sponsored by the Association of American Railroads. It featured highly condensed versions of popular musicals and operettas from old favorites, like Victor Herbert's *Naughty Marietta* to more contemporary hits such as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *State Fair*. Since the show was produced for NBC's "Night of Music," it should come as no surprise that the plotline sometimes came second to the music. One reviewer noted that "The complicated and multi-layered plot of *Showboat*, for instance, becomes nothing more than the misbegotten romance of a riverboat gambler and a romantic young lady" (RadioArchive.com).

Gordon MacRae always sang the romantic lead accompanied by his leading lady *du jour*. Among his most popular co-stars were "MGM and Warner Brothers vocalist Lucille Norman, Metropolitan Opera stars Dorothy Kirsten and Nadine Conner, Dorothy Warendskjold of the San Francisco Opera Company, and guest artists like Jane Powell, Jeanette MacDonald, and Kenny Baker" (RadioArchive.com)

The vocals were augmented by the Norman Luboff choir, and the music was led by renowned conductor/arranger Carmen Dragon. The libretti were edited by the highly experienced team of Jean Holloway, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

Gordon MacRae biography

Albert Gordon MacRae was born on March 12, 1921, in East Orange, NJ. During his early years, he resided in Syracuse, NY. [He spent his high school years] singing and acting in the Drama Club [where he also...] learned to play the piano, clarinet and the saxophone. At 19, he entered a singing contest and won a two-week engagement at The World's Fair in New York, performing with the [Harry James](#) and [Les Brown](#) bands. In 1940, while working in New York City as a page, he was "discovered" and hired to sing for the [Horace Heidt](#) Band. After a two-year stint, he joined the Army Air Corps and worked as a navigator for the next two years. He made his Broadway debut in a show called "Junior Miss"[...]. Next, he appeared, again on Broadway, in [Ray Bolger](#)'s 1946 revue, "Three To Make Ready"[where...] he was spotted by Capitol Records and signed to a long-term recording contract in 1947. He stayed with the label for more than 20 years. In October 1948, on ABC, he starred on the radio show *The Railroad Hour*. The show moved to NBC in October 1949 and continued until June of 1954. It presented operettas and musical dramatizations, all starring Gordon and many different leading ladies. Also in 1948, he was signed to a seven-year contract with Warner Brothers Pictures and, soon after, made his film debut in the non-musical, [The Big Punch](#) (1948), [then he was featured in...] a string of hit musicals [... including] five fondly remembered films with [Doris Day](#), beginning with [Tea for Two](#) (1950). Perhaps his two best and well-known films were two of his last: [Oklahoma!](#) (1955) and [Carousel](#) (1956), both written by [Richard Rodgers](#) and [Oscar Hammerstein II](#) and both opposite screen newcomer [Shirley Jones](#). In the late 1950s, MacRae began to suffer [...] from

bouts of heavy drinking and, by his own admission, developed into an alcoholic. He revealed that he had been "picked up for drunk driving" during the filming of Carousel. He conquered the disease in the 1970s and went on to counsel other alcoholics. He continued recording and performing on dozens of television shows. [...] He suffered a stroke in 1982 [but] continued on with the support of his second wife, Elizabeth, and his five children. This brilliant performer continued to tour, when his health would permit, allowing audiences to relive some of his biggest film hits. On January 24, 1986, Gordon MacRae died at the age of 64, at his home in Lincoln, NE, of pneumonia, the result of complications from cancer of the mouth and jaw.

- *IMDb Mini Biography* By: [Patrick Fullerton](#) (edited by Claire Nava 08-11-16);
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0534286/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm