

A Syndicated Show in a Network World: Frederic Ziv's *Favorite Story*
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Abstract: Across his career as one of the most successful producers of syndicated radio and television programming, Frederic W. Ziv continually battled against network domination. Forced to operate under constraints which resulted from network monopolistic practices, Ziv had to devise ways to compete with network programming at a fraction of network budgets. An industrial analysis of how one of his radio shows, *Favorite Story*, tried to mirror network dramatic anthologies but at considerably lower expense illustrates how a syndicator could survive and thrive in a network world. The paper utilizes archival documents and an interview with Frederic Ziv as its primary sources.

First-run syndicated programming¹ played a crucial role in broadcasting during the so-called "Golden Age" of radio; however, it was considerably marginalized, both at the time and in contemporary histories of the period. Operating without the financial resources or industry dominance of the networks, syndicators battled an inferior image while striving to provide a similar service with their lesser resources. Particularly important was the goal to provide for local sponsors and stations a similar class of entertainment programming that networks supplied for their affiliates and national advertisers.

While syndicated programming struggled for exposure in this sense, it has also largely been ignored in recent radio histories, with only a handful of exceptions. Perhaps the most detailed account of syndicated programming is Morleen Getz Rouse's dissertation (1976) on the Frederic W. Ziv company, the most dominant syndicator of the period. Rouse's work provides excellent coverage of Ziv's business operations and a delineation of the company's various programs, but the dissertation presents little in the way of detailed program analysis, particularly in terms of such programs' relation to network programming. Barbara Ann Moore's dissertation (1979) on first-run syndication

focuses almost exclusively on television, with only a scant eight pages devoted to the development of syndication in radio and only a minor reference to a single radio program.

Most published books on radio history similarly cover syndication's role only in passing. Even Eric Barnouw's *The Golden Web* (1968), an indispensable history of broadcasting from 1933 to 1953, covers radio syndication across only a handful of pages. One exception to such scant coverage is the work of Michele Hilmes, primarily in her texts *Hollywood and Broadcasting* (1990) and *Radio Voices* (1997). Here, Hilmes does discuss syndication's role in the broadcasting system. However, this material is again covered mainly in terms of television and is largely oriented around syndication's threats to network programming and how the networks reacted correspondingly; Hilmes essentially does not assess how syndicators themselves reacted to the dominating network programming and operations. Overall, the discipline lacks a comprehensive understanding of what syndicated programming was actually like and how it measured up with network programming from its marginal position.

Thus, this article presents a small piece of this larger puzzle with a case study, analyzing the nature of a single program and its relevance to syndication's competitive battles with network programming. Frederic Ziv, known as the "Father of Syndication," pioneered this goal of network competition in the thirties and was one of the most successful to carry it out. Ziv felt that his programming did indeed match up to network standards, despite any financial inequalities (Ziv, 1999), which makes his productions most interesting to investigate. How did a producer create and sell a show of syndicated stature (meaning with a tightly controlled budget and developed specifically for local

entities) but with a network nature (prestigious programming with highbrow connotations)?

One Ziv radio show in particular, *Favorite Story*, provides a revealing view on the topic. An anthology program syndicated in first-run from 1947 to 1949, *Favorite Story* fit within the network mold of a highbrow drama but operated under the same industrial constraints as any of Ziv's less prestigious shows. To investigate how the show negotiated these conflicting attributes, this paper will first discuss the exact nature of syndicated programming and its relation to network fare, then explore *Favorite Story* as a text which illuminates the unique position of such programming.

Throughout, this paper's account is structured primarily around archival production documents, obtained from the Frederic W. Ziv archive at the University of Cincinnati (the city where Ziv's radio operations were based), as well as the papers of *Favorite Story* writers Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee, housed at the New York Library for the Performing Arts. Additionally, various interviews with Mr. Ziv were consulted, and a brief interview was also conducted in Cincinnati, where Mr. Ziv still resides, for the purposes of this paper. These materials offer a revealing look into the business decisions of *Favorite Story's* and provide a dynamic behind-the-scenes portrait of the strategies of a successful syndicated radio program.

The Industrial and Cultural Status of Syndicated Radio Programming

To understand the broad function of first-run syndication in broadcast history, one must first make the key distinction between the national and the local. In essence, local stations, producers and sponsors simply could not afford the programming and

advertising costs that national networks, producers, and sponsors could. Frederic Ziv spoke of this in an interview with historian Morleen Getz Rouse (1975):

The thought occurred to me that all the national advertisers at that time had their choice of expensive radio programs, the local and regional advertisers did not. So I determined to create and transcribe radio programs – expensive radio programs – in terms of the local and regional sponsor.

Rouse (1976) further describes the resulting system and its rationale:

Ziv's basic approach to syndication was to produce programs with high national production levels and then market them at the local and regional level. In this way the costs of production were spread out over a much broader base, making the program available to local sponsors with small budgets; at the same time local advertisers gained the advantages of identification with a quality program and its related stars. (p. 7)

Thus, Ziv mainly produced programs sold directly to local entities. This necessitated a distribution system wherein programs were recorded on discs and mailed to stations or sponsors. On the other hand, networks directly fed live broadcasts to their affiliates.

Two key interrelated factors resulted: a lowbrow cultural image attached to syndicated programming and monopolistic network control over the system.

First, the transcriptions used in syndicated programming helped lead to a cultural and critical bias against such recordings. The quality of the recorded discs could be poor, and even a quality recording could be felled by inadequate station playback equipment (Moore, 1979, p. 3). As broadcast historian Michele Hilmes (1990) writes, "a certain blur and scratchiness made transcriptions readily distinguishable from live

broadcasts” (p. 142). Even when the quality of recordings had vastly increased by the mid-forties, an FCC rule requiring that stations announce when programming was transcribed rather than live added an instant label of inferiority (Moore, 1979, p. 5). This stemmed from a 1928 FRC ruling “that the broadcast of events or entertainment unavailable to the public in any other form would be considered of greater public service than those able to be experienced via another medium,” such as a disc recording (qtd. in Hilmes, 1990, p. 143). Thus, because of the very nature of the productions, syndicated programming was easily judged as culturally inferior.

Of course, the potential competition brought by syndicators meant that the networks helped to foster this negative image attached to recorded programs. Because of monopolistic control over landlines and transmission cable, only the networks could provide live broadcasts (see Hilmes, 1990, pp. 26-48). Therefore, they needed to make stations dependent on live programming to prevent transcription producers from gaining substantial airtime. As syndication historian Barbara Ann Moore (1979) succinctly writes, “To get the best live programs, one had to have a network affiliation, but if a station could order a series through the mail, then who needed a network?” (p. 4). Thus, networks had a vested interest in showcasing live programming as vital, especially in portraying themselves as operating in the public interest with culturally superior live shows. Networks also needed to convince affiliates that cheaper recorded programming was far inferior in quality to what the networks could provide live. This was, in fact, partly true, especially because of the distinct financial advantages held by network-related producers. For instance, networks could force affiliates to run network programming at certain times and thereby dominate the more lucrative prime-time hours, where larger

audiences tuning in meant higher advertising revenue. The networks accordingly dominated the more lucrative prime-time hours, where larger audiences tuning in meant higher advertising revenue. This left syndicators with only so-called “fringe time,” the late afternoon and late evening slots. While this certainly marginalized the status of the programming, it logically also meant lower advertising revenue. As Moore (1979) describes:

If a station scheduled a syndicated program during [prime-time], the networks, with little notice, could demand that the show be canceled and that their program replace it. Advertisers on syndicated programs had to settle for the hours with fewer listeners, for potential schedule changes, and for nonaffiliated stations – which were usually less prestigious and had smaller audiences. (p. 5)

Smaller audiences meant smaller advertising revenue. Adding this to the expense of simply distributing these recorded programs across the country, it is clear why syndicators simply could not match network production budgets, let alone their cultural status.

Throughout his career, Frederic Ziv railed against these monopolistic network controls,² and sought to battle them by equating his shows with network programming. Rouse (1976) clarifies, “There was certainly no denying that the networks were synonymous with top-name stars and top-quality programming. Ziv took advantage of the prestige associated with the networks and used it to corporate advantage when describing his own productions” (p. 37). Indeed, though he objected to their domineering tactics, he could not argue with the success of network programs and formats. Especially because the precarious financial situation of the syndicator dictated a low-

risk approach, Ziv continually used programming formats already proven successful by the networks. In this context, an analysis of *Favorite Story*, focusing on how the program followed a network mold but remained beholden to syndication's unique structures, is revealing.

Favorite Story: Rhetorical Connotations of Prestige

While many of Ziv's programs were within genres typical to syndication – adventure and mystery series, particularly, such as *Boston Blackie*, *Philo Vance*, and *The Cisco Kid* – *Favorite Story* was more unique, tackling the anthology drama genre. Such programs were among the most popular on the air in the forties, including *Lux Radio Theater* (CBS), *Cavalcade of America* (NBC), and *Hollywood Startime* (CBS). Devised as a prestigious genre, network anthology dramas frequently offered big-name Hollywood stars in famous adaptations and essentially operated as an audio version of highbrow Broadway theater. Advertised as a show that “stands head and shoulders above the finest programs on the air,” *Favorite Story* clearly tried to connote these network standards (Ziv Archive, file 025-002, promotional sheet).

Writers Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee, later noted for Broadway plays including *Inherit the Wind* and *Auntie Mame*, originally developed *Favorite Story* in the mid-forties. After live local broadcasts in Los Angeles on KFI, Ziv distributed the show nationally, ultimately supplying a total of 117 episodes. The show consisted of thirty-minute Lawrence and Lee-penned adaptations of prestigious classic literature, such as *Tom Sawyer*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Great Expectations*, and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Hosted by film star Ronald Colman, the program's title indicates its unique hook:

each tale was supposedly the favorite story of a particular celebrity. A piece of promotional material succinctly summarizes the show: "Each week the best-loved piece of literature of a well-known public figure will be dramatized by an all-star cast" (Ziv Archive, file 025-001, promotional teaser within sales brochure produced for prospective sponsors).

"The Perfect Host"

The aforementioned host, Ronald Colman, headed this "all-star" cast. Acquiring such a notable star as Colman was quite a coup. It even brought the attention of *Time* magazine (April 28, 1947), which described the signing of Colman as "an early diffident mumble that might upset the whole map of U.S. commercial radio. Transcribed shows had Big Radio – NBC and CBS – worried[, as] Big Radio's power has always rested chiefly on its near-monopoly of famous entertainers" (pp. 66-67). Indeed, most big stars avoided syndicated programming, especially because of the lesser salaries available. However, Ziv (1999) has expressed that he felt stars were worth the expense, and this was the area on which he was most willing to spend extravagantly. Of the importance of a star name, he said: "[We] tended to pick a name that needed no additional words to describe. If you said 'I have a show with Ronald Colman,' you didn't have to add any words. Stations were receptive, networks were receptive, sponsors were receptive, audiences were receptive" (Rouse, 1975).

Ziv had to pay a great deal for the Colman name: the star's contract specified a salary of \$5,000 for each group of twelve hosted episodes, an additional \$2,500 for each episode in which he acted, and 10% of net profits (Ziv Archive, file 025-010,

contract dated March 20, 1947). *Time* magazine reported that Colman was guaranteed at least \$150,00 a year (April 28, 1947, p. 66). Considering that the show had amassed \$675,000 in sales by February 1950, this was clearly a major investment in one figure (Ziv Archive, file 025-013, audit dated June 16, 1950).

Michele Hilmes, in her book *Radio Voices* (1997), has explored the similar role of Cecil B. DeMille, host of *Lux Radio Theater*. Hilmes first explains that *Lux's* advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, wished to “maintain a first-class, glamorous image” for the program, a connotation which the famed director could supply (p. 215). Secondly, because the agency had to obscure the commercial intentions and origins of the show, the expression of which would lessen the show's supposed artistic value, *Lux Radio Theater* and DeMille himself consistently presented the director as the show's author and main creative force, although he in fact had almost no creative input. Hilmes argues:

Not only did DeMille's persona bespeak “Hollywoodness” and lend a consistency to the weekly dramas, his active impersonation of the role of author helped to conceal the hybridity of the radio adaptation format and to lend it an aura of cultural legitimacy that this entirely mass-produced (and, indeed, second- or third-hand) form would otherwise lack. (p. 217)

Parts of this statement certainly apply to Colman, as well. Ziv wanted a celebrity name at *Favorite Story's* helm, but Colman's name was useful in a very specific way.

Promotional materials to entice sponsors present Colman thusly:

In the spirit of perfection that is the very essence of this production, we give you the perfect host...Ronald Colman. Charming cosmopolite, celebrated star of

literally hundreds of memorable stage, screen and radio performances...this is the magnetic personality who narrates each and every 'Favorite Story.' Yours to sponsor...his vibrant, persuasive voice, his exquisite diction, his unique prestige, his immense waiting audience. (Ziv Archive, file 025-001, sales brochure)

Adjacent to the text are publicity stills from five Colman films. Clearly, the producers relied on Colman's established film career to lend credibility to their show. His persona as the cosmopolitan sophisticate, if even just his Britishness, served a very important function in adding a highbrow flair to the program. Bob Lee wrote of this in a May 1, 1952, memo to fellow writer Jerome Lawrence: "Colman was the symbol of the stories we offered in the *Favorite Story* series: prestige, entertainment, charm, wit... In the public mind, he represents charm, dignity, stature, literary quality" (Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee Papers, Box 76, "Favorite Story Correspondence"). Colman clearly provided a similar kind of "cultural legitimacy" as Cecil B. DeMille.

However, while DeMille was merely an authorial figurehead, Colman did indeed have measurable creative input into *Favorite Story*. Numerous memos and letters in Ziv production files address Colman's choices for stories, especially those in which he was to act, and his comments on how Lawrence and Lee should adapt the tales.

Interestingly, however, there is not a corresponding expression of such authorship in Colman's introductions and closings on the program. While DeMille often claims credit for story development, production decisions, and the recruiting of Hollywood guest stars, Colman rarely gives such an impression, and writers Lawrence and Lee are usually the only creative figures mentioned (*Favorite Story* recordings). Perhaps this difference is tied to another divergent role: DeMille provided product testimonials for Lux

soap in every episode; Colman never mentioned a sponsor product. Indeed, because of the unique circumstances of syndication, *Favorite Story* could possibly have a different sponsor in each local market, thereby preventing testimonials within the program itself.³ Thus, *Favorite Story* did not need to use Colman as a central reputable authorial figure to counteract explicit commercial roots: it really was created by Jerome Lawrence, Robert Lee, and the Frederic Ziv company, not by an advertising agency or sponsors. Colman's prestige was vital to battle *Favorite Story's* syndicated status, not necessarily its commercial status.

"A Puff, a Fake": The Story Selectors and the Story Selections

Because of the money Ziv had spent to employ Colman for these purposes, the rest of the "all-star cast" of *Favorite Story* was actually just middling in terms of celebrity status. Regular actors on the weekly episodes included Jeff Corey, Edna Best, Lionel Stander, Vincent Price, John Beal, Howard Duff, William Conrad, and Janet Waldo. Few of the "special guest stars," such as Frank Lovejoy and Dan O'Herlihy, were sizable names either. In comparison, *Lux Radio Theater* offered one or more well-known stars in a leading part each week; examples include Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, Bette Davis, Edward G. Robinson, Lillian Gish, and Ginger Rogers. Even *Lux's* more frequent repeat players included substantial stars, such as Barbara Stanwyck, Claudette Colbert, and Fred MacMurray. This is perhaps an unfair comparison, as *Lux* was one of the more elaborate anthology programs in radio history, but many network anthology dramas were able to draw substantial names. For example, *Everyman's Theater* on NBC touted Joan Crawford, Charles Laughton, Bette Davis, and Marlene Dietrich as

guest stars, while *The Silver Theater* on CBS offered Jimmy Stewart, Olivia de Havilland, Loretta Young, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (Dunning, 1998).

While the regular players perhaps did not have substantial name allure, more important celebrity connotations emerged from the program's story selectors.

Promotional material explains:

'What is your Favorite Story?' We asked scores of celebrities this same provocative question. A dazzling array of glamorous Hollywood and Broadway stars, acclaimed artists, authors, composers and critics, renowned poets, scholars, humorists, explorers...and what did they choose? These are vital, aware people, who know the temper of the times – and their choices here translated into such exciting radio, are the heart-warming, the spine-tingling, the thought-provoking stories of our time. (Ziv Archive, file 025-001, sales brochure)

As this excerpt indicates, the show presented a wide range of selectors, including screen stars Gregory Peck, Shirley Temple and Cary Grant; film directors Alfred Hitchcock and Frank Capra; radio stars Burns and Allen and Jack Benny; band leaders Artie Shaw and Kay Kyser; Broadway figures Jerome Robbins and Oscar Hammerstein; poet Robert Frost and writer Sinclair Lewis; pundits H.L. Menken and S.J. Perelman; sports figures Rogers Hornsby and Jack Dempsey; and scientists Lee De Forest and Albert Einstein.

The concept here is quite intriguing, that great minds and names of the period picked out their favorite tales for the show to produce. But the execution of these selections was a bit different than as showcased on the air. Frederic Ziv himself said in a personal interview (1999), "It was a puff, a fake." First, the celebrities never actually

appeared on the show; only their names were cited. Further, the selections were not always genuine and were at the very least guided by a specific list composed by Lawrence and Lee. The celebrity would receive a list of anywhere from twenty-five to one hundred titles and was expected place a check next to a handful that were preferred; space was also provided for write-ins. He or she then signed an attached contract that read in part: "I have heretofore given you and your licensees the right to state on the radio series *Favorite Story* that one or more of the stories which I have specified is a favorite of mine" (Lawrence and Lee Papers, Box 76, "Correspondence Reference Unexpected," single-page contractual form letter).

The listed titles were all of a particular type: classic tales of literature by such authors as Dickens, Poe, Twain, Tolstoy, Balzac, Verne, and Kipling. One can see this as a strategy similar to that of employing Colman as host: utilizing prestigious literature to battle the lowbrow syndication image. However, it could also be viewed in financial terms: many of these stories were in the public domain and thus could be adapted without a significant monetary charge for the rights. In fact, those stories whose rights were too expensive were often rejected for adaptation.⁴ Choosing such classic literature was thus both financially beneficial and competitively shrewd, as *Favorite Story* could more easily compete with network anthologies on a prestige basis.

This strategy in fact fit the pattern of several other anthology programs, to the point where Lawrence and Lee memos to Ziv offices often discuss the need to avoid repeats of other shows. For instance, Bob Lee expressed concern to Ziv executive producer John Sinn about NBC's *Playhouse of Favorites* in a January 30, 1947, memo: Ray Milland and Ingrid Bergman chose *Don Quixote* and *The Pied Piper* as their respective

favorite stories, but since the NBC program had already done adaptations of these tales, Lee hoped to have the stars make other selections (Lawrence and Lee Papers, "*Favorite Story Correspondence*"). Such conflicts indicate a sub-strategy explained by another Lawrence and Lee memo (August 14, 1946): "[W]e try to use stories which are just coming into the public domain so that we get the first crack at them on this series" ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*"). Diligent research into story availability could lend the show greater novelty.

Returning to the selectors, they often were matched up with one of the three to five stories that they selected. However, this literally was just putting a check on a sheet, and the show's descriptive introductions often present the selection as one made in person to Colman, Lawrence, and Lee. For instance, the Colman introduction for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, selected by Alfred Hitchcock, describes: "The man who picked this week's *Favorite Story* you're very familiar with...People here in Hollywood call him Hitch. We were chatting with him in the commissary at David O. Selznick studios and he suggested...*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*." And in introducing Cary Grant's choice of *The TellTale Heart*, Colman relates: "Mr. Cary Grant gave us the story while he was filming a picture at RKO" (*Favorite Story* disc recordings, undated episodes #17 and #65 respectively). Such free publicity for a star's studio or current picture was an important component, and production files contain numerous letters from studios and agents telling exactly how their star should be touted. Additionally, Ziv had reached an agreement with MGM to use one of their stars a month as a selector ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*", March 3, 1947, memo from Lawrence and Lee to John Sinn).

But while they could make selections, celebrities were not always matched up with one of the stories they selected, as the above example of Milland and Bergman indicates. At times this could be a necessity: a September 1948 production document notes that Lawrence and Lee wanted Father E. J. Flanagan, founder of Boys Town, as selector of the adaptation of *Oliver Twist*; and he had indeed selected this story, among others (Ziv archive, file 025-014). However, he died just prior to production of the show, thus prompting the need for a new selector. Though production files do not indicate how they came to their final choice, the script for *Oliver Twist* shows Flanagan's name crossed out and screen star Irene Dunne's penciled in (Ziv archive, *Favorite Story* scripts). Other selectors given a title different than what they chose included Dana Andrews, Jack Dempsey, Frank Sinatra and James Mason.

These celebrities apparently did not object to their newly assigned choice, but at least one did. Lee DeForest, noted inventor and so-called "Father of Radio," had selected a number of Edgar Allen Poe stories as his favorites. Drawing from this that he would likely be happy with any Poe story, Lawrence and Lee thus chose to match him up with *The TellTale Heart*. DeForest's own words and punctuation in a letter to Robert Lee (June 26, 1947) aptly express his reaction to hearing that he might be chosen as this story's selector: "For God's sake don't! I hate that bloody, gruesome tale, it reeks with terror and offensiveness; in fact it is offal – literally so. No true friend of mine would have the radio public believe, for one moment, that the Father of Radio delights in such disgusting sadism. Don't do it, Bob" (*Favorite Story Correspondence*;" underline in original text). Lee accordingly obliged and assigned DeForest Poe's *The Assignment*.

Undoubtedly, the name value of the selectors was crucial, especially in terms of the financial benefits: because the selectors never actually appeared on the show, Ziv did not have to pay them any salary, thereby gaining cultural cachet for free.

Contrasting this method to *Lux Radio Theater* once again, *Lux* paid each headlining star \$5,000 per appearance. Ziv, on the other hand, could utilize the lure of similar names, but without any expense beyond plugging a star's upcoming movie or a writer's book.

The logic of choosing selectors even impacted the premiere episode. The series was supposed to begin with *The Diamond Lens*, selected by composer George Antheil. However, Ziv suggested starting with *Les Miserables*, chosen by painter Rockwell Kent, instead. Since newspapers wanted to "break rather large newspaper ads on their first show playing up the names of the selectors," and because George Antheil "is certainly one of our lesser known selectors," the order was changed ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*," letter from John Sinn to Lawrence and Lee, April 29, 1947).

The publicity hook was paramount, and a memo from Ziv's executive vice-president John Sinn to Lawrence and Lee dated April 25, 1952, when they contemplated moving the show to television, illustrates the logic: "We feel that the story selectors have value...They justify an excellent title. They add prestige. And they give the host something substantial to talk about" ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*").

Favorite Story would not have been markedly different in content without the use of selectors, but with them, the program carried forth a very distinct image.

"Our audience is not in Los Angeles or New York": Final Thoughts on the Challenge of Syndication

When finally considering exactly for whom this image was composed, the unique position of syndicated programming once again comes to the forefront. For instance, an April 30, 1947, letter from Lawrence and Lee to Sinn, reveals an interesting debate over the choice of selectors for one story: "Henry Seidel Canby (head of Book of the Month Club and editor of *Saturday Review of Literature*) will pick *Sire De Maletroit's Door*...John Erskine also picked *Sire*, but we feel Canby is a better name in the sticks" ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*"). This issue is raised again during the adaptation of the traditional story *The Mystery of Room 323*, as Lawrence and Lee's initial drafts contained a heavy amount of French dialogue. Throughout the revision process, John Sinn repeatedly asks them to cut it down. In one key memo, he writes:

Out in Des Moines and Oklahoma City and Paducah, they do not understand French, they do not want to understand French, and they don't even like anyone who speaks French. It is extremely trite, but none the less important, to constantly remember that our audience is not in Los Angeles or New York. It is comprised of all the people who live in between and that is the reason why I constantly harp on less dialect and less foreign language...It seems to me that our real triumph will lie in the fact that *Favorite Story* is just as big a hit in Paducah and Des Moines as it is in Los Angeles. I believe we can accomplish this without sacrificing artistic integrity. I know you will not and perhaps cannot go along with me all the way, and yet I can tell you from this point on if there was never another dialect on *Favorite Story*, the series would be stronger and last longer in all of those cities where our good sponsors live and pay money. ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*," memo dated September 23, 1947)

His logic here is most succinctly expressed in an Oct 29, 1947, memo asking the writers to tone down the use of British accents: "Believe me, it is much more acceptable commercially if it is done that way" ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*").⁵ Though perhaps trying to compete with network quality, those involved still had to keep in mind reception differences for most syndicated programs.

Because these were programs sold to local stations and local audiences, and thus had to be palatable in those arenas, syndicated producers had to have the local markets in mind when designing programming, more so than a national network whose most substantial profits came from the largest city affiliates. While striving for certain highbrow connotations to sustain an image of quality and credibility, mass appeal could not be sacrificed. After all, because syndicators lacked the kind of resources boasted by the networks, every single station's revenue was vital to maintain financial support for a transcribed program. Decisions could not be made without the local station, local advertiser, and "in the sticks" audience member in mind.

Thus, while syndicators often strove to provide local stations with programming comparable to network fare, one must keep in mind that this was still a syndicated version of what networks provided, with program strategies adapted to syndication's unique position. For Ziv's *Favorite Story*, this particularly meant reducing storied tales such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *David Copperfield* to a half-hour length, acting them out with capable yet minor status actors, economically utilizing celebrity names as a status label, and expending the most substantial expense on Ronald Colman at the helm as, in Lawrence and Lee's words, "the whipped cream this chocolate sundae needed" ("*Favorite Story Correspondence*," memo to John Sinn dated March 1947).

This strategy apparently worked, as *Favorite Story* became one of Ziv's "most popular, most acclaimed, and most financially successful radio series" (Rouse, 1976, p. 92). It was even acknowledged with an industry award: at the 1948 City College of New York annual radio awards, *Favorite Story* received an Award of Merit "for the creation of the most effective direct-selling, sponsored radio program" (*Broadcasting*, "CCNY Awards," March 29, 1948, p. 20). The program did end its first-run after only two seasons, though such short runs were not uncommon even for popular syndicated programming. After all, the shows could earn nearly as much profits in reruns as they could in first-run, obviously at considerably less expense to the producer (see Rouse, 1976, pp. 238-240). With such savvy business strategies in mind, this case study provides contemporary broadcast historians with an illustrative model of how a syndicated program could succeed within a network-dominated system. By using every available resource in the service of program quality, or at least the illusion of program quality, syndicators like Frederic Ziv filled a vital niche for local stations and advertisers in one of the most important eras in radio history.

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NOTES

¹ The term "first-run syndication" refers to original programs sold through the syndication method. This distinguishes it from "rerun" syndication.

² In my interview with him, Mr. Ziv said he finally sold his company to United Artists in 1959 because he was tired of battling these controls. He said in his Sept. 4, 1975 interview with Rouse: "I didn't want to become an employee of the networks. They were dictating everything now."

³ In fact, syndicated programming was often called "open-ended" programming, because of places within the recordings where commercials could be placed by sponsors and stations. This explains the title of the previously-cited *Time* article, "Open-Ended Game."

⁴ For example, Colman's biography claims that the star was interested in doing a number of Shaw adaptations, but that clearance proved to be too difficult and expensive to get. See Juliet Benita Colman, *Ronald Colman: A Very Private Person* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1975), p. 208.

⁵ A prior telegram from Sinn shows the strength of his convictions, when you keep in mind that he paid by the word: "Please please go very, very, very, very light on accents." Lawrence and Lee Papers, "Favorite Story Correspondence," telegram from John Sinn to Lawrence and Lee, Sept. 9, 1947.

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