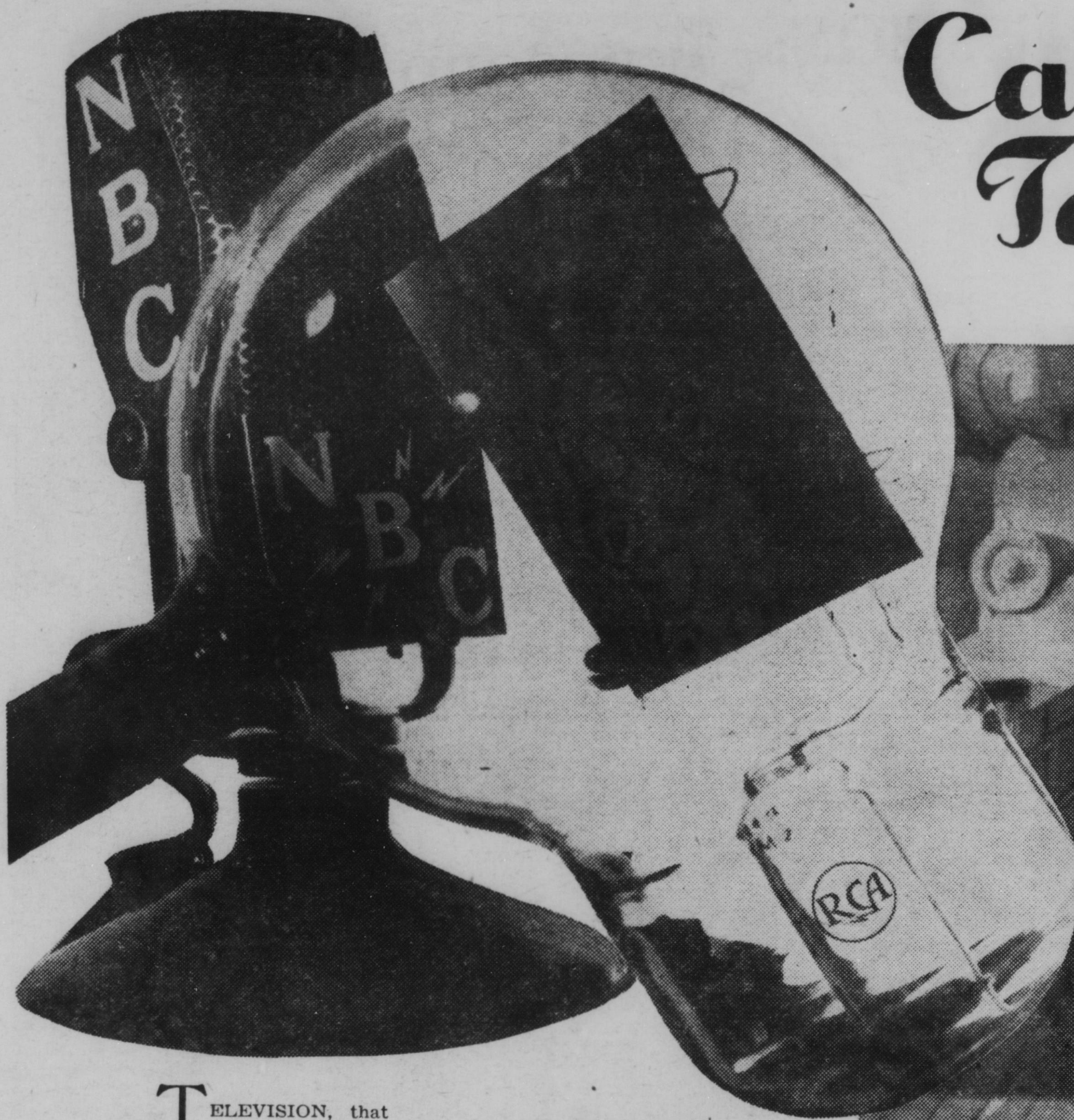
# Cantor and Television

By Pauline Swanson




*Here is the iconoscope, where television begins, and the microphone, where radio begins. Put them all together and you have this forecast of radio's future, in a photograph by NBC's William E. C. Haussler.*

*Eddie Cantor boldly faces television and all it entails. He has been getting his cast ready for it for some time. Returning to his CBS Sunday program occasionally during the summer, he plans to produce a show completely without scripts in the fall—television technique.*

TELEVISION, that spectre which lurks ominously on radio's horizon, is no bogeyman to Eddie Cantor.

The roving-eyed comic, first star of the legitimate stage to essay radio when it was a new and mysterious medium, is eager now to come to grips with radio's offspring. As a matter of fact, his new six-year contract with his present sponsor is the first radio contract to contain a definite clause making an artist available for television broadcasts.

"Let it come," he laughs when the mournful shadow of television casts itself across an inner-circle conversation. "I'm ready for it. I have a face!"

Cantor has a face, indeed. A face which stands out.

"Stands out so far, sometimes," he admits, "that a lot of guys itch to push it back into place."

That face—with its active eyes—that kinetic little figure already has braved the visible forms of entertainment, the theater and the films, and come off not ingloriously. Cantor was a theatrical name in lights long before radio as an entertainment medium was thought of. He learned much of pantomime in those theatrical days from masters of the art. Bert Williams was one of them.

"Bert could do more with his hands and face than anyone else has ever been able to do, no matter how perfectly wired for sound," Cantor will tell you.

Eddie learned pantomime on the stage. He used his knowledge in two silent pictures—one of them the successful "Kid Boots," which most moviegoers have forgotten in the onrush of audible Eddie Cantor films. He'll not be conscious of his face and hands when the radio microphone at long last is televised.

THIS may be telling secrets out of school, may be tipping off high powered radio competition which is not standing by so expectantly for television's advent, but Eddie Cantor's radio show could stand exposure to a seeing audience tomorrow.

For the benefit of the studio spectators—Eddie, collector of "firsts," was the first to encourage the presence of audiences at broadcasts—the Cantor troupe for months has worked in costume. Parkyakarkus, who really is a dapper, successful young man in a custom-tailored suit, wouldn't be funny without his brown bowler and checkered coat. Jimmy Wallington approaches his customers in the guise of a filling station attendant. Eddie Cantor wouldn't think of singing the mayor's song without his top hat and tails.

Next step will be the laying aside of scripts, another "first." Cantor already rehearses his troupe like a stock company for its weekly appearances. Soon the players will appear in their first scriptless broadcast. Put some scenery in back of them and they're ready for television.

Recently on a broadcast one of the characters represented a cantankerous old maid, with an 1898 hat, a ratty looking fur and a buttonless sack of a brown coat. To complete the ensemble she had a shiny safety pin. Just before she was ready to go on the stage she popped out from her dressing room.

"I can't go on," she moaned.

"Why not?" the harried stage crew demanded.

"Look, the best part of my costume is gone—the safety pin."

TELEVISION won't wreak many important changes in Cantor's shows. But Eddie is chuckling already at the panic its arrival will precipitate at many stations along radio row. Hillbilly comics will be faced with the necessity of looking like hillbilly comics—instead of the well groomed men-about-town many of them are. Poor Amos and Andy will have to don black face for their daily stint before the microphone. Show Boat, National Barn Dance, Hotel Hollywood, The Radio Theater will have to put in a hurried call to the costumers and scenic designers to groom their broadcasts for the seeing eye.

March of Time's problem will be particularly acute.

"Imagine," says Eddie, "trying to dramatize the stork derby on a televised stage."

And the hefty sopranos, Cantor warns, had better start dieting right now.

There will be more jobs for actors, for no longer can one man play a half dozen roles in the radio drama. Technical problems will be complicated.

"We are a gregarious people, however; we'll always go to movie houses." He softens the blow. "Tell a man a theater is so crowded that he can't get in and he'll get in or die in the attempt."

The legitimate theater can look forward to unprecedented prosperity.

"For instance," says Eddie, "John Smith, in Portland, Ore., will pick up his telephone, ask for the long distance operator.

"'I understand that Max Gordon opened a good show at the Music Box in New York City the other night,' he will say, 'Give me that telephone number.'

"He talks with the television chief at the theater, tunes in his set to the stage of the theater. He not only hears, but sees, the entire performance. At the end of a month he receives a bill from the telephone company for 'Four Music Boxes,' 'One Madison Square Garden,' 'One Session of Congress,' at 25 cents apiece."

FIFTY cents for a televised show is not an exaggerated price, Cantor insists.

"The telephone company and Max Gordon can afford to sell their product for that price—one million times 50 cents is $500,000 to be split between the two."

The price of entertainment will move down the scale, Eddie believes, while at the same time the salaries of actors should mount. With television at hand, Eddie Cantor is convinced, the producer will be able to hire, instead of one or two stars, 10 or 12, at salaries ranging from $1,500 to $15,000 a week.

"But if there's a pretty girl in the chorus, you've still got to go to the stage door to invite her to supper.

"And, of course, all the radio comedians will make a wild dash for their joke files looking up 't' for jokes on television. You can expect to hear 'You can tell a vision, but you can't tell her much' at least once a night for the first six weeks of the new era.

"The first shows will be crude, but they won't be crude very long. Because the larger the audience, the more vital the good performance. A million spectators can make a loud squawk if they're asked to sit in on a laboratory experiment.

"THEN goodby to the family radio. Practical housewives will serve cold suppers from them, remove their insides and store the household linens in them, saw off their legs and use them for bridge tables. And in the densely populated regions where firewood comes high, they'll burn them up and count the act an economy.

"From now on the radio business is in the hands of the telephone company.

"And I don't mean in the hands of the receivers."