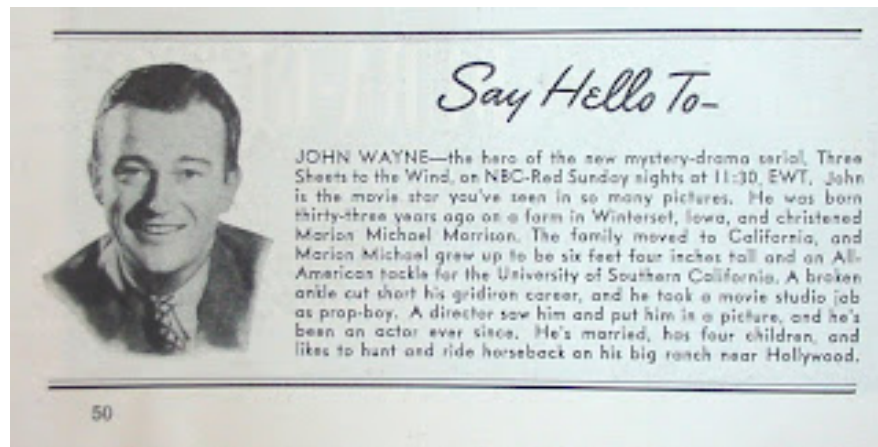


Friday, December 9, 2011

John Wayne's Forgotten Radio Show

Most John Wayne fans are aware of such John Wayne radio programs as *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon*, *Fort Apache*, *Stagecoach* and *Pittsburgh* (as well as a few more), but not too many are aware that he actually starred in a weekly radio series titled *Three Sheets To The Wind*, which aired on NBC from February 15, 1942 through July 5, 1942.



"Three Sheets to the Wind" advertisement, May 1942 issue of *Radio and Television Mirror*

The thirty-minute weekly show, which ran for 26 episodes, starred John Wayne as private detective Dan O'Brian, and Helga Moray as British Intelligence agent, Joan Lockwood. Both Sharon Douglas and Lee Bonnell also appeared in supporting roles. The show was created by film director Tay Garnett, who had directed Wayne in the 1940 film *Seven Sinners* (also starring Marlene Dietrich), who had conceived the story in 1933 while filming *SOS Iceberg* in Greenland. Garnett worked on the story over the next few years, and by 1941 he had developed a film script.

Since Wayne had worked with Garnett during this time (filming *Seven Sinners*), it is likely that Garnett had spoken to him about the project, and may have even established a tentative agreement with Wayne to appear in the film *Three Sheets to the Wind*. In 1941, Wayne and Garnett entered into a written agreement, wherein Wayne would star in both the film, and a radio series of the same name. Wayne agreed to appear in the radio series (which would be used as a promotional device to increase interest in the film) for free, in exchange for ten percent of the film's profits, plus his standard fee for free-lance film work. (a stipulation was made in the agreement that this would hold if the radio show was sustaining, and if sold commercially, then Wayne's cut would be five percent plus his standard radio salary.)

July 27, 1941

Mr. Tay Garnett
660 Stone Canyon Road
Los Angeles, California

Dear Tay:

Here is a simple statement of my understanding of the radio and picture deal we have discussed as applied to "Three Sheets To The Wind".

You are to supply one-half hour per week for a minimum of thirteen weeks sustaining time over N.B.C. national hook-up in which I agree to play the starring part. At the same time it is understood that the National Broadcasting, through the facilities of their Sales Department, will make every effort to sell the show commercially. In the event that the show remains unsold, I am to render my services without weekly compensation. Consideration for such services rendered shall be a ten per cent participation in the profits of the picture "Three Sheets To The Wind" which you plan to make at a time so that it can be released at a moment when the fullest advantage may be taken of the accumulation of advertising which the radio program will have supplied. Naturally, this consideration is in addition to the compensation which I would normally receive at my established free lance salary.

In the event that the radio program is sold commercially, then I am to be compensated weekly at a figure corresponding with my current established radio salary or a figure based upon a percentage (in no case less than thirty per cent) of the profits derived from the radio show itself. In such event my participation in the picture profits shall be five per cent.

It is my further understanding that you will undertake to arrange with Republic Picture Co. to borrow my services, in which effort I will assist you, as and when I can. It is our mutual intention that this agreement, while dealing specifically with "Three Sheets To The Wind", shall be a general pattern for a continuing association.

If this concurs with your understanding of our agreement, will you kindly sign the carbon copy on the line marked "approved" and return to me.

Sincerely,


Tay Garnett (Approved)


John Wayne

"Letter of Understanding" between John Wayne and Tay Garnett

The film version of *Three Sheets to the Wind* was never made, but the radio show was. The story line concerned the luxury steam liner *Empress* as it sailed on a 180-day cruise from its home port of Southampton, England. Unfortunately, almost the entire radio series has been lost, with only the first half of the first episode still extant. That brief 15 minutes, however, reveals the mystery and drama that likely permeated the entire the 26 week run.

The first episode, titled *The Sultan's Curse*, opens with seven people mysteriously murdered while the *Empress* is in port. Each of the murders seems to be somehow linked to a fabled (and possibly cursed) black diamond owned by the Sultan mentioned in the title. British Intelligence Agent Joan Lockwood is assigned to the case, but soon

finds that American detective Dan O'Brien (posing as a drunken tourist) is also investigating the mystery as well.