


Episode #9 Show Notes: Mystery Melange

Tonight's episode is my favorite so far—which is a big surprise, given the fact that I had originally approached it as a “filler” show, a little respite after all of my in-depth research for the Jean Harlow episodes that precedes it. One of the great things about doing Circa Sunday Night is that it requires me to learn things and pushes me to explore. I'm not an expert on anything I talk about in this show; I'm learning right along with anyone who happens to tune in. I usually construct each episode around a particular topic or a single theme that ties all of the content together, so I approach the research with a relatively narrow focus. Along the way, though, I often bump into bits of information that have nothing to do with my topic, but capture my attention nonetheless. I file these little items away, and...well, all I can say is that I'm glad everything is electronic these days. Otherwise, I'd have file drawers crammed full and stacks of manila folder on my desk. Tonight's episode is a hodge-podge (or, fancier-sounding: a *mélange*) of gems pulled from my eclectic, crazy little archive. There are many—*so many!* more that I could have included. Something tells me that there will be more “*mélange*” episodes in the future!

The past is slipping away from us, and it dims as it retreats. When viewed within a context of infinite possibilities, each individual moment seems impossibly small, like a pinpoint of light in a vast constellation of a trillion stars. A wounded pigeon walked into the Algonquin Hotel one day, long ago. It was a minor episode, long forgotten, and yet, that seemingly inconsequential moment held meaning on that particular day. It set off a chain reaction of actions and reactions that—who knows?—may be reverberating still. A reminder that God's opus is intricate in its detail and fathomless, too. Who are we to question it?


~ Jennifer Passariello, Circa 19xx

Sing, Sing, Sing (With a Swing)

“Sing, Sing, Sing (With a Swing)” is a song written by Louis Prima who first recorded it in 1936 with the New Orleans Gang. It has been performed by a number of bands, most famously by Benny Goodman, who, with his band, recorded it in 1937.

Sing, Sing, Sing is most frequently performed as an instrumental pieces, but it does have lyrics (also written by Prima).

Sing, Sing, Sing (With a Swing)

Music and Lyrics by Louis Prima

Sing, sing, sing, sing, everybody start to sing
La-dee-dah, oh, oh, oh
Now you're singin' with a swing
Sing, sing, sing, sing, everybody start to sing
La-dee-dah, oh, oh, oh.

And when the music goes around, everybody goes to town
But here's something you should know
Oh-ho baby, oh-oh-oh.

Sing, sing, sing, sing, everybody start to sing
La-dee-dah, oh, oh, oh
Now you're singin' with a swing.

[*Scat singing...*]

And when the music goes around, everybody goes to town
But here's something you should know
Oh-ho baby, oh-oh-oh.

Swing, swing, swing, swing, listen to that trumpet swing
Blow, blow, blow, oh, oh, oh
Now you're blowin' with a swing.

Blow, blow, blow, blow, listen to the trombones go
Blow, blow, blow, oh, oh, oh
Now you're blowin' with a swing.

Swing, swing, swing, swing, listen to the trumpet swing
Blow, blow, blow, oh, oh, oh
Now you're blowin' with a swing.

When the music goes around, everybody goes to town
But here's something you should know
Oh-ho baby, oh-oh-oh.

Sing, sing, sing, sing, everybody start to sing
La-dee-dah, oh, oh, oh
Now you're singin' with a swing.

Benny Goodman and the 1938 Carnegie Hall Concert

From Wikipedia: Goodman, along with his trio, his quartet, and his big band, played Carnegie Hall on the evening of January 16, 1938. This was one of the most historically significant concerts in music, because it was the moment jazz “arrived,” and was validated by the “music establishment.” It was the first time a big swing/jazz band ever played that venue.

NPR has a great little article and interview about the 1938 concert. It can be found here:

<https://www.npr.org/2000/01/31/1069809/sing-sing-sing>

From the News Desk

During my adventures in Circa 19xx Land I often come across little news items from long ago that completely distract me and prompt me to fill in blanks and construct little stories in my head. In tonight's show I present just a few of the many little stories I've come across over the last few months. All of these items come from the archives of the *New York Times*.

Runaway Horse in a Parlor

May 27, 1907

A horse gets spooked by a train whistle, takes off on a wild run, and crashes through a window.

Wounded Bird is Cared for at the Hotel Algonquin; Two Are Picked Up Exhausted

January 3, 1928

It isn't easy to be a pigeon. Three pigeons are featured, all three wounded, one of which strolls into the Hotel Algonquin for help.

\$50,000 Gems Gone as Butler Vanishes; Trusted Servant in Home in Pelham Manor Sought as 'Thief Who Cut Phone Wires'

December 4, 1930

Pelham Manor, New York. A trusted butler, believed to be the dupe of Arthur Barry, notorious jewelry burglar, is being sought by the Pelham Manor police. He is believed to be the burglar who cut the telephone wires in the country home of Eric Zardo of 1496 Roosevelt Avenue during the dinner hour last night and then disappeared with jewels valued at \$50,000. Mr. Zardo, a pianist, in company with Chief of Police Philip Gargan, spent most of today at Police Headquarters in Manhattan looking over the "Rogues Gallery" pictures of noted jewel thieves. It is understood he failed to find a picture of his butler.

The stolen jewelry belonged to Mrs. Zardo, who was the widow of Harry Frazee, owner of the Boston Red Sox and a theatrical producer. The stolen jewelry included a diamond and platinum brooch valued at \$15,000, diamond bracelets valued at \$9,000 diamond rings and pendants valued at more than \$20,000 and other jewelry.

The butler, who was known to Mr. Zardo as “Buno,” was employed by him two months ago “on a high recommendation.” When Buno arrived to take the position, he informed Mr. Zardo that he was afraid to walk out alone on the streets of Pelham Manor for fear that he would get lost. An arrangement was then made, the police said, that Mr. Zardo was to give Buno a ride every night. The two men, it is said, were seen riding around the town on several occasions.

Last night Mr. Zardo sought his butler about 9 o’clock for the scheduled trip. He was informed that Buno had taken a walk—which immediately made him suspicious. He searched the Pelham Manor streets for some time and then returned to the butler’s room. He found all the butler’s clothing and effects gone and every form of identification of the employee missing. Searching further, Mr. Zardo discovered that the telephone wires in the house had been cut, and he then found that the jewels were gone.

It is believed that the butler’s excuse of being afraid to walk out on the streets of Pelham Manor alone was part of his scheme to win the confidence of Mr. Zardo so that he would have access to any part of the house without arousing suspicion. The jewels were in jewel boxes in Mrs. Zardo’s room.

The possibility that the craft of Barry, who is at large since his escape from the Auburn Prison, was behind the theft of the jewels is being considered by the police. Barry is known to employ an accomplice and to lay his plans months ahead.

* * *

By the way, this thief walked away with quite a haul. Those stolen jewels would be worth \$767,647

[The First Commercial Radio Broadcast](#)

On November 2, 1920—election day—KDKA out of Pittsburg transmitted the very first commercial radio broadcast. PBS has a nice article on that broadcast here: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dt20ra.html>

This was an election broadcast, and for the first time, the voting public could hear the results of the Harding-Cox race without having to wait to read about it in the newspaper. Who won? Republican Senator Warren G. Harding from Ohio defeated Democratic Governor James M. Cox of Ohio. Cox won all of the Southern states, but Harding took every state outside of the South, winning in a landslide.

[Spirographics...and Me](#)

Several years ago I wrote a short piece for another blog that brought together my two worlds: my interest in vintage things, and my day-job, which is instructional design. Because I’m purging my files in this episode (and

because almost no one read this the first time around), I decided to dust this little piece off and include it here. My topic: Spirographics—something I loved to do when I was a kid (and still do!). Here it is in its entirety.

Spirographics and Me

A few months ago I purchased a Spirograph kit for myself. A Spirograph is a drawing tool that had been a huge hit back in the sixties when it was first introduced as a child's creative toy. It was a ridiculous purchase, and I almost felt guilty about it, but when I saw that the original kit of old had been re-issued, I simply couldn't resist. I'm of an age now when the call to re-examine and re-explore the artifacts of my youth is at least as intriguing to me as speculating about the future (and sometimes more so). I'm drawn now to the mid-century jazz my dad was forever playing on his stereo back home. I find myself lingering long at ephemera stalls at flea markets that feature print ads I remember from long ago. I've begun collecting teachers' edition textbooks from my era as a student. There's comfort in nostalgia. You can find rest there, and peace, too, because it's completely devoid of suspense; you already know how the story of your past life works out, how the pieces all come together. But my newfound interest in looking back is not so much a desire to retreat as it is an interest in discovering little treasures or insights I might have missed the first time around.

Our collective history is essentially a long, arduous working out of ideas. The stuff we remember—the vintage ads, the Spirograph—is an expression or materialization of ideas at a very specific point in their development. Some of these ideas have utility in our day. The Spirograph, for example, was intended as a child's toy when it was introduced, and I myself passed many an hour using one to make circle-doodles all over the covers of my school notebooks back in the day. Now, as an adult, I'm finding new use for it as an aid in my design processes.

The History

The spirograph (little s) has a long history. According to Wikipedia, it was invented around the end of the nineteenth century by the mathematician Bruno Abakanowicz for use in calculating an area delimited by curves. The first drawing toys based on the movement of gears were introduced shortly thereafter. “The Marvelous Wondergraph” was one such toy advertised in the 1908 edition of the Sears catalog. The Spirograph (big S) that we know, however, was developed by a British engineer, Denys Fisher, who exhibited it at the 1965 Nuremberg International Toy Fair. His company produced the toy. It was introduced to the U.S. market in 1966, when Kenner, Inc. acquired U.S. distribution rights. It was named Toy of the Year in 1967. It's still widely available in craft and toy retailers across the country.

How it Works

Spirograph is a gear-based drawing tool used to make geometric shapes and patterns. The original kit was composed of plastic rings (stators) with little teeth on their inside and outside circumferences, and a set of wheels (rotors) with holes in them through which the user inserts a ballpoint pen. Holding the pen steady and ensuring the teeth of the wheel remain engaged with the teeth of the ring, the user guides the wheel in a circular motion. The pen creates a new line with each circular pass, resulting in intricate, and often visually stunning, patterns, particularly when patterns are layered one on top of another.

Why the Spirograph is Cool

The best thing about the Spirograph is that it lends artistic ability to those who, without the tool, have very little. I myself love color and imagery, and often think about how shapes and colors might be combined in new ways to produce various effects. In other words, I have little images in my head that are dying to jump out and take form on paper. Sadly, I have no natural talent for drawing. My renderings are always crude and sloppy little things that bear no resemblance to that crystal clear picture I had imagined. But the Spirograph is mechanical. There is a refined, controlled uniformity in the patterns it produces. If I can hold that pen steady and keep those gear teeth engaged, even I can produce little pieces of art.

The Spirograph is also cool because, while you can take a deliberate approach to your designs by planning each pattern in advance, you can also allow yourself to discover designs that result from the random selection of rings and wheels. Some of my favorite patterns are those that have arrived through this random approach.

What the Spirograph Can Bring to the Design Process

When I started fooling around with my new Spirograph, my intent was to just use it as a mindless stress-management exercise—something to do at the end of a long day to unwind. But in using it to make circle after circle after circle, I've found that the exercise can bring a few things to the basic design process.

- [It helps to work out color schemes.](#) There are many ways to work out color schemes for a project. One I commonly use is to arrange and re-arrange paint chips on my desk top. But paint chips are abstract. What Spirographs do is show colors in relation to each other within an actual pattern. It takes only a minute or two to create a Spirograph pattern, so if you want to try out a scheme, or see how particular hues are affected by the proximity of other colors, the Spirograph is a convenient way to do that.

- [It helps to cultivate the art of restraint.](#) Making all of those circles is addictive, and a little hypnotic. It's easy to take a pattern too far, to clutter it up, to mar the perfection of a simple form. I've learned to recognize when the proportions of color, saturation, weight, and space are ideal for a particular design. In other words, my Spirographs have helped refine my sense of when done is done.
- [It helps to develop tolerance for imperfection.](#) Anyone who has done Spirographing knows that perfection is elusive. It takes a lot of practice before you can fall into a rhythm that's likely to produce consistently clean lines. Even then, though, your patterns are vulnerable to the unintended shifts of the gears or slips of the pen. One night I spent two whole hours trying to produce a series of four perfectly uniform graphs. I couldn't do it. There was always a point at which my gears would lose engagement or my paper would move, and my pen would veer off track. As someone who tends to obsess over visual inconsistencies, I initially found this completely intolerable. I thought I was going to have to be institutionalized. But, strangely, the next morning when I surveyed the stray papers that evidenced all my failed attempts, I saw a few that looked organically beautiful. I actually used them in a slide presentation I was designing, and I grew quite fond of them. I learned two lessons here: the first that imperfection can sometimes be more visually appealing than perfection; the second, that sometimes small things don't matter all that much, so get over it!

All those years ago when I was sitting in my bedroom drawing graphs on my notebooks, I would have never imagined that one day, well into adulthood, I would be writing (electronically!) on the virtues of Spirographs. But, like many relics of the past, Spirographics continue to inspire and shape the ideas of today.

[Favorite Thing of the Week](#)

I decided to pull this week's Favorite Thing from right inside my home office, since that's where I taped this episode. Drum roll...it's a 1950s Peter Pan Board game! This game is part of my small Disney collection (have I mentioned that I *love* Disney—especially vintage Disney?), and I keep it on display on a shelf in my office. The game is in fantastic condition, BUT unfortunately, it's missing the instructions! I have no idea how to play it. But honestly, I don't like to handle it very much, anyway. It's pretty frail. It's colorful, it's fun, it's classic Disney, and it's my Favorite Thing of the Week. If you want to take a look at it, I put pictures of it out on the Pinterest Show Board for this episode.



Would you do me a favor?

Please, if you like this show (and are not too embarrassed by it) would you share it wherever you do your social networking? I don't know very much about how to grow an audience, and honestly, I like having a small audience. It's just me and you, hanging out on a Sunday night! But, of course, it's nice to know people are listening. I appreciate your help.

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