

LOCAL RADIO DRAMA TROUPE  
RESURRECTS LOST HORROR CLASSIC

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The name Arch Oboler probably doesn't ring any bells for most people today, and it's likely that the title of the old time radio series for which he was a prolific writer and host, "Lights Out!", doesn't either. But mention "Chicken Heart" and "Bill Cosby" in the same sentence and you'll find many people doubled-over with laughter.

It is on the 1966 album "Wonderfulness" that the Cos reminisces about his childhood experiences being frightened to death by radio shows like "Inner Sanctum" and "Suspense!". In the skit, Cosby tells a story of sneaking downstairs in the middle of the night to turn on the family's radio and tune in to a "Lights Out!" episode about "a chicken heart...a chicken heart that ate up New York City". Cosby's childhood self roots for the heart as it swallows up janitors, elevator operators, cabs, and buildings ... until the voice on the radio tells him "it is outside of your door!" In true Cosby fashion, he defends his family's home by smearing Jell-O on the floor and setting the sofa on fire -- with hilarious results.

Until recently, Neil Marsh, founder of the Post-Meridian Radio Players -- a Somerville-based group that produces live and studio-recorded radio drama (or, as it's often called now, audio theater) -- assumed Cosby made that story up. But it turns out there really was an episode of "Lights Out!" about a chicken heart that grew out of control and consumed the world. It was written by Arch Oboler and first aired in 1937, then was subsequently repeated several times into the 1940s. Sadly, the original recording was eventually lost or destroyed, though many decades later Oboler produced a recreation of the last eight minutes of "Chicken Heart", featuring Hans Conried in the leading role, for the LP "Drop Dead". But that is all we have to remind us of the original.

Except for the script...

The Post-Meridian Radio Players will be re-creating Arch Oboler's "Chicken Heart" as part of "Chicken Hearts & Other Parts": a Halloween-themed fundraiser for local filmmaker Chelsea Spear, to be held at the First Congregational Church of Somerville on Friday, October 14th at 8:00pm. The cast includes local actors Rob Noyes and Michael McAfee in the lead roles, plus a team of 12 additional actors providing voices for 32 other characters, and two live effects artists who will utilize everything from a stainless steel mixing bowl and a lunch box to a hand-help sewing machine and a vat of gelatin to convince the audience that a chicken's heart is, indeed, devouring the world around them.

"Chicken Hearts & Other Parts" will also feature the following other performances:

- "The Atlantis Affair" - A live sci-fi/horror tragicomic radio drama, by local writer/director Alex Feinman, about the surreal encounters of a Boston-based computer programmer and his companions with the mysterious.

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- "Erasure" – A reading by local author Jennifer Pelland of her original short story about a woman struggling to understand who she is, after her memories of a traumatic experience have been erased, and the dangers she now faces.
- "Improv PoetryProse" – Horrific dreamtellings woven by nationally-recognized voice artist Lindsay Ellison, based on the books at hand and topics or images suggested by the audience.
- "Mayday on the Mystic" & "The Unhappy Medium" – Screenings of two segments from the subject of the fundraiser, Chelsea Spear's film-in-progress, "The Ballad of Burd Janet": a re-telling of the Celtic folktale "Tam Lin", set in New England of the 1920s.

"Chicken Hearts & Other Parts" runs Friday, October 14th, at 8:00pm in the downstairs hall of the First Congregational Church of Somerville, 89 College Avenue, on the corner of Francesca, four blocks up from the Davis Square T-Station. Tickets will be \$10 for adults and \$7 for students and seniors and may be purchased at the door. Reservations can be made by calling Hub of the Universe Productions at (617) 669-4391 or by visiting <http://www.HubOfTheUniverseProductions.com> and selecting the EVENTS link.

Additional information about Chelsea Spear and "The Ballad of Burd Janet" may be found at <http://www.pixievision.com>.

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