

## Imaginary Orchestra

Many – Many years ago, when I was less than ten, I would use my imagination to entertain myself and escape from being left alone. For example, my parents use to own a huge radio that we kept in our living room. I looked like a huge mahogany floor cabinet. It had a small glass dial in the top half, the size of a letter's envelope. Inside the glass dial was a needle that moved back and forth across the AM stations by the knob on the left. The knob on the right was the volume control. Underneath the window were eight brown Bakelite keys that would find my favorite station with one press. Actually, it looked like a face with a mouth full of teeth.

Below the face of the big Zenith radio were a pair of cabinet doors that were covered in a ruby jacquard fabric that was stretched behind a brass lattice criss-cross. And behind those doors was a rack filled with 33 and 1/3 records. We call these old records “vinyls” today. In the middle of the radio, between the face and the doors, was a drop-down door that pulled out to expose the turntable that we could play the record collection. All in all, the massive musical hulk was an exciting construction of secret places for a little girl to explore and imagine wonderful things. But, I've strayed away from my story about the Imaginary Orchestra.

Once upon a time, when I was just a little girl, my parents had this fine mahogany radio that stood in our modest living room next to the front door. At night sometimes, I enjoyed turning out all the lights in the front room while the radio was on; and I would listen to either “Sargent Preston and Yukon King”, a continuing adventure of a Canadian Mounty and his brilliant German Shepard. Or, I would listen to popular singers of the time like Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, The Ink Spots, or the Andrew Sister. But my favorite was Montovani and his Orchestra.

Why? Because when Montovani was playing, I would let my imagination pretend that behind the little glass window with the dial was a miniature orchestra inside the radio. I would squench up very close with my nose on the glass and try to peer around the dial plate. Deep inside where the glass tubes lit up the inside of the radio’s works, was a little sound stage filled with tiny men and women seated with their instruments on a platform. Dressed in tuxedos and long black skirts, they played their violins, horns, and cellos. There was also, a concert grand piano, no more than two inches long. . . and a tiny golden harp. In the back were big copper drums the size of thimbles with a standing musician pounding away and moving his hands across the tops of the miniature set to silence the boom they made. They all were playing away on their grand stage that was small enough to fit onto my hands cupped together. And there was Montovani on a little box with his arms swinging with his baton; leading them in beautiful music. Not a radio wave coming from the sky somewhere. Not an electronic sound from a record. But a miniature orchestra with real people and their instruments playing away on a grand stage.

I could see them right in front of my nose – just inches away through the side of the glass – right around the edges of the brass dial.

The music poured out of the ruby colored fabric stretched on the backs of the doors. My fingers would follow the curves of the lattice work that protected it from being punched or torn. The music was mesmerizing and took me far away to wonderful places beyond the little living room, beyond the little grey house, and far from the farm. Music that my tiny orchestra performed inside the big mahogany cabinet took me to the center of a big city production studio where I was with the actual orchestra.

And when I would get tired of being on my knees, peering into the little glass window. I'd get up and go turn the lights back on in the living room; and the magic would all be gone. There would only be our flower covered sofa, a couple of dark green easy chairs, a china cabinet filled with books, my piano, and that big Zenith radio by the front door with a white vase of fresh cut flowers.

But, sometimes after dinner, just before bedtime, if the living room was quiet and I was left alone...I'd hurry and flip off all the lights to take a quick peek through the small glass window. And there just around the edges of the brass dial, and deep, deep inside where the glass tubes were . . .I could see a little orchestra being lead by Montovani. Montovani and his orchestra were playing music just for me.