

WAR OF THE WELL(e)S

by Michael Weber
Directed by Lawrence Grimm



PORCHLIGHT
MUSIC THEATRE

“How often do we as artists get the opportunity to speak directly to our audience at the very moment that they are personally experiencing exactly what the author is writing about?”

Orson Welles to John Houseman in the WAR OF THE WELL(e)S

IF you were listening to the radio on October 30, 1938 anywhere in America you didn't need to wait for Halloween to instill fear and uncertainty into your life. With Hitler's early bloodthirst as a harbinger of World War II, many Americans were primed for the unimaginable to become the new reality; the invisible to become the unforgettably visible. Add to this the understanding that aside from some standard tabloid hyperbole at this time, there was no reason to believe that news was overly manipulative or wholeheartedly fake, and you have the perfect storm for a bit of infamous national hysteria.

Michael Weber's play, originally written for the stage and now presented in the medium that further ignites our imaginations while paying homage to the creative process that generated a sensation, invites us to consider Welles as the ultimate provocateur. With German submarines spotted off the Mid-Atlantic coast, the idea of testing society's potential reaction to the frightening possibility of sinister aliens crossing global borders from Mexico, I mean Mars, didn't seem at all far-fetched to Welles. Or perhaps only as far-fetched as believing that a global pandemic could arrive at our doorsteps in 2020 accompanied by the same familiar human reactions Americans experienced in 1938. Whether driven by the 23 year old ego of a genius artist or the conscious act of a social scientist's media experiment or both, Welles challenges his artistic partner John Houseman and us with the eternally relevant, infinitely applicable and always un-answered question: “When it's over, win or loose, is it back to business as usual or for once in our lives do we actually, oh, I don't know, learn from the past?”.

Thanks for listening.

Larry

THE STAKEHOLDERS



ORSON WELLES
JONATHAN WAGNER

At age twenty one, before he was widely acknowledged as one of the greatest filmmakers of all time, Orson Welles co-founded the Mercury Theatre with Producer John Houseman in 1937. Following a string of successful ground-breaking Broadway productions, the Mercury produced one of its most infamous productions with an adaptation of H.G. Wells' **The War of the Worlds**, which Welles had envisioned in a format of breaking news occurring in real time.

The production would throw Welles into the center of a great national controversy while catapulting him even further into his prowess as a rising star of media. Although he would later hint that the production's manipulation was not completely unintentional, at the time Welles sheepishly told the press: "If I'd planned to wreck my career, I couldn't have gone about it better."



JOHN HOUSEMAN
TOM HICKEY

The Romanian-born British-American actor was initially a producer of theatre, film, and television and best known early on for his rule breaking collaborations with Orson Welles as director on such controversial and successful productions as **Macbeth** (also known as **Voodoo Macbeth** featuring an all black cast in Harlem) and **The Cradle Will Rock** (which was notoriously threatened by government censorship).

Houseman, who is fondly remembered as an actor for his portrayal of Professor Charles W. Kingsfield in **The Paper Chase**, played many roles in his life but as he shared in his 1972 memoir, **Run-Through**, one of his biggest commitments was "on a partnership with a 20-year-old boy in whose talent I had unquestioning faith but with whom I must increasingly play the combined and tricky roles of producer, censor, adviser, impresario, father, older brother and bosom friend."



HOWARD KOCH
TRAVIS KNIGHT

As the gifted new writer joining the Mercury Theatre Radio Ensemble in 1938, Howard Koch was tasked by Houseman and Welles with the mammoth challenge of adapting H.G. Wells' **The War of the Worlds**. Originally set in 1897 England, he transformed the book into a contemporary late breaking news bulletin format with a first person singular perspective in less than a week. Three days in, with Welles in absentia (he was doing all nighters working on Broadway's **Danton's Death**) Koch had confided in Houseman as producer that he could not execute the adaptation. Houseman insisted Koch continue collaborating with himself and Paul Stewart only to arrive with a draft that most in the ensemble felt would be a complete disaster. Following his work with the Mercury, Koch became a successful screenwriter (Casablanca) and wrote a play about his radio experience **Invasion from Mars** later adapted for the TV movie, **The Night that Panicked America**.

THE MERCURY THEATRE ENSEMBLE



KENNY DELMAR
LANCE BAKER

Delmar was widely known for his characterization of Senator Beauragard Claghorn on the Fred Allen Show which would then go on to become the inspiration for the Warner Brothers animated character Foghorn Leghorn. His dead on impression of FDR (masked as the Secretary of the Interior) in **The War Of The Worlds** was one hidden weapon of authenticity credited for inciting the broadcast's hysteria.



PAUL STEWART
JEFF STILL

Helping Orson Welles get his first job in radio, Stewart was the Associate Producer for the Mercury and the co-writer and rehearsal director for **The War of The Worlds**. Orson Welles credited Stewart for creating much of the excellent quality of the Mercury's work. Paul Stewart made his film debut as Kane's butler and valet in **Citizen Kane** uttering the first line of the film, "Rosebud...I'll tell you about Rosebud."



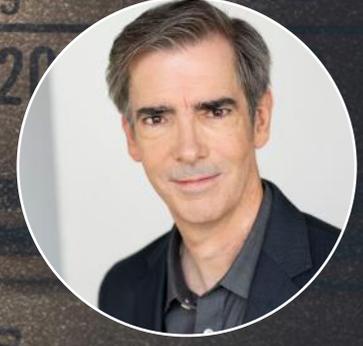
ORA NICHOLS
MIERKA GIRTEN

Nichols was the first and only woman to run a sound effects department during the Golden Age of radio. Transitioning from the vaudeville circuit as a drummer and dancer to silent films as a sound effects and musical accompanist, Ora Nichols was the head sound engineer of CBS who was not only considered an absolute master in her craft but could humble and slay Orson Welles himself with her metaphorical and imaginative audio and foley concepts.



RAY COLLINS
LEVI HOLLOWAY

With over 900 stage roles to his credit, Ray Collins was a core member of the Mercury Radio Theatre Ensemble. A long time friend and associate actor with Orson Welles, Collins notably appeared in **Citizen Kane** and played Ltnt. Arthur Tragg in **Perry Mason**. He played three roles in **The War of the Worlds**, where he played the rooftop newscaster describing the destruction of New York in vivid detail.



FRANK READICK
WILL CLINGER

Deeply inspired by WLS radio's Herb Morrison in his live audio coverage of the Hindenburg disaster in 1937, Frank Readick was determined to craft his own authentic performance as a reporter in **The War of the Worlds** who was witnessing the horrific tragedy of an alien invasion before his very eyes. He appeared with Orson Welles in **Citizen Kane** and was well known for his evil laughter in **The Shadow** series.

THE RADIO LISTENERS



DOROTHY TISHMAN
MIERKA GIRTEN



SAMUEL TISHMAN
MICHAEL WEBER



JOHN MORRISON
GUY VAN SWEARINGEN



HENRY BRYLAWSKI
KEVIN MATTHEW REYES



LOUIS WINKLER
DANNY MCCARTHY

Dorothy Tishman, a domestic who worked part time in a cinema box office, is enamored with movies, musicals and the likes of Nelson Eddy and Henry Fonda. The Tishmans discover the supposed alien attack secondhand from panicked friends and family because they were, like many others, late listeners to the already in progress broadcast.

A hard working Eastern European immigrant arriving in Manhattan in 1920, Samuel Tishman was a newspaper salesman married to Dorothy Tishman. Samuel gets easily caught up in the hysteria of the broadcast through his own confusion and paranoia about Hitler's ascent and an ensuing invasion by aliens from Mars.

Prepared for a quiet night at the police station before Halloween, John Morrison was the rookie Bronx cop who first became aware of the alien invasion by fielding many of the 800 phone inquiries from New York and New Jersey citizens who expressed great concern over what to do, where to go and whether the alien invasion itself was real.

On his way to pick up his girlfriend in Washington D.C., the 25 year old law student was en route when he heard that an alien ship had landed on a New Jersey farm. Although at the age of 92 Brylawski would reflect back on that time claiming he "knew it was a hoax", his girlfriend was completely terrified by the broadcast. But not so much so, that she couldn't become his fiancé the night of the broadcast.

The bachelor bricklayer from Manhattan "almost had a heart attack" when he listened to **The War of the Worlds** broadcast. Following that near crisis, he hit the streets in a panic attempting to seek shelter and refuge. After spending his last dollars on a train ticket out of the city only to find that it was just a radio show induced scare, Winkler asked The Mercury Theatre to reimburse him for the money he had spent on his departure (he had been saving for a new pair of shoes); CBS was happy to oblige.

THE CHARACTERS



LTNT. MONTGOMERY SMITH
HENRY GODINEZ



NARRATOR
LAWRENCE GRIMM



ANNOUNCER
ANISH JETHMELANI



CBS EXECUTIVE, OFFICER
JOHN LISTER



*MCDONALD, LTNT.
VOGHT, OPERATOR*
PHILIP LORTIE



PHILEAS FOGG
JON MOZES



MRS. WILMUTH
SADIEH RIFAI



*GUNNER, POLICEMAN,
REPORTER*
CAMERON ROBERTS



*REPORTER, OBSERVER,
ANNOUNCER*
STEVE SCHINE



THE STRANGER
MICHAEL SHANNON



SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
MICHAEL PATRICK THORNTON



*REPORTER, ANNOUNCER,
CARL PHILIPS*
DOUG VICKERS



*PASSEPARTOUT,
CAPTAIN LANSING*
JONATHAN WEIR

THE CREW

Playwright.....Michael Weber
Director/Producer.....Lawrence Grimm
Graphic Design.....Colin Grimm
Sound Design/Foley.....Matthew Grimm
Program Design.....Sanja Manakoski

SPECIAL THANKS

**Kirsten Fitzgerald, Abigail Madden, Jeannie Lukow, James Juliano,
Austin Packard, SAG-AFTRA, The Koch Estate.**

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CURATED RESOURCE LIST

VIDEO AND FILM

[PBS American Experience: War of the Worlds](#), Documentary

PBS Documentary exploring the context, history and narrative around the radio drama. Interspersed with actors sharing firsthand accounts as radio listeners from the period. (60 min, 2013)

[The Night that Panicked America](#), TV Movie

*Emmy nominated TV movie chronicling the story behind the broadcast. Features Meredith Baxter-Birney, Tom Bosley, Eileen Brennan, Vic Morrow, John Ritter. The film aired annually on television for years on October 30 coinciding with the original Welles radio airing of *The War of the Worlds*. (96 min, 1975)*

[The Immortal Orson Welles](#), Documentary

“Avoids the usual myths and clichés of Wellesian folk lore and offers a rare insight into the world of this fascinating actor and director.” (2019)

[They’ll Love Me When I’m Dead](#), Documentary

A behind the scenes look at Orson Welles unfinished film, “The Other Side of the Wind” (Netflix, 2018. 1hr, 38 min.)

[Orson Welles’ “The War of the Worlds”](#) Original Radio Drama CBS October 30, 1938 –(Subtitled)

[The Night America Trembled](#), Docudrama

Edward Murrow hosts this 60 minute docu-drama recounting the fateful night through a 1957 News lens.

BOOKS

[Broadcast Hysteria: Orson Welles’s War of the Worlds and the Art of Fake News](#), by A. Brad Schwartz

Through an examination of the actual letters sent to Welles following the broadcast, Schwartz examines the lasting impact of fake news on American culture and the media despite an acknowledgement that the national hysteria may have been manufactured by the press. Available as audiobook and hardcover.

[Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles](#), By Frank Brady

*“A decade in the research and writing, biographer Frank Brady’s *Citizen Welles* is the first comprehensive life story, definitive for our time, of Orson Welles through to his death in 1985.”*

ARTICLES

[Infamous “War of the Worlds” Radio Broadcast Was a Magnificent Fluke](#). The Smithsonian Magazine

*A great companion article to the Weber play as it presents a behind the scenes look at the making of *The War of the Worlds*.*

[‘War of the Worlds’: Behind the 1938 Radio Show Panic](#), National Geographic Magazine

A look at the historical and social context for how the classic hoax unfolded.

