

Big Bill & Oom-A-Gog

To hear Bill Blair tell it, all he ever wanted to be was a radio announcer.

That's what he started doing in 1949, when still a high school student. That's what he did in Tulsa in the 1950s, on stations KOME and the pre-rock 'n' roll KAKC. And that's what he's been doing for the past 11½ years at the NBC affiliate, KTSM, in El Paso, Texas.

But in between those radio jobs, Blair spent five years as the host of one of the best-remembered kids' TV shows in Tulsa history, "Big Bill and Oom-A-Gog," which ran on KVOO (now KJRH), Channel 2, from late 1959 through 1964.

Blair himself is well-remembered in Tulsa, too. A former president of the Tulsa Press Club, he spent part or all of a decade as an announcer and weatherman in



Bill Blair is shown here as Big Bill with his friend Saddle-sore.

Tulsa, in addition to his kids' show work.

A humorous man with an easy
See Big Bill on H-4

Brunch

. .Big Bill

Continued from H-1

conversational style, Blair recently reminisced via phone about his years in the Tulsa broadcasting business, and the genesis of "Big Bill and Oom-A-Gog."

"I started in radio when I was in high school, but in the real world, my first job was at KOME (now KAKC, at 1300 AM)," he recalled. "That was back when it was the Rod of God, owned by John Brown University. All religious programming except for the news. They had four (broadcast) towers, and they called them Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."

From there, Blair went to KAKC, then at 970 AM. Although

KAKC would later become the No. 1 rock 'n' roll station in Tulsa, Blair was elsewhere by the time rock 'n' roll began dominating the airwaves.

"We ran jazz and pop, and a show from Mutual called 'The Woody Woodpecker Radio Show.' It was just like the cartoon, only audio. I was the morning disc jockey there."

Running Woody Woodpecker foreshadowed his days of introducing cartoons as Big Bill on Channel 2. But before Blair became Big Bill, he paid some more dues.

First, he went to a TV station in Enid, where he had a show in 1954-55 called "The Malt Shop"

("This was before 'American Bandstand'") and became instrumental in setting up the teen-age gathering places known as Teen Towns in Oklahoma. From there, he went to a Lawton station "that showed so many Charlie Chan movies we actually got letters addressed to the Charlie Chan Station."

In 1959, after a stint in the military, he joined Channel 2 as a weatherman, and "Big Bill and Oom-A-Gog" began.

"(Tulsa broadcaster) Hal O'Halloran's dad had a kids' show, and when he got a little too old, they went looking for a new kids' show host and asked me," he said. "We bought a package of Colonel Bleep cartoons, and along with those came Oom-A-Gog, a seven-foot-tall aluminum robot with flashing eyes and a horn. Everybody thought the robot's name was Oologah — that's probably what we should have called it."

"Inside Oom-A-Gog was Dick Cardwell from the production crew. He's the only one who ever did it. Last I heard he was managing a radio station in Salt Lake City."

The show began running weekdays from 3 p.m. until 4 p.m. It was so successful that it later expanded to 4:45 p.m.

Blair said that, in those days, personal appearances at various Tulsa stores were a big part of the job.

"We used to go to Sears a lot, especially around Christmas. Oom-A-Gog had these big rubber boots painted silver, and one time at Sears a kid kept stomping on his toe. After he'd done this for awhile, he looked up and said, 'You know, Oom-A-Gog, some-

times I think you're almost human.' And Dick looked down at him and said, 'Sometimes I think you're almost human, too, kid.'"

In addition to his Big Bill work, Blair also was the host of the "Kiddies' Auction," sponsored by Kitty Clover Potato Chips and broadcast on Saturday mornings for two summers. ("Ever try to eat a potato chip in the morning when you're hung over?" he asked.) The idea was that children would save coupons printed on Kitty Clover potato chip bags and use them to bid on prizes.

"One family must've had relatives saving bags and scoured every garbage can in town," he said. "Every week, they'd buy a couple of bicycles, a color TV..."

He said that what finally brought down the local kids' shows, including his, was a ruling from the Federal Communications Commission.

"The FCC passed a ruling that said you couldn't have a children's show with the host doing commercials. That killed it. That was why so many national sponsors were buying time, to get the local hosts to push their products."

With "Big Bill and Oom-A-Gog" gone, Blair continued as a weatherman for awhile, and then joined a Tulsa advertising agency. On April Fool's Day, 1968, he joined another ad agency, this time in El Paso, with fellow displaced Tulsan Larry Bettis.

"Then we decided that I wasn't cut out for advertising, so I went back into radio," he said.

These days, he holds down a midday shift on KTSM-AM, a news-talk station, as well as announcing for KTSM-AM and FM and KTSM-TV.

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