

Harold Peary, 1908-1985

Harold Peary: born as Harrold Jese Pereira de Faria

Harold Peary was born in San Leandro, California, on July 25, 1908, the son of Portuguese immigrants. By the age of eleven, he was singing at local weddings and other events. He began his radio career as a thirteen year old singer billed as The Oakland Tribune's Boy Caruso, and by 1928 he was a regular on San Francisco radio, featured on an NBC program called The Spanish Serenader. This was a role he parodied in the classic Gildersleeve episode, The Mystery Voice in which Gildersleeve becomes romantic Brazilian baritone Ricardo.

In 1929 he had his own radio show and got his big break in 1935 when he was cast in the Fibber McGee and Molly Show as Throckmorton Gildersleeve.

A busy actor in the 1930's in 1935, he went to Chicago, making the rounds of many major programs. He was equally adept at comedy and drama, and he was adept at accents and dialect, and his vocal range was so flexible that he often played several parts in the same program.

Around 1937 he began playing various characters on Fibber McGee and Molly, including Chinese laundryman Wu Fu, and a blustery, stuffed shirt named Gildersleeve, the most pompous name writer Don Quinn could think of. Continuity and consistency were not considerations, so Peary played many variations on the Gildersleeve, who was occasionally known as George, but later settled into a permanent role as the McGees' next door neighbor and adopted one of the most memorable names of radio, Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, named for Peary's address, Throckmorton Place.

In 1939, Peary came up with his trademark giggle. It caught on quickly and Peary incorporated it in the Gildersleeve character. In 1941 he got his own radio show, The Great Gildersleeve, which debuted on 8-31-41 and ran for 17 years. In 1950, Harold Peary left the program to move to another network and a new, short-lived program, "Honest Harold."

This was one of the longest-running comedy shows in radio history, running until 1958. Peary left the Gildersleeve radio show behind in 1951 and went on to make numerous feature films, four of them based on the Great Gildersleeve radio show. His career in films tapered off by the fifties, but he became busy in television and records in that decade. His last film appearance was in 1964 but TV appearances continued into the early 70's.

He was awarded 2 Stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for Radio at 1639 Vine Street and for Television at 1719 Vine Street in Hollywood, California.

