

## Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy

Born in Chicago in 1903, Edgar Bergen developed a talent for ventriloquism at a young age. When Bergen asked a local carpenter to create a dummy, the wisecracking Charlie McCarthy was born. The duo began their career as talent show headliners, performing in Chicago while Bergen attended Northwestern University. Bergen eventually left Northwestern to concentrate on performing, but Charlie received an honorary degree from the school in 1938, a "Master of Innuendo and Snappy Comebacks."

Bergen and McCarthy made their radio debut on *Rudy Vallee's Royal Gelatin Hour* in 1936 and were an instant success. In 1937, they were given their own show for Chase & Sanborn. Almost immediately, *The Edgar Bergen/Charlie McCarthy Show* became one of radio's highest-rated programs, a distinction it enjoyed until it left the air in 1956. During the show's two decades on the air, Bergen added new characters to the show, including the slow-witted Mortimer Snerd and the man-hungry spinster Effie Klinker. Today, Charlie McCarthy, Mortimer Snerd and Effie Klinker are on permanent display at the Radio Hall of Fame. [<http://www.radiohof.org/comedy/edgarbergen.html>]

Bergen's career on the screen was successful with and without Charlie McCarthy. He usually appeared on the screen with Charlie, the first being Sam Goldwyn's *The Goldwyn Follies* in 1938, released through United Artists. The film was a disaster in many aspects for Goldwyn, but one critic mentioned, "any picture that introduces Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen can't be all bad." Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy both became the starring vehicles for a handful of great comedies including *Charlie McCarthy, Detective* (1939), and two RKO films featuring The Great Gildersleeve and Fibber McGee and Molly, *Look Who's Laughing* (1941) and *Here We Go Again* (1942). Any radio listener who has enjoyed the verbal battles between W.C. Fields and Charlie McCarthy will simply

love the 1939 picture *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man*. Sadly, that film has been overlooked and underrated by film critics, but any radio fan who has ever seen the picture will admit it's well worth the price of any admission. [[http://www.old-time.com/otrlogs2/charlie\\_mg.html](http://www.old-time.com/otrlogs2/charlie_mg.html)]

Edgar Bergen helped tremendously with the war cause, including appearing in *Stage Door Canteen* in 1943.

Edgar Bergen died on October 1, 1978. The *Edgar Bergen/Charlie McCarthy Show* was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame in 1990.

The cover shown here demonstrates that there is at least one nice celebrity cover available to collectors; he was probably just a little too late to make the Group I Radio Stars covers. I

