

## 13 Parallels between Martin Gardner and Stan Freberg

John Miller (1949)  
Portland Oregon  
dialectrix.com/G4G

G4G 13  
Atlanta

*Gardner and Freberg had a curious number of co-incidences in their lives: Military service, magic, children's literature, popularization of subject material, and so on. This talk/paper will compare timelines based on their autobiographies and other biographic research.*

*These are parallels, more co-incident than equivalence!*

### **The Autobiographies**

Martin Gardner's autobiography is *Undiluted Hocus-Pocus* (UH-P).

During the Centennial, I helped Colm Mulcahy glean U-HP for things to Tweet on @MGardner100th, so I noticed many details.

That same year, probably because Stan Freberg was one of my heroes, I discovered his autobiography, *It Only Hurts When I Laugh* (IOHWIL). I was struck by all the parallels between UH-P and IOHWIL.

The front jackets perfectly show the difference between these guys. Gardner, reserved vs Freberg, Leaning into you. Martin was 12 when Stan was born.

### **MAGIC || 1**

Stan's live-in Uncle Raymond was "ConRay the Magician". Stan helped him set up. A rabbit was placed in ConRay's coat that was later pulled out of a hat and given to a member of the audience... always little Stan. Stan would exit the theater and then go in through the back door with the rabbit to use in the next show. When Stan's father objected to the trickery, Stan raised rabbits so that they could truly give them away. (There is a photo of ConRay in IOHWIL.)

Martin's father showed him a magic trick. (What was it?)

### **EARLY INFLUENCERS || 2**

Martin's father gave him a copy of Sam Loyd's *Cyclopedia of 5000 Puzzles Tricks and Conundrums*.

On Oct 30, 1938, Stan's first time out eating alone in a diner, he heard Orson Welles' *War of Worlds* on the radio, live. He realized "it was just another marvelous use of radio". (Martin was in Tulsa, at Tulsa Tribune...)

The diner was The Root Beer Barrel, on Fair Oaks Avenue in South Pasadena, CA. IOHWIL P21. Freberg's other idols were Jack Benny and Fred Allen.

### **TEACHERS || 3**

Young Stan Freberg's writing teacher said: *Creative, but Bombastic!*

Martin's math teacher: *You'll do Math in my class!* (Not Tic-Tac-Toe) P22 U-HP.

### **ARMY || NAVY || 4**

Martin did PR for a RADIO signaling training school, stationed in Wisconsin.

Freberg entertained troops at a base hospital, stationed in Pasadena, CA. When off duty, he worked on radio, doing cartoon voices.

### **BASE NEWS in service || 5**

Chosen for their aptitudes, both men edited newspapers as part of their military service.

Yeoman Gardner: *Badger Navy News*, in Wisconsin before shipping out to USS Pope.

Corporal Freberg - *The Needle News*, at Fort McArthur.

Freberg was first based at Fort McArthur, in Special Services, as a baker, till he got a mastoid infection, when he was taken to McCornack military hospital near Pasadena, where they put him to work locally.

### **TIME FOR BEANY || HUMPTY DUMPTY || 6**

Gardner worked on a children's magazine while Freberg worked on a children's TV program!

Martin edited 10 issues/year of *HUMPTY DUMPTY* for 8 years, from 1952-1960 -- Obviously only part time from 1957 to 1960, once *Mathematical Games* began.

Freberg & others started *Time for Beany*, a TV puppet show in 1949. Beany was the #1 Children's show, with a 70 share, for 5 years. That's over one thousand 15-minute shows!

Anecdotes: After a stage hand dropped their cue cards during the Live show, Freberg's crew invented the first crude Teleprompter.

Einstein was a fan of Beany, and once left a meeting saying: "You will have to excuse me, gentlemen. It's Time for Beany!"

### **JABBERWOCK(Y) SONG || ANNOTATED ALICE || 7**

In 1960, Martin's *Annotated Alice* was a success. (Time warp ahead.)

In 1951, Walt Disney animated *Alice in Wonderland*. Freberg & Co. did The Jabberwock Song, but it was not included in final cut of the movie. The Chorus: Stan Freberg, Daws Butler, and the Rhythmaires.

Anecdote: The demo recording was included in the 2004 and 2010 DVD releases of the film. In the final release of the movie, the character of the Cheshire Cat (played by Sterling Holloway) sings the first few lyrics of the Jabberwocky poem when Alice encounters him.

## **DRAGONET || FLEXAGONS || 8**

Martin's *Scientific American* article *HEXAFLEXAGONS* caused a lot of folding and flexing in December 1956 !

*DRAGONET* was an audio spoof of the TV show *Dragnet*, substituting a Knight for Detective Joe Friday. It sold a million copies in 3 weeks, in 1953. Freberg produced many such mini-radio comedies.

*DRAGONET* & *FLEXAGONS* put both men on career paths. They gained many followers.

## **JOHN & MARSHA || 8 continued**

Freberg came up with a crazy vocal recording that went viral in 1957. Some radio stations refused to play "John & Marsha", believing it was a secret recording of a passionate exchange between two real people.

Anecdote: The famous 1956 Snowdrift shortening commercial was a one-off of "John & Marsha". It was NOT Freberg's, but done by Hubley/Babbitt.

## **ORVILLE || DR MATRIX || 9**

Freberg frequently appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* with another puppet, a moon man named Orville. They chatted about earthlings, smog, war, ... Freberg was essentially banned from live TV for talking about the threat of Nuke War.

Martin often used Dr Matrix and others as a foil to discuss pseudo-science.

## **TYPEWRITERS || 10**

Both men used Typewriters. (My talk showed Photos of each.)

## **STAN FREBERG PRESENTS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA || MATHEMATICAL GAMES || 11**

Martin began *Mathematical Games* in 1957. The 4 Color Map Theorem was fun!

*Stan Freberg presents The United States of America* was a "Satirical Revue" with ten skits, from Columbus to the Battle of Yorktown, complete with voice actors, narration, a musical score, and sound effects.

It sold millions. I first heard this when I was in High School. I bought the vinyl album for \$3.75 in the 1960's. A later CD edition contained Vol 1 & 2.

U.S. history teachers today play this in the classroom. It's very playful. There's a grain of truth in the skits. For example, 'Take an Indian to Lunch', was based on a 'Take a Negro to Lunch' campaign, if you can believe that.

The skits put you in the position of thinking about things like the folly of selling Manhattan for \$26 worth of "Junk Jewelry", etc.

## ADVERTISING || RECREATIONAL MATH, SKEPTICISM || 12

Gardner quote: "The best way, it has always seemed to me, to make mathematics interesting to students and laymen is to approach it in a spirit of play. Surely the best way to wake up a student is to present him with an intriguing mathematical game, puzzle, magic trick, joke, paradox, model, limerick, or any of a score of other things that dull teachers tend to avoid because they seem frivolous." -- Intro to Mathematical Carnival

Martin believed in the power of play. People were skeptical of having fun with Math.

Freberg quote: "The principle is the same on radio or television. My theory is, why should people be bored out of their skulls by advertising? If we have to live with it, why not make the commercials at least, if not more, entertaining than the show itself? What if people were afraid to leave the room for fear that they might have missed one of the entertaining commercials? Wouldn't that be the best of all possible worlds for the sponsor?"

Freberg poked fun at the "Hard Sell". He thought commercials should be Fun. You need to entertain people in exchange for their time.

Anecdote: Freberg's Radio/TV Mini-comedies were forerunners of SNL, et. al. Here's an example from 1962. Freberg made a group shot of 10 doctors in white tunics. Nine of them were obviously Chinese. The one in front was a white guy. The caption or voiceover was:

9 out of 10 Doctors recommend CHUN KING chow mein.

This commercial/ad may have also appeared in print media.

Freberg probably created as many Ads as Martin did MG columns.

## TELEVISION itself || 13

Gardner quote "Several years ago I read about a man who was so annoyed by the drivel on his television set that he blasted the screen with a shotgun." -- from MG's negative review of Jerry Mander's book *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (p 361, Science - Good, Bad and Bogus)

Freberg was likewise incensed with TV programming, particularly commercials.

When CBS wanted Freberg to do a show, he wrote an opening with him holding a shotgun facing a shooting gallery with TVs moving along a conveyor belt...

ANNOUNCER (TV1): When Headache Strikes, you need fast Fast FAST relief!  
BANG! CRASH!

ANNOUNCER (TV2): I tried everything for my constipation... BANG! CRASH!

ANNOUNCER (TV3): Stomach acid burned a hole right through this handkerchief,  
See? BANG! CRASH!

FREBERG TURNS TO FACE CAMERA: Good evening, I'm Stan Freberg.

CBS: You can't do that opening.

The Stan Freberg CBS show didn't last long, so Freberg turned to commercials.

Freberg refused to do commercials for cigarettes or alcohol, but he did for everything else.

My favorite: Cheerios, the 'Terribly Adult Cereal'. Naomi Lewis may be the actress in Cheerios.

Enjoy a smoked Esskay frank (Actor puts a lighter to a frank). Jesse White is in the ESKAY smoked franks commercial.

Martin appeared in 'Cigar and Rope' an early venture into TV, "MiniTrix".

Freberg's son Donavan got a nerdy reputation for his part in an encyclopedia commercial. The Encyclopedia Britannica commercial was EB's most successful ever.

### **THREE BONUS PARALLELS, IN CASE YOU DIDN'T LIKE SOME OF 1-13!!!**

#### **SCIENCE FICTION WRITER FRIENDS || 14**

Science Fiction writer Ray Bradbury and Freberg were friends. Ray introduced Stan to Orson Welles. By then, Orson Welles was a Freberg Fan!

Isaac Asimov and Martin were members of the Trap Door Spiders group.

#### **FATHERS || 15**

SF: "My minister father believed that God intended us to find humour where we could in this over-serious world"

MG: His dad was christian in name only, a petroleum geologist, a kid at heart.

Similar fathers. Believed in humor, inquiry, honesty, not being too serious.

#### **WIVES || 16**

While doing a guest shot with Orville on a 1958 episode of The Frank Sinatra Show, Freberg met his wife-to-be Donna, who would also double as his producer until her death in 2000.

Wives Donna and Charlotte died in 2000, bisecting the men's lives.

Freberg however, promptly remarried.

#### **TIMELINE**

MG Born 1914 | SF Born 1926 | Depression era | MG Navy | Hiroshima |---| SF Army | Beany/Humpty | Adman/MatGam | Wives Die 2000 |---| MG Dies 2010 | SF Dies 2015.

Martin was ~12 when Stan was born.

Stan Freberg died three years ago, on April 7, 2015.

My awareness of both began in mid 1960's.

## Book Reviews

*It Only Hurts When I Laugh*

His award-winning radio/TV commercials turned the advertising world askew. Convincing buttoned-down ad executives to allow him to poke fun at products was no joke, as detailed here in hilarious anecdotes.

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-8129-1297-5>

*Undiluted Hocus-Pocus*

Reviewed by Andy Magid

<http://www.ams.org/notices/201403/rnoti-p281.pdf>

## Links

Freberg

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stan\\_Freberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stan_Freberg)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time\\_for\\_Beany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_for_Beany)

[Stan Freberg Presents the United States of America Volume One: The Early Years](#)

Gardner

<http://www.gamepuzzles.com/martin.htm>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Gardner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Gardner)

[https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Gardner](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Gardner)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpty\\_Dumpty\\_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpty_Dumpty_(magazine))

Miller (author)

<http://dialectrix.com/G4G>

## Videos

Stan Freberg Commercials on YouTube (14 minutes)

[https://youtu.be/\\_Bx4LBz8Xy4](https://youtu.be/_Bx4LBz8Xy4)

Cheerios, the 'Terribly Adult Cereal'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PauDwNFPucU>

Jesse White - Esskay Franks commercial

<https://youtu.be/vNjeIjuzliU>

Betsy Ross and the Flag, audio starts here:

<https://youtu.be/kCEE9pOkvQU?t=6m36s>

Martin Gardner's 1950s "MiniTrix" films

<http://martin-gardner.org/Film.html>

Martin Gardner Cigar and Rope

<https://youtu.be/uzr5jC93g-Q>

Snowdrift Shortening Commercial 1956 (NOT FREBERG!) [[Snowdrift](#)]

Stan Freberg on Dick Cavett, McGovern-Hatfield amendment radio advertisement.

<https://youtu.be/vt6iCTMp8xE>

## **Awards**

MG: Honorary doctorate from Bucknell University (1978)

MG: The American Institute of Physics science writer of the year award (1983)

Freberg is in the Radio Hall of Fame, the Animation hall of Fame, and the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Freberg won nearly two dozen CLIO awards, advertising's equivalent of the Oscar, and three Emmy Awards.

## **37 images used in presentation, not appearing here!**

UH-P Cover, IOHWIL cover, ConRay the Magician, Sam Loyd's COP cover, Orson Welles, NAVY, ARMY, HUMPTY DUMPTY magazine covers, Beany and His Pals, Time 4 Beany puppetry, Beany Landing, Beany Telescope, Tenniel Jaberwocky, Disney's Jaberwocky, flexagon, DRAGONET, John-Marcia record label Snowdrift commercial, Orville, Martin Hard at Work, Stan in 1968 NYC, Four Color Map, SFPUSA Album Cover, 9 out of 10 doctors, Ducks with Three TVs, Cheerios, Esskay Franks, Cigar and Rope, Encyclopedia, Bradbury, Asimov, Stan Freberg flagwaver.

## **Stan Freberg**

Lettered in Debate, performed a multi-voice solo play on stage in high school. Creative writing, Critical Thinking.

He was an Audiomagician, creating radio-like programming in the TV era.

Did not play sports, but he could run fast!

Listed occupation on tax return: Guerilla satirist, marketeer.

Freberg had a boy and a girl, Donavan & Donna Jr.

Freberg did a radio ad for the McGovern-Hatfield amendment (withdrawal from Vietnam). An ad was criticized as being in Bad Taste. He publicly countered that on Dick Cavett show: "No, the war in Southeast Asia is Bad Taste."

Common Theme: Being told "You can't Do that".

Company: Freberg Limited (But Not Very)

## **Martin Gardner**

Martin kept in touch with Milton Semer about shenanigans in Wash DC.

Martin's mother was a Methodist, liked colors, was K-Teacher.

Martin had two boys.

Martin: "I played a lot of tennis. My father was fairly wealthy, and we had our own tennis court. I also was on the high school tumbling team. I particularly liked the high bar."

## **Other Stuff**

There are probably some deeper parallels, in Skepticism, or maybe in their early work (EG HUMPTY DUMPTY and BEANY episodes).