

## Songs You Love to Hear

KDKA songfest  
features vocal talents  
of Johnny Kirby  
and Barbara Lee Owens.



Johnny Kirby and Barbara Lee Owens join in duet with Russ Merritt at celeste and Johnny Mitchell at the organ.



Barbara is an ardent sports fan and tunes in events when she can.

"Songs You Love to Hear," KDKA's Monday night program which presents music in the modern manner, is about as easy listening as you ever want to hear.

Big reason for the success of the program is the singing of two youthful Pittsburgh stars, Auburn-thatched Johnny Kirby, sensational young tenor, and Barbara Lee Owens, recent University of Pittsburgh graduate who has learned that her beautiful soprano voice provides a better livelihood than that afforded by teaching college classes.

They are aided in their solos and duets by the music of pianist Russ Merritt and organist Johnny Mitchell, two Pittsburgh radio veterans who are famous in their own right.

Johnny Kirby can't recall the day when he didn't sing—at least attempt to. Perhaps, unintelligible and off key, according to his earliest recollections, but nevertheless singing was his childish form of play and amusement. So, down through his adolescence Johnny associates music with his most pleasurable moments.

And all that is understandable. For Johnny's family tree is replete with musicians. Actually, he was born and reared in a concentrated musical atmosphere.

Today, boyish-looking, young Kirby, still in his twenties, has catapulted to a lofty niche in radio. He is the featured male star in the "Singing Strings" program, as well as "Songs You Love to Hear." Such a goal is seldom attained in such a brief professional span of time. But Kirby made it in virtually nothing flat.

Kirby's spectacular rise is the outgrowth of a protracted period as boy choir singer. While still in short trousers and advancing toward the mature age of 10, Kirby was featured boy soprano in church.

Later, the clear vibrant quality of his rich tenor voice drew him all the solo assignments in the many high school musical festivals. And it was at this juncture that he commenced studying voice seriously, although he always had considered it his probable career. While serving as soloist in several of Pittsburgh's larger

churches, he was invited to take prominent singing roles at the Pittsburgh Playhouse. He has since been featured in many Playhouse shows.

In 1942 Fred Waring summoned young Kirby for an audition. Without hesitation, he proffered him a contract to join Waring's Pennsylvanians.

Almost simultaneously, he was sought for Leonard Silverman's "New Faces of 1942" but at virtually the same time, another sought the services of young Kirby. It was Uncle Sam's U. S. Armed Forces. Kirby quickly forsook his musical career to join the Army, where he served 14 months.

Barbara Lee Owens, though a newcomer to KDKA, is not entirely unknown in the Pittsburgh district dramatic field.

Born in Pittsburgh, she is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and did post-graduate work at the University of Wisconsin and Carnegie Institute of Technology.

Her educational background fitted her for scholastic work at the University of Pittsburgh where she taught three courses in biology as a graduate assistant, but some day hopes to do nothing but sing.

She joined the staff at KDKA after singing with the Shadyside Presbyterian choir, the Pitt Hatters and the Melody Guild. She finished among the finalists in the Pittsburgh Concert Society auditions. Miss Owens is also a

member of the Tuesday Musical Society.

In addition to her musical work, Miss Owens also appeared as an actress in two Pittsburgh Playhouse productions, "After Hours" and "The Damask Check."

Since she began broadcasting, Miss Owens is much in demand for personal appearances and special shows.



Kirby, who is also a sports lover, is idol of teen-agers and oldsters.

Radio & Television West — December 1948