Harry Stewart profile

Born in Tacoma in 1908, Harry Edward Skarbo was hired in 1927 at Seattle’s KVI radio — first as an announcer (“Harry Stewart”), and then weatherman, news reporter, and finally as a banjo player. Around 1931 Stewart headed off to California where he created a comedic routine based on speaking a funny sort of American-English smothered in a Scandinavian dialect. That skill evolved into an improbably incongruous stage character — Yogi Yorgesson: “The Hindu Mystic” — a “Scandihooovian” rube who also had a spiritual and omniscient East Indian guru-like vibe. Thus, Yorgesson — replete with a costume consisting of logger boots, an exotic loincloth, a plaid lumberjack shirt, and a Hindu turban — became a radio and recording star — his novelty 78 on S&G Records (“My Clam Digger’s Sweetheart”) became a sizeable enough hit in 1948 to prompt the new (and soon-to-be big-time label) Capitol Records to buy out his contract and release many subsequent discs by him.

Over the next years Stewart recorded many additional comedic songs including one with a local reference to Tacoma’s Titlow Park: “Tillie From Titlow.” In fact, Tacoma remained an important part of Stewart’s life and every time he returned to visit friends and family the Tacoma News Tribune covered it all like he was returning royalty. While in the area he always gave back to the community by performing at each September’s Puyallup Fair and also took on a few nightclub engagements. It was at one such evening performance at Seattle’s old Palomar Theater where the acclaimed “America’s King of Scandinavian Humor” first crossed paths with a kindred spirit, Stan Boreson.

Boreson — like his stylistic soul-mate, Yorgesson — soon became quite adept at poking fun at his fellow Scandinavian Americans in a charmingly lighthearted, and musical way. Indeed, many years later Boreson would even record an LP titled, *Yust Tinking of Yogi*, in tribute to his forebear.

— Peter Blecha 2008