



'Skipper Ryle Show' appealed to kids of all ages

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By [Jim Rohrer](#)



Skipper Ryle

Urbane, intelligent, a master storyteller and a Renaissance man, Glenn "Skipper" Ryle had legions of devoted fans.

They faithfully watched "The Skipper Ryle" show from the mid-1950s to 1972, which for much of its run was on local TV seven days a week.

He piloted the mythical "River Queen" for kids of all ages, and it was generally conceded that the weakest part of his WKRC-TV kiddie show was when he broke for "Popeye" or "Betty Boop" cartoons. There were games, experiments, adventure stories and prizes from Kenner Toys.

According to the National Television Academy, which inducted him into its Silver Circle Hall of Fame, Play-Doh and Silly Putty made their debut on his show. Ryle was known to gather up every Kenner sample he could find so the kids in his audience would always go home with something.

Not that it was easy to get on the show. It was booked a year in advance.

[Photos of Skipper Ryle through the years](#)

His most enduring legacy?

It might be a Halloween ditty, "Wolf Gal," a novelty tune he recorded in 1963 for Saxony records. Backed by a girl group, The Charmaines, accompanied by a howling wolf sound track and a beat that brought to mind 1962's "Monster Mash," Ryle talked his way through a song that featured such never-to-be-forgotten lines as:

"She wore a black gown, it was skin tight."

That provides just a hint at the genius behind his kiddie show – it might be populated with young children in the audience and rely on cartoons, but there was always an adult edge that attracted viewers regardless of age.

While the shows have mostly faded into history, "Wolf Gal" and its B-side, "The Puddy Tat Song" (wherein Ryle shoots a howling cat dead), are still available online.

He was no Bobby "Boris" Pickett when it came to monster songs, but like everything else he tried, it was entertaining and not something you would see from his main competition, "The Uncle Al Show." For Uncle Al, the average audience was about 4 years old. One had to "graduate" to Skipper Ryle.

A telling note about his popularity is that when the Cincinnati Zoo staged "Skipper Ryle Day" in 1965, a crush of 26,000 fans showed up and radio stations had to broadcast alerts to motorists to avoid the zoo area.

Ryle, then Glenn Schnitker, was a decorated teen combat veteran in World War II, and later in Korea, a pilot, a martial arts expert and a scuba diver. In the years after his still-popular show was yanked, he displayed his other skills as a host on "Bowling for Dollars," as a weatherman, newsman, staff announcer, author of on-air travel pieces and late-night movie host.

Glenn Ryle retired in 1989 and died in 1993 at age 66 at his Cheviot home.

When he died, Nick Clooney, who used Ryle as second banana on his own talk-variety effort "The Nick Clooney Show," said: "He was really one of a kind."

We're not likely to see anyone like him again.

Have an idea for The Enquirer's Do You Remember column? Please contact Jim Rohrer at jrohrer@enquirer.com or 513-755-4157.

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