



Sunday, 4 March 2012

## They Had Two Shows

One of countless minor running gags on Jack Benny's show was that Dennis Day had two shows. Beginning in 1946, he starred in 'A Day in the Life of Dennis Day.' But Dennis wasn't the only Benny supporting player to get his own starring sitcom that year. So did bandleader Phil Harris. And so did the Man of a Thousand Voices, Mel Blanc.

Ask old-time radio fans which is the best of the lot, and they'll likely pick Harris. He had a fairly well-defined character and excellent supporting players in Elliott Lewis and Walter Tetley. Day's show ran for a number of seasons while Blanc was off the air by the following summer.

1946 also marked the debut of *New York Herald-Tribune* critic John Crosby. He reviewed all three of the new shows and found them all lacking. Let's look at what he had to say.

'The Mel Blanc Show' debuted September 3, 1946. The following May 17, Colgate-Palmolive announced it was withdrawing its sponsoring ship on June 24. The review is from September 21th.

### Radio Review

#### A VOICE GETS A PROGRAM

By JOHN CROSBY

Mel Blanc could only have happened in the last two decades, of the 20th century. In the 19th century, he would perhaps have been a ghost writer. Today, with the decline in popularity of the printed word and the simultaneous rise of the radio and the movies, he is a ghost voice. The requirements for a ghost voice are about the same as those for a ghost writer. You must have great assimilative powers, enormous versatility but no fixed personality.

Though you may never have heard of Mel Blanc you have unquestionably heard his voice. Out of his skilled larynx have come the voices of the train announcer on the Jack Benny program, Pedro on the Judy Canova show, Hubert Peabody on the Jack Carson program and Bugs Bunny and Porky the pig in the animated movie cartoons. He was also Private Snafu in those Army training films and did more performances for the Armed Forces Radio Service than anyone else.

After supporting virtually everyone in prominence in radio, Mr. Blanc now has his own program (CBS, 7:30 p.m., Tuesdays) in which he operates a fix-it shop. ("You bend it—we mend it.") I'm pleased to see Mr. Blanc break into the big time but I advise him to hang on to his other contracts.

#### PERSONALITY LACKING

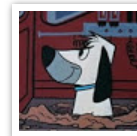
Mr. Blanc has thrown himself so wholeheartedly into the portrayal of Porky the Pig and his other voice characterizations that he doesn't seem to have any personality of his own. He reminded me of a certain great actress who was seated at dinner one night next to a producer I know. The next day the producer complained that the lady seemed to have no personality and employed instead bits and pieces from her various stage roles. "During the soup course, she was the Duchess of Malfi," he said. "When we got to the filet mignon, she'd become Candida. For desert she played one of those cockney guttersnipes."

It was a magnificent performance, he said, but he suffered from acute indigestion for three days.

In addition to schizophrenia the Mel Blanc program is afflicted by most of the clichés of radio comedy. As a fixiteer, Blanc is a sort of helpless pawn of society, whom I wouldn't trust with an electric toaster. He has a girl named Betty who is just everyone's kid sister. Somewhere along the way the night I listened, he was assaulted by a burlesque queen named Fifi.

#### VOCAL CHESS GAME

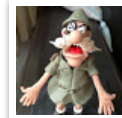
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## Blogs to See

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Spencer Jordan's amazing work... we are hoping artists like Ian

Knox...and families of these comic artists can see these gems... - made with fimo clay I had ago and its not very easy to do...

5 hours ago

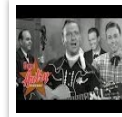
### Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



Vehicle Verification Centers of Mexico City will reopen in August with COVID

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandollera.com  
6 hours ago

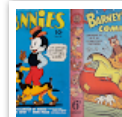
### Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

service of cowboy church. Today's musical selection begins with Gene Autry singing "Dear Hearts and Gentle Pe..."  
9 hours ago

### Termite Terrace headlines



Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! - OK so I've been doing some looking around. Bosko apparently had a comic book and I'm wondering if any of you know of

"Come on, sugar boy," is Fifi's approach to the male sex. In other words, the Mae West gambit.

"Ba hup ba hup ba hup," stutters the male in question, which is known as the Bert Lahr return to the Mae West gambit.

"We're all alone and after all you're a man and I'm a woman," was Fifi's next move. That play is optional. Some students of this pastime prefer "Come up and see me sometime" or even "Beulah, peel me a grape." Frankly, I'm not qualified to express a preference one way or the other. I haven't seen a burlesque show since 1931 and I have only the dimmest recollection of what they're like. Maybe burlesque queens act that way.

Later on, Mr. Blanc tangles with an efficiency expert who messes up his fixit shop in what sounded like one of Bert Lahr's old revue sketches. Among the other worn characters on this program is Uncle Rupert who has all the characteristics of Uncle Amos in the comic strips and talks like the Great Gildersleeve.

"Look at the cigar butt on the floor, Uncle Rupert. That's yours," says Blanc sternly.

"No, you saw it first," says Uncle Rupert genially.

I don't object to a certain amount of kleptomaniacism in radio shows but the Mel Blanc program has much too much of it. The authors have tried to cram too many old ideas in one half hour instead of being content with just one or two. About all I can say for the show is that it's good-natured and that the sound effects were wonderful.

The F.W. Fitch Company had sponsored two shows in the 1945 radio season, one being a Sunday night musical show called 'The Fitch Bandwagon' that NBC tried cancelling before the season began. After the season began, the sponsor doesn't appear to have been happy. A check of its magazine ads shows Dick Powell was moved from 'Rogue's Gallery' during the season to front the 'Bandwagon.' The following year, Fitch went a different direction, and Phil Harris and Alice Faye were signed to do a domestic sitcom, and sing a couple of songs over the music of Walter Scharf. It debuted September 29, 1946. Critic Crosby found it a little too domestic for his liking. The Faye-Harris review is from October 5th.

## Radio Review

### PHIL HARRISES AT HOME

By JOHN CROSBY

If the domestic felicity of Phil Harris, his wife, Alice Faye, and their daughter, whom they refer to as Baby Alice, as presented in a new comedy series (NBC, 4:30 p m. Sundays) is a reasonably accurate portrayal of what goes on after dark in Hollywood, we've all been grossly misinformed by the movie magazines.

I was under the impression, gained largely from a national movie magazine, that the movie folk spent most of their evenings at immense parties where they wore funny clothes and threw one another into the swimming pool. According to this new and intensely conjugal radio program it isn't like that at all.

In the new series, Harris kissed Mrs. Harris with a great deal of noisy enjoyment about 12 times.

Virtually every line exchanged between this devoted couple ended with the words "lover,"

"baby" or "honey." Harris favored "honey" almost exclusively though Miss Faye used all three impartially.

"You ain't givin' honey," murmured Phil after one of the early kisses. So they tried it again.

This marital concupiscence so stimulated Miss Faye that she sang "They Say It's Wonderful."

"Oh, honey, it's wonderful," breathed Harris.

"Look honey, something awful has happened," exclaimed Miss Faye, getting the plot into motion.

### BREAKING THE ICE

She explained that, in a moment of flagrant carelessness, she had run over Ingrid, Baby Alice's deeply beloved doll, and smashed it to bits. The task of breaking this news or somehow talking their way out of it was turned over to the man of the house. Hams shouldered the responsibility and went looking for Baby Alice, who was in the back yard making mud pies.

"Hello, Baby Alice," he said carefully

"Hello Daddy."

After beating around the bush a bit, Daddy told Baby Alice her dollie had fallen sick and had gone to the hospital. "When Ingrid comes home from the hospital, will she have a little dollie?" inquired Baby Alice.

"Why . . . no."

"Well, when Mummy goes to the hospital . . ."

"That's not the same thing," cried the desperate father.

The crisis was averted only temporarily. Baby Alice insisted on talking to her dollie in the hospital. A subterfuge was arranged but the clever child detected almost immediately that she wasn't talking to the nurse at the hospital but to Mummy on the upstairs extension.

### BIG PROBLEM UNSOLVED

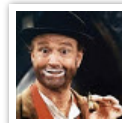
The scene switched to dinner which Miss Faye apparently cooked and served with her own hands (Don't



additional covers you could share! ...

18 hours ago

## Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Born on July 18, 1913 - Red Skelton - \*Today's post commences

with the Guzzler's Gin routine ...

1 day ago

## News From ME

Sorry... - As far as I know, I do not have any diseases. I just have too much to deal with right now so I won't be blogging much if at all. I'm postponing all the web...

2 days ago

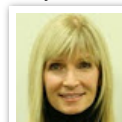
## Cartoon Research

In His Own Words: H.T. Kalmus on Disney in Technicolor - Suspended Animation #276 Many references may be found regarding two-strip Technicolor. I have been guilty of discussing Walter Lantz's King of Jazz (1930)...

2 days ago

## AFRTS Archive

Mary Turner 1985 - Mary Turner today Mary Turner really rocked the house.



Normally when any of the jocks got a reaction, it'd be split.

The ones

that were really liked wou...

4 days ago

## The World of Knight



TONIGHT, 11:54 PM. - COPYRIGHT 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT

4 days ago

## Yowp



Hanna-Barbera Birthday Did-You-Knows - 63 years ago today, some

forms were signed by George Sidney, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera creating what eventually became the biggest TV cartoon operation i...

1 week ago

## Supervised By Fred Avery: Tex Avery's Warner Brothers Cartoons

Wabbit Twouble: A Small Addendum to An Outstanding Podcast -

worry. They're probably heavily insured). From the grunts of enjoyment emitted by Harris it must have been quite a feed. But the problem of Ingrid still remained, and after dinner Mr. and Mrs. Harris repaired with heavy hearts to the nursery, where a child's music box played softly in the background. "How are my little girls tonight?" asked Miss Faye. (Don't ask me how that plural crept in. I don't know).

"Fine, Mummy," said Baby Alice.

To postpone the news about Ingrid just a moment longer, Harris told the story of Jack and the

Beanstalk with minor variations, though nothing that would upset any modern child. After that the deed couldn't be postponed any longer.

"Baby, I have a confession to make," said Harris "Ingrid, your little dollie, is not in the hospital."

#### SHE'S SOME KID

"I know," said the child casually. "I just didn't want Mummy to feel badly."

"Awwwww," said Alice, deeply moved.

"That's my sweet little girl," cried Phil, overwhelmed.

"Good night, Mummy! Good night, Daddy!"

"Good night, you little rascal you!"

That was about all. Alice and Phil, each busy with his or her separate thoughts, returned to the flickering fireplace. Alice, knowing full well what the answer would be asked Phil how he would like to spend the evening.

"I'd just like to sit here with you," replied her husband. "Let's get cozy."

There was the sound of a lingering kiss, the first one in 15 minutes, and the music rose to a throbbing crescendo.

Has anyone got a handkerchief?

Colgate-Palmolive announced in July 1946 it was replacing Bob Burns with Dennis Day, who debuted October 3, 1946. The company maintained sponsorship of his show into the early '50s. It's interesting Crosby's review of November 12th compares Day to non-singing, non-mimicking Alan Young, who was on the air for rival Bristol-Myers, but it was for good reason.

#### Radio Review

##### Innocence Their Forte

By JOHN CROSBY

Somewhere in the first minutes of the new Dennis program (NBC, 6:30 p.m., Thursdays), Day, who works in the drugstore in Weaverville, gets the rat poison mixed up with Mrs. Anderson's cough medicine.

"Which one will make me stop coughing?" asks Mrs. Anderson.

"They both will," say Day.

"Young man, I never expected to see such stupidity in this store."

"You couldn't help it. I'm here all the time."

Dennis Day is, of course, that nice, under-paid tenor who has been pushed around these many years on the Jack Benny program. From the scrap of dialogue above, you'll observe he hasn't changed a great deal on his new program. (Incidentally, the word "new" is used in the sense that anything less than five years old on the radio is new. Mr. Day has been around for some time.)

#### PATTERN IS RIGID

"A Day In the Life of Dennis Day," a title which I suppose was inevitable, follows a pattern as rigid as the Greek unities and almost as old. Mr. Day plays the part of a dewy-eyed, open-hearted young man whose innocence perpetually gets him into trouble, something like the Victorian heroines of yore, though naturally the trouble is of a different nature. The same formula is used with varying success on the Alan Young show, the Eddie Bracken show and a number of other radio series whose names I can't at the moment recall. Assisting Mr. Day into and out of his difficulties are Mr. Willoughby, the druggist; Mrs. Anderson, the strong-willed mother of Dennis' girl; her weak-kneed husband, and a villain named Victor. The last time I paid attention, Dennis was involved in trying to get a room in Mrs. Anderson's boarding-house. After that rat poison incident, Mrs. Anderson was naturally reluctant to have him around. Somehow Dennis got talked into climbing a ladder into Mrs. Anderson's room, leading to one of those P. G. Wodehouse situations of misrepresented identity. Mrs. Anderson mistakes him for a burglar and tries to rouse her husband to combat.

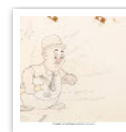
#### COMEDY SAMPLE

"Let's not be hasty, dear," says that unfortunate. "He may be armed."

"Oh, no, sir!" says Dennis.

"You stay out of this," snaps the husband.

That's a fair sample of the comedy which is intermittently funny. Besides a pretty flair for comedy, Day has a couple of other assets. One is a knack for imitations, which is worked into the script as often as is decently



Original animation drawing from Wabbit Twouble with color notations

for the ink and paint department. Release date: 12/20/41 Availability: Looney Tunes Gol...  
3 weeks ago

#### Mark Kausler's CatBlog

[The Lady and the Tiger](#) - From the Cathy Hill Archive of Unpublished Comics comes "The Lady and the Tiger". This story was drawn before Cathy started the "Mad Raccoons" series. U...  
4 weeks ago

#### What About Thad?

[Cartoon Logic Podcast](#) - And yet another distraction from this brick and mortar blog... I've entered the world of podcasting with renowned animation director and historian Bob Jaques...  
10 months ago



#### Likely Looney, Mostly Merrie

[That's all, folks!](#) - My posts have gotten thinner over the years. I'm aware of that. I've been hopeful for a long time, that I can remain active with blogging and sharing furth...  
1 year ago



#### Dr. Grob's Animation Review

[The Flying Man](#) - 'The Flying Man' is a very short absurdist film in which a man drops his coat to take a swim in mid air. Another man with a dog drops by, tries the same th...  
2 days ago

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possible, and the other is a pleasant tenor voice, a refreshing change from all the baritones on the air.

Like all these programs, the Day show could stand a touch of tartness to counter-balance all that sweetness and light. The writers ought to take a trip out to Weaverville sometime and meet some of the unpleasant people like old Ben, the sourpuss who runs the store, or Harrigan, the bartender who hates everybody.

If you listen closely, you can detect about one degree of difference between the Alan Young show (NBC 8:30 p.m., Fridays) and the Day show. Mr. Young got there fast and his program is tuned a little more sharply. Its nonsense is more outrageous than the Day program and consequently funnier. It also boasts the presence of Herbert [sic] Updike III, a Harvard snob, with an intense distaste for the lower classes. GEE WHIZZ SCHOOL

"Alan, hand the butler your hat and coat so he can boil them," he's likely to say. "I want you to meet Mother and Dad. They're out in the garden letting the orchids smell them."

Young, one of the younger and more promising comedians in radio, adheres to the "Gee whizz" school of comedy and is just as guileless as Day or any of the rest of those young men. He's a very good comedian, however, and his program is an amiable half hour, if you don't hear it too often.

These programs are all more or less interchangeable like some car parts and there isn't much point in listening to more than one of them. In fact, if something happened to Mr. Young unexpectedly, I imagine Mr. Day could be rushed into his place at a moment's notice without anyone outside of the studio audience detecting the difference.

Fortunately for Crosby, the Harris show evolved past the saccharine lovey-dovey stuff, and started figuring out the direction it wanted to go in, with Lewis and Tetley added to the cast before a switch of sponsors and then writers.

The reason the Harris show succeeds for me (though I still have some problems with Phil's "domestication") because is it built on the Harris scenario from the Benny show, not just the character. If Harris were to have his own show, we'd expect a retired-from-pictures Alice there. And a boozy, dumb Frank Remley. And they're there, so the show has a familiarity from the start. Day is like he's in an alternate universe. I'd love to have heard a show including Verna Felton as his mother and built around that. Instead, he's in a different town, with a different occupation, with a bunch of radio clichés as supporting characters. Crosby hits on the problem with Blanc's show. Blanc's character is a zero. You know a show's in trouble when it has to open by reminding the audience the star is a funny guy. There's not a lot for Blanc to do than his accents and cartoon voices, and this show isn't the framework for it. Supporting characters are tired, one-dimensional types heard everywhere on radio comedies, including Alan Young's show.

Oh, there was someone else connected with the Benny show to get his own show in 1946. We'll look at that failure in another post.

Posted by Yowp at 00:33



Labels: Jack Benny, John Crosby

## 2 comments:



**J Lee** 4 March 2012 at 05:55

What this reminds you is the idea of spinning off a popular character into their own series didn't originate with Fred Silverman at CBS in the early 1970s.

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▼ Replies



**Tim Lones** 14 March 2012 at 17:33

It's been said that the first "spinoff" was The Great Gildersleeve from Fibber McGee And Molly in 1941

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