



Sunday, 27 May 2012

## The New Writer

This past week, the last of Jack Benny's radio writers passed away. You can read a nice little profile of Al Gordon [HERE](#). (The story has Gordon and Hal Goldman misidentified in its accompanying photo, judging by the 1960 photo caption to the right and another newspaper photo from the same year).

Gordon and writing partner Goldman joined the Benny show in 1950. You'd think the job would be cinch. By then, Jack, his cast and his secondary players had all settled into tried-and-tested characterisations and routines. It would seem that all the writers had to do was pick a few of them from the buffet, slap them together in a show, then pick a few different ones next week and do it all over again. It wasn't quite that easy.

Newspaper syndicate writer Charles Witbeck did a couple of feature stories in 1960 about Gordon and Benny's other writers in the television era. (One wonders if Witbeck simply had plenty of material so he banked some of it for use during a fallow period). Perhaps the most interesting thing is Benny trusted his writers' judgement over his own, at least a lot of the time.

This story appeared in papers starting January 5.

### Jack Benny's Writers Live 'In A Happy Rut'

By CHARLES WITBECK

"The happy rut" is what four well-paid writers call working for Jack Benny.

Working for Benny is a career, a lifetime job, or so it would seem by Hollywood writing standards. Two writers, Sam Perrin and George Balzer, have been making up lines on Jack's stinginess for 17 years. Hal Goldman and Al Gordon are the youngsters who say they're "carrying the old men" with 11 years of service. Perrin, Balzer, Gordon and Goldman have been with Benny so long they think like him. They should by now. Furthermore, they know each other so well, one writer often will say word for word what another is thinking of. Generally all four are talking at once, and there are continual interruptions.

In a Beverly Hills office that Goldman describes as turning a dark shade of red, the four sit and dream up Benny half-hour shows and his hour specials. This is done by dictating to a secretary.

"She's the real writer," says Sam Perrin.

"She picks out what she likes best," said Hal Goldman.

How can she tell what to use when all are talking at once?

"Whatever comes in clearest," answered Balzer. "She can tell by the tone of something thrown whether it should be ignored or not, and by our attitude."

#### Always Interrupting

"If after three words a guy isn't interrupted, it's OK," was Perrin's definition.

Since the men are so used to interrupting, they feel ill at ease when there is silence and often three will let one writer go on and on until he pleads for help.

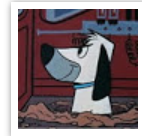
It takes from seven to nine days for the four to do a half-hour TV show and they put in a regular eight-hour, five-day schedule. There are days when nothing much happens and the men are stuck with a problem of coming up with the right material, say, for a guest.

These days of famine, seen in another light, are called "the will to play golf" by elder statesman Perrin, who in



BOSS TELLS JOKE — Jack Benny gets off a fast one and his writers laugh it up. Perhaps it's a joke they've written for Benny. From left to right are Hal Goldman, George Balzer, Jack Benny, Al Gordon and Sam Perrin.

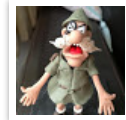
## About Me



[View my complete profile](#)

## Blogs to See

### Peter Gray's Comics and Art



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...

4 hours ago

### Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



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

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandollercartoons.com

6 hours ago

### Movies with Michael

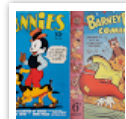


Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

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

his 17 years with Benny has never been out a day.

### No Panic

Failure to solve a problem doesn't bring panic. The men feel if you don't do it today, you'll get it tomorrow. They go home to their wives and swimming pools (one, Al Gordon, doesn't own a pool the others claim he sells pool water to them), and don't fret. "But I think at home, not at the office," said Gordon.

"For instance, we had Jack Paar as a guest not long ago." Balzer said. "We were into eleven pages of a sketch with Paar and it wasn't right for him. So we took it 'and found it would fit George Burns perfectly. We never throw anything away."

### Benny Judges

Noawadays four men do most of the writing and then Benny comes in to listen and judge. In the beginning during the early radio days, Jack sat in with the men. Now he trusts them. Jack knows what he wants and all four respect his good ear. They also need him in any arguments over material. Any side that Jack goes to wins. "We retain privileges," said Goldman, "you tell Jack why you like a joke and sometimes that convinces him. "And there are lines that you put in the script because you know in reading Jack will pencil out. so you just throw the line at him. If he likes it he will use it."

Probably the best thing about Benny and his writers, besides the fact all like each other, is that Jack doesn't keep score on who suggests what. He doesn't care. This eliminates rivalry.

After finishing a script, the men know what will get laughs and what should get laughs and they're seldom wrong. When a laugh doesn't come over as expected, they have a way out. "Anything that lays dead is an ad lib," is their alibi.

Their knowledge of what strikes the public's funny bone has to be fairly accurate. "Otherwise we'd lose our annuities," said Al Gordon.

With that announcement, seniority leader Sam Perrin looked at his watch, borrowed a couple of pills from the group doctor, Hal Goldman, and then led the three boys back to the office where they would be locked up for the afternoon. There was no "will to play golf" in evidence.

This is from the *Modesto Bee*, November 21, 1960.

## Jack Benny, Writers Have Chuckles While Rehearsing Television Show

On Monday mornings at 10 o'clock in Beverly Hills, Jack Benny, announcer Don Wilson, four writers, singers and guest actors hold a reading for taping the following Sunday Benny show.

The reading takes all of 35 minutes interspersed with the loudest laughs from portly Don Wilson, followed by Benny's chuckles and then the writers'. Benny is known to be a great audience and lives up to it during a reading.

The weekly session is mere routine to the whole group which has been with Benny so long. In a sense they're all company men. Don Wilson is on his 27th year with Jack; Rochester has been around since 1937, and writers Sam Perrin and George Balzer began 18, years ago. The other two writers, Hal Goldman and Al Gordon, are the newcomers, with only 11 years to their credit.

A few minutes after 10 o'clock recently, after the men had settled down, Jack began reading his opening monologue. He added pauses and it sounded as if he were on stage or doing a radio show. At the end he said, "It isn't long enough."

Writer Sam Perrin nodded, and said they'd fix that up and Benny continued. Dennis Day began reading about how he thought this was the opening show for the season. Jack explained that he had already done the opening. Then Dennis read: "Well, I've got to hand it to you, you've sure got a lot of guts," referring to the fact that Benny had the gall to do an opening without Dennis.

Benny almost fell out of his chair laughing at this line. The others joined in, but Benny's guffaw was the biggest. The reading went on with the writers and Don Wilson laughing here and there.

When they came to a commercial involving a bagpiper dressed in kilts, Benny questioned a line about the raising of kilts. Jack wondered whether it was in good taste and the writers offered substitutes. It wasn't decided what would be done.

"We'll fool around with this later," said Sam Perrin. Jack nodded and then decided to kid Perrin. "Let's fool around with it now. It's my show." There was more laughter and the reading continued.

At 10:35 o'clock Jack read the last line on page 33 and then got up and walked around. "This is a very good show roughly," he said. "It's too long but all our shows are too long at the reading." While others were talking and he was thinking, Jack pulled a few dollar bills from his pocket. He counted them, put them back in his pocket, said a few words and went into his office.

Sitting behind his desk in an office covered with plaques, Jack talked about guests like Arthur Godfrey, Joey Bishop, the James Stewarts and Dan Duryea.

"We're also going to do a show about Fatso (Don Wilson) since he's been with me for 27 years and I think it's

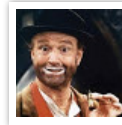


JACK BENNY

additional covers you could share! ...

17 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

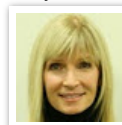
### Cartoon Research

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

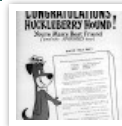
### The World of Knight



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 -

very funny.”

Jack was going to have his wife Mary Livingston on the opening program, but Mary was very nervous about it, and finally Jack told her she didn’t have to do it. It was a huge relief to Mary who never does a live show, or a taped one for that matter, so it is doubtful if fans will see Mary at all this season.

Switching over from a twice-a-month show to a weekly series isn’t bothering Benny a bit. “We have 11 shows in the can already,” he said, “and we’re not panicky.” Jack will even do three concerts in Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Cleveland. While talking about the concerts, Jack suddenly got an idea and rushed out of the room. He wanted to make sure plugs for the concerts would be put in the shows the week before.

**Idea First**

“I’m glad I thought of that,” he said, re-entering the room. He sat down and leaned back. “Care for a cigar?” I shook my head and Jack continued.

“You know my writers prefer doing a weekly show. It keeps their hand in. The reason isn’t financial. They’re paid the same amount regardless.

“Also this year we’re not doing any specials. Those took a lot of time.”

Asked if the Marquis Chimps would be back, Benny smiled. “Maybe, if we can get the right approach. You know the good thing about that show, the one with the chimps, was that the rest of the show was good. If only the monkey had been good we would have had a lousy show.

“Our problem as always is to find the right thing for the guest. If we can’t, we don’t do it. With those writers the idea comes first and then the guests.”

The company men are working harder this year, but they don’t show it. Benny says he isn’t running any faster this season than last.

“I still get out to play golf,” he says. “If I can keep those guys off my neck.”

Gordon wrote jokes for Benny, but Benny had a little joke about him. He dubbed Gordon and partner Hal Goldman “the new writers”, and still called them that even 20 years later when they were writing Jack’s TV specials.

Goldman died in 2001. As for the “old” writers, George Balzer passed away in 2006 and Sam Perrin in 1998. They had written the radio show with John Tackaberry, who died in 1969, and Milt Josefsberg, who passed away in 1987. Gordon’s death this week, in a way, marks the end of an era for Benny’s still large fan-base, and reminds us that character-based comedy can stand the test of time, even from that brief period known as the Golden Age of Radio.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [08:09](#)


Labels: [Jack Benny](#)



No comments:

Post a comment

Enter your comment...

 Comment as: 

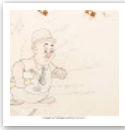
Garth (Google) ▼

Sign out

Publish

Preview

☐ Notify me




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

Blog Archive

- ▶ [2020](#) (216)
- ▶ [2019](#) (376)
- ▶ [2018](#) (379)
- ▶ [2017](#) (380)
- ▶ [2016](#) (396)
- ▶ [2015](#) (389)
- ▶ [2014](#) (390)
- ▶ [2013](#) (388)
- ▼ [2012](#) (397)
  - ▶ [December](#) (39)
  - ▶ [November](#) (34)
  - ▶ [October](#) (32)
  - ▶ [September](#) (34)

[Newer Post](#) [Home](#) [Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

- ▶ [August](#) (33)
- ▶ [July](#) (34)
- ▶ [June](#) (34)
- ▼ [May](#) (31)
  - [This Stuff's Been Cut](#)
  - [The Fall of Sara Berner](#)
  - [When Mickey Was Fun](#)
  - [Touché and Go](#)
  - [The New Writer](#)
  - [Keeshan and Cartoons](#)
  - [Riff Raffy Daffy](#)
  - [Build a Gag, Kill a Duck](#)
  - [The Rise of Sara Berner](#)
  - [Snow Business Mouse](#)
  - [Ub's Thumb](#)
  - [Benny on Comedy, Characters and Concerts](#)
  - [The Disney of France is Hungarian](#)
  - [A Walter Lantz Shortcut](#)
  - [Droopyville](#)
  - [Miss Brooks 101](#)
  - [That'll Fix You](#)
  - [The Mice Sing La-La-La](#)
  - [The Same Old Jack](#)
  - [Wanted: Stars For Leon](#)
  - [Meow Wow!](#)
  - [Ub's Surprise](#)
  - [Marvin Miller's Millions](#)
  - [A Tail Sandwich Tale](#)
  - [Acme Bat-Man](#)
  - [Durante's Schnozz at 30](#)
  - [Ernie Pyle on Disney](#)
  - [Giraffe of Tomorrow](#)
  - [Baby Bottleneck Boom](#)
  - [80 Years of the Jack Benny Show](#)
  - [Oh, no, Lumbago!](#)
- ▶ [April](#) (32)
- ▶ [March](#) (31)
- ▶ [February](#) (29)
- ▶ [January](#) (34)
- ▶ [2011](#) (106)

Labels

- [Aline Mosby](#) (17)
- [Art Davis](#) (33)
- [Bad Luck Blackie](#) (9)

[Bob and Ray](#) (10)

[Bob Clampett](#) (82)

[Bob McKimson](#) (59)

[Bob Thomas](#) (53)

[Chuck Jones](#) (142)

[Columbia](#) (33)

[Counterfeit Cat](#) (8)

[Cynthia Lowry](#) (26)

[Dick Thomas](#) (14)

[Don Patterson](#) (17)

[Earl Wilson](#) (6)

[Erskine Johnson](#) (37)

[Felix the Cat](#) (27)

[Film Daily](#) (50)

[Fleischer](#) (154)

[Frank Tashlin](#) (24)

[Fred Allen](#) (43)

[Fred Brunish](#) (11)

[Friz Freleng](#) (137)

[Gene Deitch](#) (18)

[George Pal](#) (10)

[Grant Simmons](#) (4)

[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (99)

[Hanna-Barbera](#) (2)

[Harman-Ising](#) (61)

[Henry Morgan](#) (13)

[Irv Spence](#) (8)

[Jack Benny](#) (454)

[Jay Ward](#) (30)

[Jimmy Durante](#) (17)

[John Crosby](#) (84)

[John Sutherland](#) (28)

[Johnny Johnsen](#) (27)

[Kenny Baker](#) (6)

[King-Size Canary](#) (8)

[Laugh-In](#) (11)

[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (6)

[Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)

[Magical Maestro](#) (9)

[Maurice Noble](#) (12)

[Mel-O-Toons](#) (4)

[MGM](#) (553)

[Norm McCabe](#) (5)

[Pat Matthews](#) (10)

[Paul Julian](#) (13)

[Paul Terry](#) (2)

[Sara Berner](#) (5)

[Screwy Squirrel](#) (34)

[Spider-Man](#) (1)

[Terrytoons](#) (84)

[Tex Avery](#) (468)

[Tom and Jerry Human](#) (29)

- [Tralfaz Sunday Theatre](#) (17)
- [Ub Iwerks](#) (80)
- [UPA](#) (57)
- [Van Beuren](#) (94)
- [Vernon Scott](#) (42)
- [Virginia MacPherson](#) (14)
- [Walt Disney](#) (145)
- [Walter Lantz](#) (241)
- [Warner Bros.](#) (586)
- [Who Killed Who](#) (10)

