



Sunday, 15 July 2012

Fred Allen Talks Television

Fred Allen once remarked (and I'm paraphrasing from an appearance on "The Big Show") that television was called a medium because "nothing is well done, or very rarely."

Allen spent years complaining about network radio, but then when television started killing the medium he complained about, he complained about that, too.

TV and Allen didn't mix, though it wasn't for a lack of trying from those broadcasting executives that Allen constantly ridiculed. They gave him a variety show. It worked for him in radio, but not television. They gave him a Groucho-like quiz show where he could ad-lib with ordinary people. It worked for him in radio, but not television. Finally, they put him on the panel of "What's My Line" where, again, he could ad-lib. It worked for him as best as it could. But Allen's reputation for ad-libbing completely overshadowed the fact his radio show was carefully scripted, much of it by Allen himself, week after week. Ad-libs were only the icing on the dessert, not the main course. That was all lost when he went to television. He simply couldn't be the same one-man band he was in radio.



Allen harangued about television to anyone who would listen, and *New York Herald-Tribune* columnist John Crosby, who shared with Allen intolerance for the mundane and inane, gave him a chance to make fun of TV in some one-liners. The column is from May 9, 1950, when Allen was still appearing on "The Big Show" with Tallulah Bankhead on NBC. To give you a bit of background, Douglas MacArthur was fired by President Truman on April 11. CBS and RCA both developed different colour TV transmission processes; RCA's was compatible with black and white TV sets. Televised broadcasts of major league baseball were given as one reason for the decline in minor league baseball in the '50s as league after league folded. And as for which Ralph Edwards show is being referred to, it's your guess. "This is Your Life" wasn't on TV at that point, I'm presuming it's "Truth or Consequences," which opened with loud shrieks of laughs from the studio audience being panned by the camera.

Radio and Television

By FRED ALLEN

John Crosby is in Europe on vacation. In his absence his column will be written by friends.

Television is here to stay—and so is General MacArthur.

In the beginning, God worked six days and created the Earth. Today, 1 director, 1 scenic designer, 8 writers, 4 painters, 6 carpenters, 5 wardrobe women, 4 cameramen, 4 assistants, 2 floor managers, 8 chorus girls, 10 actors, 6 electricians, 18 stagehands and 20 musicians work six days and create a mediocre television show.

In Chicago, during 1950, a crime was committed every 12 1/2 minutes.

(Criminals on TV crime shows claim they could have beaten this record if they didn't have to stop for commercials.)

The Western Union Telegraph Company has formed a subsidiary to install and service television receivers. (If you come home some night and see a messenger boy on your roof—there is no reason to stop drinking.)

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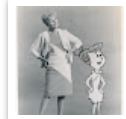


May 1940 - You couldn't blame David Sarnoff if he

mumbled some uncomplimentary comments at the F.C.C. in May of 1940. The Commission made two rulings, basically tell...

23 hours ago

Yowp



Wilma - Jean Vander Pyl didn't have a big name on

television when she was cast to play Wilma Flintstone in 1960. The others were a bit different. Bea Benaderet ap...

3 weeks ago

Blogs to See

Termite Terrace headlines



Today's Post: The 1964 World's Fair Documentary and other

64 World's Fair stuff - This documentary is quite good. Most of you have probably already seen it, but I'm sharing it here anyways. While I'm add it, why not share some ...

10 minutes ago

The National Credit Office, Inc., reports that 70 percent of consumer purchases of television receivers are on an installment basis.

(The size of a TV actor's audience has nothing to do with his ability—it is determined by the Finance Company's collections.)

To cover the recent demonstration for General MacArthur the various networks had more than 500 technicians and \$2,500,000 worth of TV equipment in the streets.

(Many radio actors wish the networks would leave them there).

The Supreme Court will shortly rule on whether the CBS or RCA system will be used for color television.

(Meantime, both TV networks will operate in one color—red.)

According to a survey, conducted by a Northwestern University professor, teen-age youths are reading less because of television.

(In most American homes the 20-inch screen is replacing the five-foot shelf.)

The newspaper critic's scathing review of a TV show is hate's labor lost.

(The minute a program is finished the viewer at home forms his opinion of the actors and their wares. The critic's pernicious monograph, appearing in the paper the following morning, is too late to serve a purpose. It is merely the obituary of a departed charade.)

Television is keeping so many baseball fans away from one minor league park that the teams are only playing with seven men.

(The other two players sit in the stands so there will be somebody to watch the games.)

A Boston incident. Excited by something it saw on a television program, a Doberman-Pinscher bit his six-year-old master.

(It's logical—the dog couldn't turn the set off—it did the next best thing.)

A special committee of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters reports it will attempt to raise necklines in television.

(Faye Emerson is sure going to look incognito in a turtle-neck evening gown.)

One columnist wonders why most TV directors have those short haircuts.

(TV directors wear crew cuts to keep the actors from getting in their hair.)

There are so many college men working in television any office door can be opened with a fraternity key.

A Cleveland Transit System board member blames television for trolley line's deficit.

(Television may be going places but the people who are looking at it aren't).

One TV survey outfit has a new electro-mechanical system that eliminates calling viewers by phone.

(Today there are so many surveys calling set owners that the set owners are starting to call the surveys — and what they are calling them threatens to reach a new high in sulphurous invective. Some of the phrases contain so much sulphur if they are rubbed on a hard surface the words will give off a dull blue flame.)

In South Bend, a TV antenna fell across a 27,000-volt power line with some amazing results. Balls of fire bounced up and down on the roof with thunderous explosions; the telephone burned out; a glove lying in the yard burst into flames; the plumbing began throwing off sparks and pipes melted around the kitchen sink.

(The family was not alarmed. They thought it was the Ralph Edwards' TV show starting.)

I'd like to think if Fred Allen had lived longer—he died in 1956—the right venue on the tube could have been found for him. But he never looked comfortable on camera. Some radio people are meant for radio. Allen always wanted to be a writer and, considering the calibre of two autobiographies he put together in the '50s, his right venue may have been a publisher's doorstep.

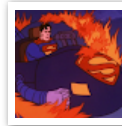
Posted by Yowp at 07:21



Labels: Fred Allen

4 comments:

Movies with Michael



The World's
Greatest
Super
Friends:
Lex Luthor
Strikes

Back (1979) - A wonderful episode. In this episode, Lex Luthor escapes from prison by switching places with Lois Lane. After escaping he captures each of the Supe...

1 hour ago

Fernando Llera Cartoons



CONAGUA'
s
cybersecurit
y payments
found
unverified

by ASF's 2002 audit. -

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3 hours ago

Pete Hale



My First
Carl Barks -
I decided to
become a
cartoonist
last year, so

I started reading some old "animal" comic strips and books for study and enjoyment. I've already tried out...

7 hours ago

News From ME

Today's Video Link - We haven't had any Tom Lehrer on this site in many years so let's rectify that. Here he is on one of David Frost's eighty zillion TV shows in Great Britain...

12 hours ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Tomorrow
Afternoon
at Niles:
Silent Era
Animation
and Jerry

Beck -

1 day ago

AFRTS Archive



Your
audience
awaits! -
Many of us
saved a
tape or

acetate or two. There are a lot of people that would like to hear them again. The airchecks from AFN/AFKN/SCN etc usually t...

1 day ago



J Lee 16 July 2012 at 11:24

Stylistically, Allen was the forerunner of the more cynical style of comic that became popular by the end of the 1960s on TV, but weren't as highly sought after during the medium's first 20-plus or so years, as the idea was to put on a happy face that would satisfy everyone on the limited number of channels available. The narrowcasting of TV over the past 30 year's would have been better suited towards finding a home for Fred's type of comedy.

[Reply](#)

Fred Allen 17 July 2012 at 07:27

Great article and some hilarious quotes by Fred Allen. This webpage also discusses Fred Allens' displeasure at the new television medium (including his last "What's My Line" appearance before his death: <http://www.fredallen.org/television.html>)

[Reply](#)

Anonymous 8 April 2014 at 14:51

As pointed out, Fred would have fit right in during post-1970s television, but in the 1950s the TV networks wanted happy, toothy grinned people who thought everything was just fabulous and didn't use a lot of big words.

There is a reason why Art Linkletter was one of the biggest TV stars of the 1950s! Blech!

[Reply](#)



Yowp 8 April 2014 at 19:41

Unfortunately, Anon, Fred just didn't look comfortable on TV. Compare his quiz show hosting to Groucho's. Even on his first appearance on What's My Line, he acts he's not even sure he should be there. It boils down to he wasn't really ready for TV and TV wasn't really ready for him.

[Reply](#)



Enter comment



The Exposure Sheet



A Taste of What's to Come - Hey guys! I'll be out of town this

weekend, and due to this trip, I decided to push back my next planned post to Monday, so I have some more time to iron ...

2 days ago



Cartoon Research

New York State of Mind: The 35th Anniversary of "Oliver & Company" - An excellent "warm-up lap" for the artistic leaps and box-office blowouts on the horizon for Disney.

2 days ago

Mark Kausler's CatBlog

Felix Vs. A Spy From Brigandia - In these Felix strips from 4-24 to 5-7-32, Felix returns from the Moon, only to encounter a spy from the kingdom of Brigandia, who wants to steal all the p...

6 days ago

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Felix and the Snakecycle

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Scully

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Reckless Driver Outlines

Porky the Fireman

TV Needs More J.P.
Patches

What to do with Adolf

Disney and his Big Bad
Wolf

Music by Screwy Squirrel

San Francisco, Giddyap
Style

The One Failure of Arnold
Stang

Hot Spot Backgrounds

Balloon Land

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and Old Drawings

Bugs as Groucho Smear

Excited City Wolf

Jim Backus, Radio and
Recovery

The Loose Nut Explosion

Wacky Blackout Title
Drawings

An Oscar-Winning Boy
Scout

Jack Benny and Gracie
Allen

I'll Have the Mashed
Potatoes De Guard

William Schallert

A Fish!

Yankee Doodle Mouse

It Started With a Football

Nancy the American
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Northwest Hounded
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Doris Singleton

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