

Wednesday, 14 November 2012

## Fred Allen Sees Oblivion

Fred Allen's radio show came to an end on June 26, 1949 and it was probably a relief for all concerned. Allen was tired and doctors ordered a rest. His ratings were down. Network radio was dying; network television was taking off. And despite NBC probably being fed up with Allen's on-air putdowns of broadcast entertainment in general and the network in particular, they knew he had star power and kept him under contract during his sabbatical.

Allen didn't have a weekly platform for his views on radio and television any more, so he took his opinions to the press. In interviews, Allen wasn't always satiric, he was bitter, bordering on morose at times. We're going to post two of them, one today and one next week. They were published about five weeks apart, written by different columnists on opposite sides of the U.S.

John Crosby of the *New York Herald Tribune* syndicate knew he could fill space just by asking Allen about the shape of radio and nascent TV. So he did. This was published December 6, 1949. See if anything has changed.

### Radio In Review

By JOHN CROSBY

#### Unemployed Actor

HAD lunch with Fred Allen the other day to find out how it feels to be an unemployed actor. "I feel like God on the seventh day." He was chomping his customary lettuce leaf at his customary table at the Plaza. Allen has just had a bout of illness which left him 20 pounds lighter.

On him, it looks good. (I ought to point out this unemployment is voluntary. Fred, at the insistence of his doctors, is taking a year off.)

"It's wonderful, this freedom. You can live on the money you save on aspirin," he remarked cheerfully.

"The only trouble is I keep thinking of jokes and I don't know what to do with them. I thought of one the other day. 'These days the price of coffee will keep you awake.' Well, that joke has been keeping me awake. I don't know what to do with it. I wish you'd take it off my hands."

HE NODDED pleasantly at a lady who had smiled at him from across the room.

"I have to be very careful. My public has shrunk to such an extent that I have to be polite to all of them. I say hello to people in sewers. You know, I went off the air once before—back in 1944. We got three letters deploring it.

"This time we're way ahead of that. I think we got fifteen. Man spends seventeen years in this business trying to build it up, and he goes off the air and who cares? People still write me for tickets. They think I'm still on the air. I think they have me confused with Red Skelton. It makes a man bitter."

He chomped some more lettuce, reflectively.

"I had 17 years. You don't even do that to land. You wouldn't plow the same land for seventeen years without giving it a rest. But radio does it to comedians.

"ANYHOW, I'LL be ready for the welfare state when it arrives — not working. Most of you working people will be terribly ill at ease for awhile but I'll be used to it."

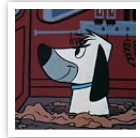
In spite of all this talk about retirement, Allen has a contract with NBC which will restore him either to radio or put him on television next Fall. He doesn't know which yet but he thinks there's no point in thinking about radio any more.

"They're cutting the budgets way down. With a small budget you can't put a show like mine on the air without reducing the standards you set for yourself."

Allen is one of the most rabid as well as one of the most critical of television fans. We turned to that.

"You can make more money in bed than you can in television. They ought to turn the cameras on the stagehands. They make more money than the actors.

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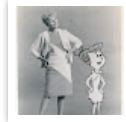


May 1940 - You couldn't blame David Sarnoff if he

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 Documenta

ry 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 ...

15 minutes ago

"WHEN YOU SEE Kukla, Fran and Ollie come alive on that little screen, you realize you don't need great big things as we had in radio. They ought to get one of these African fellows over here to shrink all the actors. We're all too big for this medium.

"What gets me is why they haven't sold the Dave Garroway show. Whoever does that show is turning out real television: he's creating something for television.

Berle isn't doing anything for television. He's photographing a vaudeville act. That's what they're all doing.

"Even 'The Goldbergs', which has been so well received, gets tiresome after you see it four or five times. You know what the uncle is going to do and you know what the kids are going to do.

"THE TROUBLE with television is it's too graphic. In radio, even a moron could visualize things his way: an intelligent man, his way. It was a custom-made suit. Television is a ready-made suit. Everyone has to wear the same one.

"Everything is for the eye these days—'Life,' 'Look,' the picture business. Nothing is for the mind. The next generation will have eyeballs as big as canteloupes and no brain at all."

Allen has been trotting around sampling opinion on television in some effort to find out what people like.

"I talked to the oysterman at Grand Central the other day," he remarked morosely. "He likes everything on television. Even Maurey Amsterdam looks good after staring at oysters all day long.

"That's one of the reasons you don't have color television. You'd catch all the actors blushing at the things they have to say. One thing I can't understand—all this advertising of television sets on television. If you see the ad, you already own a television set.

"WE ALL HAVE a great problem—Benny, Hope, all of us. We don't know how to duplicate our success in radio. We found out how to cope with radio and, after 17 years, you know pretty well what effect you're achieving.

"But those things won't work in television. Jack Benny's sound effects, Fibber's closet — they won't be funny in television. We don't know what will be funny or even whether our looks are acceptable.

He nodded at another fan across the room.

"Middle-aged," he commented. "I notice all the people who come up to me are middle-aged. No kids. I've played to three generations on radio and in show business. Now I've got to grapple with a fourth."



Posted by Yowp at 12:51



Labels: Fred Allen

## 2 comments:



**Jeff Kallman** 14 November 2012 at 17:17

Fred Allen was a national treasure. A few months after Crosby published this article, Allen found himself practically the unofficial co-host of Tallulah Bankhead's "The Big Show," and continued his caustic zaps at the de-evolution of broadcast intelligence.

[Reply](#)



**J Lee** 14 November 2012 at 21:32

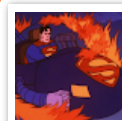
Lots of Boomer-aged types think their generation invented 'cynical' humor, or at the very least no one did it before they discovered Lenny Bruce, National Lampoon and later Saturday Night Live. Allen's humor could be just as biting, but made (NBC censors notwithstanding) radio-friendly. In a way, he's more of a role model for many of today's talk show host comedians than Johnny Carson was.

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### 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 cybersecurity payments found unverified**

by ASF's 2002 audit. -

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fernandollera.com

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

**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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