

Sunday, 25 November 2012

Ban Gaslight!

The film industry has always had a boogie man, living in fear over something it feels will kill it or, at the very least, take away potential profits. At one time, it was television. Studios even banned their stars under contract from the small screen (which delayed Red Skelton's move from radio to TV). Finally, they realised how short-sighted this was and how there was money and publicity to be made from television. In between those years, Jack Benny got caught in the stupidity.

Before it became, more or less, a sitcom in the late '40s, the Benny radio show used to parody movies. One of them was "Gaslight," the 1944 Ingrid Bergman thriller. Bergman re-enacted her role in Benny's send-up a year later. When television rolled around, Benny's writers handily lifted material from old radio scripts and re-worked it for the small screen. And that's where Jack ran into trouble because of paranoia coupled with legal opinion.

Here's a column from the National Enterprise Association dated December 27, 1958 about how a Benny TV broadcast was delayed almost six years. Can you picture such a thing happening today?

Jack Benny Finally Ready for TV Satire on 'Gaslight'

By ERSKINE JOHNSON

HOLLYWOOD — TV comedians have taken their problems to psychiatrists, sponsors, network bosses, censors, joke writers, sympathetic wives and, on occasion, to bill and tax collectors.

But Jack Benny is the only comedian who can say he has had a problem presented to the United States Supreme Court. And, reflecting TV's own confusion these days, the Supreme Court couldn't even solve the problem.

There was a 4-4 split decision when only eight of the nine justices voted on the matter. But no one really cared any more.

Big Cause Celebre

So the Jack Benny CBS-TV program Jan. 11 should be viewed as television's first big cause celebre as well as a very funny, but very dead, corpus delicti, filmed in 1953.

After six years of standing by with a typical "Well —," Expression on his face, Jack will unreel his controversial 15-minute satire of MGM's 1944 movie "Gaslight." Jack is the husband and Barbara Stanwyck is the wife he's driving to insanity. Bob Crosby plays the Scotland Yard inspector. Just about everyone. I guess, knows the plot.

Issue Clarified

And just about everyone believes, wrongly, that the long battle between the MGM film studio and CBS-TV over Jack's film was based on the right of a TV comedian to satirize a motion picture.

Well, it wasn't.

The legal battle was over the invincibility of Hollywood and its film against TV competition. Hollywood was putting up quite a fight in 1953, you may remember, and caught in the middle was Jack Benny.

MGM really wasn't concerned about Jack's spoof of the movie. In 1952, Jack presented a "Gaslight" satire on his live show.

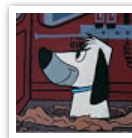
Before that, on his radio show, there was a Benny "Gaslight" satire. Grateful for the publicity MGM even loaned Jack a print of the picture so his radio writers could study the scenes and the dialogue. What MGM suddenly worried about in 1953 was something cherished passionately by Hollywood, motion picture studios and — MOVIE FILM.

Legally Important

So for reasons legally important to Hollywood in 1953 it became a big life or death struggle. Spoofing "Gaslight" on radio, even on live TV, was just dandy with MGM. But when Jack put it on film—WOW! Leo the MGM Lion, roared.

Film WAS Hollywood. Film WAS the movie theaters of the world. MGM film—all of Hollywood's film — had

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[safety measures.](#) - ©2020 fernandollercartoons.com
5 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..."
8 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

been copyrighted long ago by a task force of lawyers who spent months on the project, leaving no loopholes, they thought. But then Benny filmed 15 minutes of "Gaslight" satire.

Critical Situation

It was the loophole MGM's lawyers didn't think about in the TV-less long ago. Left unchallenged, it could set a precedent.

Left unchallenged by MGM, the studio's customers, the theatre men, would have a nice "you done us wrong" argument about aiding the TV "enemy." The Hollywood winds were blowing in a different direction in 1953 and Jack and his film were caught in the legal gust.

So a lawsuit put Jack's satire on the shelf. Privately, Jack was told by an MGM executive — "No matter what the decision may be. Jack, you can show the film on TV. Just ONCE, you understand, and only because of our friendship with you."

To Prove Point

Hollywood wanted to prove a point in 1953.

No MGM movie in ANY FORM ever would be shown on TV, said the studio.

So with MGM winning all the way, and with CBS appealing all the way, the case went to the highest court in the land.

But when the court's split decision came down, MGM films, leased to TV, were making millions; MGM was in TV production, MGM's customers, the theatre owners, no longer had exclusive right to showing film. It was a whole new world. So the Hollywood cause celebre of '53 didn't mean a thing in '58.

After Jack unreels the "Gaslight" satire on Jan. 11, I'm sure people will be asking:

"What was all the fuss about?"

Well, now you know.

The show was broadcast January 11, 1959. William Ewald of the Associated Press reviewed it the next day and said it had several very funny moments, but much of the parody was lost because the movie was so old.

And, as it turned out, the delay was all for nothing.

Posted by Yowp at 07:25



Labels: [Erskine Johnson](#), [Jack Benny](#)

5 comments:

Anonymous 25 November 2012 at 12:37

On his next episode, Jack said;

Jack: MGM released a statement that they were unhappy with my parody of their movie Gaslight being shown on TV last week.

Well that seems very fair, considering that they released me twenty years ago and left me in a basket on Warner Bros doorstep.

[Reply](#)

J Lee 25 November 2012 at 19:43

MGM's observance by 1958 really was odd, because Warner Bros. had let the dam burst in 1957, when they went against the studios' combined attempted to pretend television didn't exist, when Warners signed their deal to produce original programming for ABC (Columbia had been sneaking their efforts in through the back door via their Screen Gems subsidiary for a few years prior to that, and once J.L. went in the other studios followed suit). This seems more like a case of throwing good lawsuit money after bad, in winning an argument after the viewing public already has decided they'd rather stay at home in front of the telly six nights out of the week.

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Yowp 25 November 2012 at 21:21

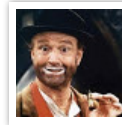


WE WERE ALL YOUNGER—Six years ago Jack Benny and Barbara Stanwyck filmed the satire on the movie "Gaslight" that finally will be seen on TV.

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

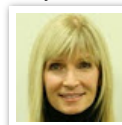
Cartoon Research

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

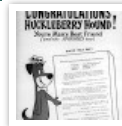
The World of Knight



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 -

J.L., I suspect MGM's management troubles at the time played some kind of role.

[Reply](#)



bgrauman 8 October 2018 at 00:08

The Warner Bros. deal with ABC (to produce "WARNER BROS. PRESENTS" as their first weekly TV series) began in 1955. By 1957, they started producing a lot of Westerns for the network [including "MAVERICK", "SUGARFOOT" and "COLT .45", in addition to "CHEYENNE", which began as a segment of "WBP"]. In MGM's case, it took them a while to begin production of weekly filmed series after the failure of "MGM PARADE" in the 1955-'56 season {in which they discovered you can't offer off a bunch of old film clips, recycle old Pete Smith/John Nesbitt/Robert Benchley/Carey Wilson and Tex Avery shorts, and throw in "interviews" with current MGM stars- with "plugs" for their current movies- and expect the audience to tune in every week; most didn't}. When they started producing weekly versions of some of their classic films in 1957, including "THE THIN MAN" and "NORTHWEST PASSAGE", that's when they began to be a "player" in filmed TV productions for the networks. Still, they just didn't want Jack's parody of "Gaslight" to be repeated.

[Reply](#)



bgrauman 8 October 2018 at 00:28

And HERE'S the episode, as telecast on January 11, 1959:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CM5vN8sgRII>

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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

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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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