

Sunday, 17 March 2013

## Oh, Rochester!

As the television years wore on, Jack Benny's gang that made his radio show so great slowly broke up. Phil Harris left the show before it ever got to the tube (he was replaced by Bob Crosby, which is like replacing a neon sign with an LED light). Mary Livingstone didn't want to do television and appeared only rarely. Dennis Day started showing up only occasionally as he had growing outside interests (and Jack went to a weekly show). That left announcer Don Wilson and Eddie Anderson as Rochester.

Judging by the reaction he got from the audience, Rochester was second only to Benny himself in popularity on the show. Everyone could cheer for—and identify with—a poorly-paid, put-upon employee who kept putting one over on his boss. All vestiges of racial stereotyping were eliminated from his character within a few years. I imagine Jack's brushes with racism (a hotel where the cast was booked refused entry to Anderson, for one) had something to do with it; ridding him of black clichés made the subtle point to bigots that Rochester was no different than anyone else.



Here are a couple of newspaper columns on Anderson, both from United Press International. The first is from April 25, 1960, the second from November 15, 1968. Anderson addresses the racial aspect in the latter, speaking of those who had their eyes and ears solely fixed on his basic role on the show instead of how he played it.

### Shouts As A Kid 'Make' Rochester

By RICK DU BROW  
UPI Hollywood Writer

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) \_ Eddie (Rochester) Anderson, Jack Benny's brash stage valet, says he got the gravel in his voice that has earned him a fortune by trying to out-shout other newsboys as a youth.

"We really hawked newspapers when I was a kid in San Francisco," said the impish, 54-year-old Anderson, who was born in Oakland, Calif.

"We thought that the loudest voice sold the papers, which wasn't true, of course. Anyway, I ruptured my vocal chords from straining them."

Wearing old work clothes and puffing on a cigar in his large, comfortable home, Anderson said:

"In the early days it looked like I was a gonna be a singer, but I wouldn't force that on anybody now."

Anderson, now a little hard of hearing, lives with his wife, Eva and their three children — Stephanie, 7, Evangela, 3, and Edmund, 2.

He's been with Benny for 23 years.

"I auditioned for him a week before Easter in 1937," he said.

The audition was for the part of a railroad porter for a broadcast dramatizing Benny's move to California from New York with his family.

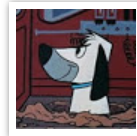
The public loved "Rochester," asked for more — and Benny's writers wrote a script in which the comedian hired him away from the Pullman Co.

"Eventually, it might work into a steady job," Anderson joked.

According to Anderson, the reason for Benny's continued success on his CBS show is his forethought.

"He has a talent for planting a situation that will catch on and pay off maybe a year later," he said. "It's

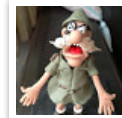
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Spencer Jordan's amazing work... we are hoping artists like Ian

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3 hours ago

### Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



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

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandolleracartoons.com

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### Movies with Michael

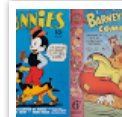


Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

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

7 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

uncanny. And he knows his exact image to the public.

"Once, on radio, he got the idea for people to send in letters on the subject of 'Why I hate Jack Benny.' It might have been dangerous, but it worked out wonderfully.

"As for me, I enjoy my part to this day. I enjoy the situations and the family ties, you might say. I get a lot of pleasure out of the show."

Nevertheless, said Anderson, he wouldn't mind having a show of his own.

"I certainly haven't — and wouldn't — divorce myself from Jack," he said, "but I think I could be fitted for a situation comedy."

Anderson is one of Hollywood's genuinely funny characters.

And nothing bothers him.

On his first broadcast, he showed up at the studio in white tie and tails with a top hat and an Inverness cape draping his shoulders.

And when a horse he owned won a race, he showed up at MGM studios in the costume of a Kentucky colonel and insisted that everyone call him Colonel Rochester.

"But I have pretty good common sense," he said. "I didn't marry an actress."

### *In Saturday Television Special...*

## **Benny and Sidekick Rochester Reunited**

By VERNON SCOTT

HOLLYWOOD (UPI)— "Rochester!"

The name was invariably bleated with frustration for three decades by Jack Benny on radio and later television.

Comedian Benny made the name more famous than the municipality in western New York state. At the other end of Benny's cry was Eddie (Rochester) Anderson whose social life and drinking habits were the despair of his boss.

After almost four years apart, Benny and Rochester will be reunited Saturday night in a television special, "Jack Benny's Bag."

It's a new, hip format for Benny. The jokes will be more "in," the dialogue "with it," and the pace faster. But Eddie Anderson will be a part of the fun.

### **Hadn't Seen Benny**

"Before we taped the show I hadn't even seen Mr. Benny," Rochester said a few days before airtime. "He's so busy traveling and doing concerts we just don't have time to get together.

"It was good to work with him again. I remember the first time I appeared on his radio show—it was Easter Sunday of 1937."

Anderson, his black face full of humor, refused to say if he was older than Benny: "If he says he's 39 years old, then you gotta say I'm about that age, too." Eddie Anderson is a loose, happy man who is disturbed only by other black people who accuse him of having been an Uncle Tom during his years with Benny.

Today's activist-oriented blacks in show business are disdainful of Negroes who played subservient roles to white men in the old days.

But they forget Anderson was that Eddie co-star on Benny's shows and got as many laughs as the Waukegan Wonder, frequently topping him with a quip.

### **Never Uncle Tom**

"I never played an Uncle Tom," Anderson said, "Because the scripts always called for me to get the best of Mr. Benny.

"The fact that I played a valet had nothing to do with Arthur Treacher played those roles and nobody ever criticised him for it."

Now that Benny appears mostly on the road in concerts or as a single guest star.

Anderson has gone into semi-retirement. He has done a couple of video commercials and a movie.

He fills his spare time as an assistant trainer of horses at Hollywood Park for the harness racing season.

At one time Eddie Anderson earned more than a thousand dollars a week. He worked hard for it and spent it with abandon.

While he is not in financial straits, neither is he the richest performer in semi-retirement.

"Everything's fine with me," Anderson concluded. "And it makes me happy when total strangers take the time to greet me with a big, 'Hello, Rochester.'"

Posted by [Yowp](#) at 07:43



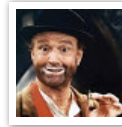
Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 2 comments:

additional covers you could share! ...

16 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

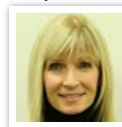
### **Cartoon Research**

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

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

The ones that were really liked wou...

4 days ago

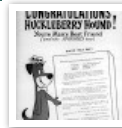
### **The World of Knight**



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 Lee 17 March 2013 at 09:43

One of my main problems with modern political correctness is the general idea that anything done before about 1965 or so has to be racially insensitive, simply because it was done before 1965. So people reflexively hear that Rochester was Jack Benny's butler and mark it down on the "must be bad list", while Robert Guillaume's portrayal of Benson on Soap and his own show is OK, because it's contemporary culture for many of the PC arbiters and were part of their pop culture history. There's no attempt to look at the show itself other than the superficial context of the Benny-Eddie Anderson relationship.

Some of the early Benny shows certainly went for the trite stereotypes when it came to Rochester's character -- it's kind of jarring to hear some of them now on the XM old-time radio channel when they're replayed -- but by the mid-40s that was no longer the case. If Jack and his writers wanted to do 'dumb' jokes, Dennis Day got them, and as always, the entire show revolved around playing off the character flaws of Jack, not of his supporting cast (even with Dennis' dumb routine, he'd still get zingers off at Jack's expense). The fun was always in watching Benny's flaws be mocked and his vanity take a beating, and Anderson and Mary Livingston were the main two sources of those 'gentler' assaults (as opposed to Frank Nelson or Mel Blanc, who'd do full-front assaults on the Benny ego).

[Reply](#)

Anonymous 17 March 2013 at 17:10

the only time, i ever got to see Jack Benny live was at a supermarket in the early 1970s. The great Jack Benny was waiting at the counter next to the one where i was with my dad. My dad told me: "Look it's Jack Benny", i looked up and there he was. Then i kept asking my dad, to let the two of us go and talk to him and thank him for all he's given us, however my father said:"I doubt he came in here to be bothered by fans, besides he knows how much we love him. Probably should have been more insistent. Glad to see that, the man who we saw at the supermarket, was the man everyone knew and loved a kind, funny, nice talent..

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