



Wednesday, 28 August 2013

It Sounds Sensible

Someone asked a while ago why I haven't mentioned the Burns and Allen show on the blog, considering I've mentioned George Burns a number of times in connection with Jack Benny. I hadn't really noticed, to be honest. Since today is the 49th anniversary of Gracie's death, maybe it's a good time.

For years, George gave credit to Gracie for being the whole act. In a way, that's true. But I've got to give credit to their writers. It must have been a real task to come up with new scripts every week for 39 weeks (I'm talking radio here) with Gracie's own peculiar take on the English language. Gracie didn't only spout puns like Jane Ace's "up at the crank of dawn." The great thing about Gracie is she would either take a word or phrase with more than one meaning and apply the other meaning to it, or she'd use it literally. Either way, her humour always had a basis in logic. She merely convoluted the way she used English. It's pretty clever and must have been difficult to come up with new turns of phrase every week.



And that was only part of her charm. Gracie was likeable, her intentions on the show were always good. She was like a friendly neighbour. Couldn't you picture living next door to her? Gracie's fluttery delivery in the mouths of a lesser comedienne might have come off phoney. But listening to the show, you can be easily convinced that Gracie Allen sounds and behaves that way in real life.

There were some elements of the show over the years I didn't like. Earlier ones where George and Gracie aren't married sound odd (though it may be the basis for the word "Trafaz." Read [HERE](#)). Bringing in Clarence Nash as a pet duck strikes me as a superfluous move. I never bought Bill Goodwin as a hammy ladies man; Phil Harris on the Benny show had that character nailed down. And Goodwin eventually became so busy being a ladies man on the show, someone else had to be brought in to do his announcing work. Toby Reed struck me as too stiff and flat for Burns and Allen.

Here's what columnist John Crosby thought about Burns and Allen after their move to CBS. This appeared in papers around December 22, 1949.

Burns and Allen, those prehistoric comedians, now are almost at the tail end of Mr. Paley's Wednesday night parley on CBS which is quite a parley. In order, you get Dr. Christian, Groucho Marx, Bing Crosby, B. & A., and Lum and Abner—an indigestible grouping if ever I heard one.

George and Gracie and still very funny people, provided you haven't grown weary of that particular side street over the years.

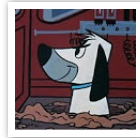
My own theory for their longevity—George Burns is 112 years old and doesn't look a day over 96—is that theirs is a specially timeless comedy. Gracie Allen is a past mistress at feminine irrelevance, that distinctive female gift which has driven all husbands out of their minds from time to time.

"All great singers have their trials," says Gracie to George. "Look at Caruso. Thirty years on a desert island with all those cannibals." "You've got the wrong man," says Georgia wearily.

"No, you're the right one for me."

In that exchange, Gracie has switched directions twice and your average husband, listening to her, can derive a

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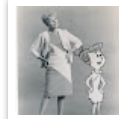


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1 day ago

Yowp



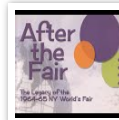
Wilma - Jean Vander Pyl didn't have a big name on

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

3 weeks ago

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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 ...

30 minutes ago

small crumb of comfort from the fact that his own wife, gifted as she is at wandering a mile away from the point, isn't that bad.

You hardly can describe the Burns and Allen show as a public service program, but it has some claim to that distinction. In the umpteenth years they have been on the air, Gracie very likely has kept two or three husbands from shooting their wives, simply by persuading them that things could be worse. A small thing, but noble.

Gracie lives in a permanent state of hopeless confusion that defies rational solution. She drives a car with the emergency brake on, for example, so that when an emergency happens she's ready.

The other day she delivered a spirited talk to her neighbors to come to the assistance of her husband, George, with the words: "When George needed help, who did he go to? You! Now that he needs help, it's your turn to help him." Well, it sounds sensible.

Recently she's been trying to comfort George about his singing which drives people to distraction. George said: "My singing is a thing of the past. It's dead, extinct."

"It does not," said Gracie loyally.

The Burns and Allen show, like so many others, is now transcribed. This has added a little more polish to the production and an added fillip to the pace (which was always good). George Burns, one of the swiftest wits in Hollywood, strikes an almost perfect note of resigned exasperation.

Bill Goodwin, the announcer, has been cast in the role of a male animal of great sex appeal which sometimes gets a little harassing. In all other respects Burns and Allen are still a fine half hour of entertainment—apart from their great age. I shouldn't advise listening every week, though Once a month is enough.

Despite the fact Gracie's humour was almost always verbal, I think the Burns and Allen show worked best on TV. We'll explore that with John Crosby in a future post.



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [11:17](#)



Labels: [John Crosby](#)

1 comment:



Tim Lones 28 August 2013 at 11:34

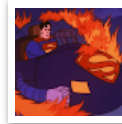
Sometimes I think John Crosby didn't like anything very much.

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[fernandollera.com](#)

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

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Beck -

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2 days ago

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