



Sunday, 22 September 2013

## TV Without Mary

Stories abound about Jack Benny's wife, Mary Livingstone, and not all of them are pleasant. All I know is from a radio listener's standpoint, she had the ideal dry, cutting delivery that added to the Benny show's enjoyment.

The former Sadye Marks had become part of her husband's vaudeville act as a last-minute replacement, and then remained on his radio show past a one-shot appearance when her performance prompted favourable letters from listeners. But Benny biographies reveal she was nervous while on stage to the point that, finally, some of her last radio shows featured her recorded voice dubbed in afterward (script girl Jeanette Eymann read her part during the actual performance in front of an audience). You'd never know listening to the shows that she had mike fright.



The prospect of television apparently frightened her, though she had made the movie "This Way Please" in 1937. So with only a few rare exceptions, she never made the jump to the new medium with Jack. But so strong was her character that some viewers apparently never noticed. Here's an Associated Press column dated October 11, 1960.

### Mary's Staying Home

### Benny Goes on Alone

By BOB THOMAS

Associated Press Writer

Hollywood — There was much to-do when Gracie Allen retired from show business. Not generally known is the fact that her close friend, Mary Benny, has been virtually retired for almost a decade.

This was disclosed by Jack Benny as he prepared to start his 11th and most strenuous season on TV. He'll face it without Mary.

She had been scheduled to appear in the first show tomorrow. "I needed a scene in which someone would scold me for going on TV every week, and Mary was the only one who could do it because she is the only woman who has a close relationship with me," Jack explained.

"But I could see she was getting more and more nervous as the show got closer. So we rewrote her part rather than subject her to the strain. She gets nervous, even without an audience.

"Actually, Mary never was crazy about performing. In our last days on radio, she did all her work at home, and the script girl read her lines with me before the audience. The people never minded, once I explained the situation to them."

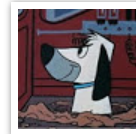
WHILE MARY has given up performing, she's still an important member of the Benny team, the comedian indicated.

"I always take decisions to her, because she has great insight," he said. "When I was thinking about going on TV every week, I asked her what she thought about it. I'd either do that, or stay on every other week and do a few specials.

"She advised me to go on regularly but to avoid the specials. 'You'll always be trying to top yourself with specials, Jack,' she said. 'You'll feel miserable if you don't.' She's absolutely right."

And so Benny is embarking on a weekly grind though he is 27 years beyond his legendary 39. He doesn't need the money. He doesn't need the fame. So why does he do it?

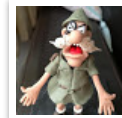
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Spencer Jordan's amazing work... we are hoping artists like Ian

Knox...and families of these comic artists can see these gems... - made with fimo clay I had ago and its not very easy to do...

2 hours ago

### Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



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

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandollera.com  
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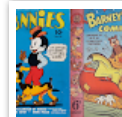


Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

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

6 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

"I THINK IT makes more sense in building an audience," he explained. "Before, no one knew exactly which week I was on; I didn't even know myself. It was hard to maintain a rating, because people who liked my show might not like the alternate show, and vice versa.

"Besides, I like to work. I've always been a little show crazy. Bob Hope and I often argue which of us is the worse in that regard. We both hate long vacations.

"By doing a show every week. I can get into a regular routine. I don't have those dull periods when I'm anxious to get to work. The writers like it better, too: they know what their deadlines are and they prepare for them."

THE SCHEDULE still leaves him time to play golf three or four times a week (though he groused about the loss of daylight saving) and to play fund-raising concerts, as he will next month in Cleveland, Cincinnati and Indianapolis. It's a busy schedule at an age when a lot of folks are collecting Social Security.

"I think it's working that keeps me young," he observed. "If I had quit a couple of years ago. I'd be an old man by now. As it is, I just got the returns back from my annual checkup, and the doctor says I'm in fine shape." His secrets of continuing success? Jack offered two:

—"I hate a lousy show. If I do one, I feel miserable afterward. I think most of my shows are good ones. A few are great."

—"I think I'm a good editor. I work closely with my writers—two of them have been with me 18 years. I edit them closely, and I know what is good for me."

The Jack Benny radio show had so many pieces, if one was missing on occasion, you might not notice unless it was pointed out on the air. But not all the pieces were there when the show moved to television and that resulted in some modifications. The TV show was good, but the radio show was far more enjoyable to me simply because a good mix of personalities and characters had been worked out over the years. And a large part of that was Mary Livingstone.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:45](#)



Labels: [Bob Thomas](#), [Jack Benny](#)

## 7 comments:

**Anonymous** 22 September 2013 at 12:59

I love Mary's singing voice, her duets with Phil Harris on the radio program were a highlight. She was a real talent, she and Jack managed to turn even her fluffs into comedy gold!

Mark Kausler

[Reply](#)

**Anonymous** 22 September 2013 at 19:56

Love Mary. Love her. Wonderful voice, infectious laugh, great skills, underrated talent. Love her on the show. Like Phil, when she isn't on the show? It didn't feel like "The Gang" to me.

As for how Mary was.. well. ALSO like Phil- if you want to learn more about these people, whom were never the subject of their \*own\* books, you can find out about them in books about other people. (In Phil's case, I read one or two Alice Faye bios just to see what they said about Phil)

George Burns wrote a book in the 1980s, one of several memoirs, dealing with his friendships and relationships, and being that Jack was his best friend... well. I believe he could be the source of the "stories abound" about Mary being kind of bitchy and cold. I also have read that, regardless of how distant she could be, she could not resist Phil, who apparently oozed the charm in real life, and she had great affection for him, as he was oblivious to any kind of wall. But George Burns wrote at length that he didn't feel Mary appreciated Jack, took exception to things she said after he died, and took exception to how she had to be treated when they went out in public. Like I said- I love Mary. On the show, she's perfect. In real life, it doesn't concern me, nor change how she came off on the show- but if you want to learn more about her, read George Burns. Simple as that.

[Reply](#)

**Anonymous** 8 April 2014 at 14:55

Jack's daughter also had a lot to say about her mother.

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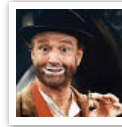


**wbhst** 24 April 2015 at 05:52

additional covers you could share! ...

15 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...

1 day ago

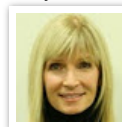
**Cartoon Research**

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

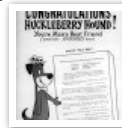
**The World of Knight**



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 -

Apparently, the recording of the voices for the Warner Bros. 'Merrie Melodies' cartoon "The Mouse That Jack Built" (1959) - where Jack, Mary, Rochester and Don Wilson voiced themselves as mice (and Mel Blanc doubled as the Maxwell and Ed the vault guard) - may have been similar to the final (1954-55) radio season. An online review of a book about the late Robert McKimson (who directed that cartoon) showed a picture of him and writer Tedd Pierce at the recording session, going over the script with Mel, Jack, Don and Rochester - and Mary was conspicuously absent. Wonder if, for those who've seen that cartoon, that's why she seems to sound as uninvolved and going-through-the-motions as she did in the final episodes of the radio show, and whether her lines were recorded separately from the others'.

[Reply](#)



**Unknown** 24 April 2017 at 09:46

It amazes me that Mary Livingstone had stage fright. I loved the Jack Benny program and I thought she had some of the most amazing wit and comedic timing I have ever heard. I wish I had one tenth the talent she had. From Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone, to Phil Harris and Dennis Day, to George Burns and Gracie Allen, these are amazing talents we may never see again in this world.

[Reply](#)



**Unknown** 27 August 2017 at 18:31

I loved all the radio shows, and all the stars. Gracie and George were an adorable pair. The Great Gildersleeve w/ Mr Peevy, Digger O'Dell, fibber McGee and Molly and Baby Snooks. Then the mysteries....

[Reply](#)



**Unknown** 22 January 2019 at 14:16

O" cut that out.....

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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**  
[The Lady and the Tiger](#) - From the Cathy Hill Archive of Unpublished Comics comes "The Lady and the Tiger". This story was drawn before Cathy started the "Mad Raccoons" series. U... 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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