

Sunday, 8 December 2013

## The Brief Tenor

Dennis Day is the singer just about anyone thinks of when Jack Benny's name is brought up. He joined the Benny radio show in 1939 and remained with him to the end, even though he was a star in his own right by that time. And he continued to appear occasionally with Benny on television into the '60s.

On the flip side is the tenor who worked five weeks on the Benny show before walking out—Michael Bartlett.

It's a little puzzling why Bartlett signed with Benny in the first place. He had appeared on film opposite Grace Moore, who had been assuring the public that Bartlett was screen star material. What would you choose—being a movie star or a supporting player on radio who sang one song and then kibbitzed with a character named Schlepperman?

Day was likely thankful Bartlett chose films. Although Bartlett's movie career quickly washed out, he enjoyed quite a number of years on the stage, with a stint as a Captain in the Marines during World War Two in between.

Fan magazine *Radio Mirror* profiled Bartlett in its December 1935 edition. Cover date notwithstanding, Bartlett was gone from the show after October.

### MEET MICHAEL BARTLETT

DO YOU KNOW JACK BENNY'S NEW TENOR COMEDIAN? YOU SHOULD BECAUSE HE'S HOLLYWOOD'S AND RADIO'S LATEST SINGING FIND!

By **DAN WARREN**

YOU should know Michael Bartlett.

Because he's the new tenor-comedian on the Jack Benny Sunday night radio programs.

Because he's Hollywood's newest, most exciting discovery who sang opposite Grace Moore in "Love Me Forever," who takes a prominent part in Claudette Colbert's "She Married Her Boss," and who is scheduled as Miss Moore's leading man in her next picture.

By rights Michael Bartlett today should be living in Massachusetts, a staid officer in a staid manufacturing company. His background of prominent New England ancestry called for that, but Michael had different ideas. It all started his freshman year at Princeton, when he became one of the distinguished few to join the Triangle Club which has made itself famous lately by producing two songs: "Love and a Dime" and "East of the Sun and West of the Moon."

"That," Bartlett explained, "was my first taste of the stage and I vowed that it wouldn't be the last. The thrill of going on the road with the production sold me on the theater as a career. All day on the train we'd sit around in pajamas playing bridge and get dressed just in time to get off the pullman and around to the theater before the curtain went up."

He also learned that year how much freshmen can be imposed upon by seniors. He was the tenor of a trio and every night when the three walked out into the spotlight, it was his job to hold up his two companions. People might otherwise have thought they'd all been indulging.

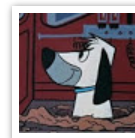
For awhile it looked just as easy as that—he'd decided on the theater as his career, so the theater it would be. Then complications arose. First his father objected and tried, by cutting his allowance, to dissuade his son.

Michael overcame that by hiring himself out as a choir singer in a church on 114th street in Manhattan. Salary, \$80 a month. After that, his father admitted defeat and sent him abroad to continue his studies.

He's stubborn, this six-foot young man who looks like a new Englander softened by contact with the more volatile, sunny disposition of the Latin races. His family was the first to find this out. Broadway producers were the second.

After a few years in Italy as a student and later as a full fledged opera singer under the name of Eduardo

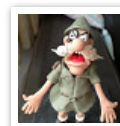
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Spencer Jordan's amazing work... we are hoping artists like Ian

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 fernandollercartoons.com

3 hours ago

### Movies with Michael

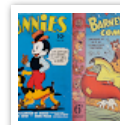


Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

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

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

Bartelli, Michael returned home. "To be best man at a friend's wedding." And he's stayed here ever since. He talks now with a gesture of hand and nimbleness of eyebrow that would do credit to any Roman singer.

In the beginning, Broadway failed to recognize in Michael the potentialities that have turned him overnight from a concert hall performer to a radio and screen star. Jerome Kern finally chose him to take one of the leads in his musical comedy, *The Cat and the Fiddle*," but not until he had hired another for the part. Michael got the job after waiting eight months.

"The trouble was," he said, "my background scared them. They didn't think that anyone who could sing in four languages and who had studied abroad could sing their popular melodies."

THIS fear in producers has plagued him ever since, until last spring. Michael wanted to get into the movies. About the time sound films were springing up like mushrooms after a heavy rain, he went to Hollywood and took a series of screen tests. Fox finally handed him a year's contract as a featured player. And then never cast him in a single picture, just paid him his salary. He's tried radio too, before this fall. "I can't count all the times I've been called down to some studio and told to sing for a prospective sponsor. Naturally I always chose a piece I knew, light opera or a favorite aria, and the sponsor would just sit and shake his head. I hadn't sung 'Love in Bloom' so I couldn't be much good!" The nearest he came was six months ago when he made an appearance over WOR, powerful local station in New Jersey. Stubbornly sticking to his guns, he chose for one of his numbers a melody he had heard in Paris. He sang it in French, by way of introducing it to American audiences.

No great rush of agents wanting to sign him soured Michael on radio and he went again to Hollywood, this time by request. Grace Moore wanted him for her picture. He determined to forget broadcasting. Then this summer he had a phone call from an old school chum. "Come over and audition for the Jack Benny show," the friend said. Bartlett, in his own words, thought the friend was nuts, but he got an hour off from the lot where he was working and went to the radio studio, "Listen," the friend said, "I know you can sing, but you've got to do one popular number."

Bartlett nodded and rushed out to a music store, grabbed the first sheet music he saw and took it back with him. When he opened it up, he saw it was "Tell Me That You Love Me Tonight." When he hummed the tune he discovered it was the same little French melody he had introduced last spring!

Which all goes to prove that the right kind of stubbornness sometimes gets you places. It also explains why Michael Bartlett says he is glad of the chance to play comedy with Jack Benny, when another opera singer would snort and rear on his hind legs. He'll sing popular melodies from now on and like 'em.

Bartlett died February 3, 1978 in Webster, Massachusetts. You can read an excellent biography of him [HERE](#), though I don't believe it explains he changed his name to Michael when addressed that way by mistake by another new student while attending Hotchkiss Prep School (source, Grace Wilcox, *Long Island Sunday Press*, May 19, 1935).

It didn't take long for Jack to find a replacement tenor. John Skinner's column in the February 1936 edition of *Radio Mirror* states that Phil Regan was considered, but his price was too high. Benny then settled on the winner of Eddy Duchin's Radio Open Tournament, who had appeared in the films "The World Moves On" and "George White's Scandals." Kenny Baker became the show's tenor in November 1935. Skinner reveals that, like Dennis Day later, Baker didn't use his natural speaking voice on the show; "It's all in fun," reported the columnist. Baker stayed for two years until he, too, felt he could move on to bigger things than Benny, and really didn't. Perhaps it was just as well, as many fans think Dennis Day was the best choice of all.

Posted by Yowp at [06:56](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

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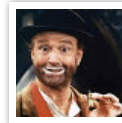
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additional covers you could share! ...

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

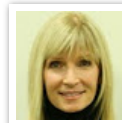
#### **Cartoon Research**

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

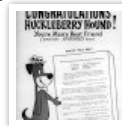
#### **The World of Knight**



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 -

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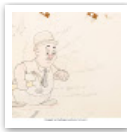
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Original animation drawing from Wabbit Twouble with color notations

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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