

Sunday, 2 March 2014

## Inside Jack Benny

There were just so many biographical stories about Jack Benny that journalists could write before they went looking for a new angle. And one of them was the psychological angle.

Judging by what Jack told Lloyd Shearer, several news people had done it before. That doesn't stop Shearer from doing it again. Whether he succeeds, we'll leave to you. This lengthy piece appeared in the magazine supplement of a number of newspapers beginning September 13, 1964.

Shearer not only wrote under his own name, he simultaneously penned "Personality Parade" in *Parade* magazine, also a newspaper supplement, from 1958 to 1991. He died of a heart attack in 2001 and had battled Parkinson's for a number of years.

### WHAT MAKES JACK BENNY RUN

by LLOYD SHEARER

HOLLYWOOD. On Friday, September 25, Jack Benny, an American institution of 70, will begin his 15th season on television and his 55th in show business.

Before the current season is finished, this beloved funnyman will have been tuned in by more video-viewers than any other performer of our time. In addition to his weekly Friday night stint over NBC at \$75,000 per program, Benny will be telecast by CBS, the network he recently left, via two sets of old shows. One is called *Sunday with Jack Benny*, on from 5 to 5:30 P.M. The other set of reruns is entitled *The Jack Benny Program* and will be shown each weekday starting October 5, from 4:30 to 5 P.M.

Ordinarily such overexposure—no other comic is on TV six days a week—would doom any comedian. But Jack Benny is not "any" comedian.

In the course of five decades he has devised such a sure stimulus to the public funny-bone that he has become a legend in his own time, a household staple, a seemingly basic ingredient of the American culture—the lovable, endearing cheap skate with the helpless, glazed look, the inept butt of his own fabricated miserliness. He is the indispensable comedian perennially welcomed and wanted by the people.

No comedian of this century has sustained his success and popularity as long as Jack Benny. The longevity of his career—it started in 1909—is amazing. Almost all his contemporaries—Eddie Cantor, Groucho Marx, Ben Bernie, Phil Baker, Fred Allen, Will Rogers—have either died or passed into semi-retirement.

Only Benny continues to meet the challenge, to come out week after week, standing there on stage, arms crossed, egg on his face, warm, good-natured, done in by the script, evoking smiles, titters and sometimes buffs of laughter by his audience.

### WHAT'S THE HITCH?

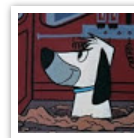
One imagines that age 70 would find Jack a happy, peaceful, serene, fulfilled personality. Best-paid comedian in the world—he grosses somewhere around \$5,000,000 a year—admired and respected by fans the world over, honored and emulated by members of his own fraternity, happily married since 1927 to his first and only wife, incredibly healthy, surprisingly youthful-looking without once ever having submitted to a face lift—"I never would have got one if I needed it, but luckily I never have"—possessor of every creature comfort from Rolls-Royce to Beverly Hills mansion, Benny is nevertheless an insecure, frequently troubled man bedeviled by moods of moroseness and depression, nagged by a feeling of unfulfillment and inferiority.

From time to time he wanders aimlessly along the streets of Beverly Hills, a loner, a man occasionally given to crotchiness or hypochondria, or he drives dispiritedly around Los Angeles or plays a solitary round of golf at the Hillcrest Country Club, a man in search of life's meaning, not knowing how or where to find it, an incomplete and unrequited man, a paradox and anomaly.

In an effort to find out what makes Benny tick—he's a fascinating human being to interview, glib and stimulating, unphilosophical but eloquent, full of dicta and contradictions—I asked him if in the winter of his life he liked the kind of man he had become.

"Not entirely," he answered frankly, "because I have a lot of faults that I shouldn't have. For instance, one of

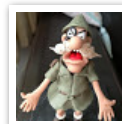
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### Blogs to See

#### Peter Gray's Comics and Art



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

the things I don't like about myself is being moody. But nobody knows that, except maybe my wife or people very close to me." Benny is convinced that only he and his wife and intimates are privy to his weaknesses. He believes firmly that from all others he manages to hide his inadequacies.

### MORNINGS ARE BEST

"You," he continued, "would never know that I'm moody in a million years. My closest friends would never know it. They think I'm the same jolly guy all the time. Good time Charlie! But I get moody more than I should. And I don't know what starts it off. "Usually it starts late in the afternoon and then by night it's over again. I feel best in the mornings. In fact I try to do all my work in the mornings if I can. I get much more work done. I'm an early riser. I like to get up early and do things. I practice my violin. The only thing I like to do late is play golf. But everything else I do in the morning.

"I'm not a party comedian. I don't know how to be funny in people's homes like many comedians—George Burns or Bob Hope or Jerry Lewis or Milton Berle. This I know nothing about. I'm a good listener.

"Maybe. I'm moody because I'm a perfectionist. I want my shows to be good. But I must say this, that years ago I was much more nervous than I am now. I find my work a lot easier. Years ago I placed too much importance on every performance. Let's say when I was really 39, I had a feeling that everything had to be perfect. It didn't have to be at all, but I thought it had to, and that made me nervous.

"Some people think I'm insecure. But I don't think so. Maybe a long time ago I was, even after I had success for a while. But now it's too late for me to be insecure. Financially, I'm pretty safe. I maybe should be worth millions more and could have been if I were a good business man. But money doesn't mean that much to me. I've got enough to be secure. To have security money is the first thing you should have—for your wife, family, kids, grandchildren. So I have that. Fortunately I also have my health. Career-wise, the public still wants me. But let's go to another extreme. Let's say that I've had enough of TV and maybe the audience has had enough of me. I still have concerts that I can give. Mine are always very successful. They never miss. I could do stage plays. I could do shows. Probably make a picture or two like Chevalier does by playing older parts. Why should I get moody or feel insecure?"

I suggested to Benny the possibility that he might not really like being a comedian, that perhaps he had always secretly hankered to become a business tycoon or a leading man like Cary Grant. "What omissions have there been in your life?" I asked.— " 'Omissions?' " Benny toyed with the word while he played with his spectacles. "I think," he declared, "that Mary and I should have adopted more than one child. That's a mistake I made. We adopted only Joan. But of course, right after that, Mary was going to have a baby herself, which she lost. So then I felt we should have adopted another couple of kids. But somehow we didn't. I kind of miss that. I would have liked to have had more kids, and more grandchildren.

"About being someone else," he went on, "if miracles could be performed, I guess I would like to be one of the world's great violinists. Then I could give concerts legitimately. They wouldn't take in as much as they do now and they wouldn't be as interesting. But I would like to do that for about a year. If I could go back to being 50 or 60 and feeling as good as I feel now, that also would be wonderful. But otherwise, I'd like to stay right where I am."

Many of the comic's friends say that Benny's inferiority complex is founded in his lack of formal education. Born Benny Kubelsky, son of Russian Jewish immigrants who opened a saloon in Waukegan, Ill., Benny left school in the ninth grade to take an \$8-per-week job playing the violin in the pit of the Barrison Theatre. He never returned to school, but claims he has mixed feelings about his inadequate education.

"If you want to be in show business," he declares flatly—"let's say as an entertainer or a comedian—a college education isn't good for that. It's not conducive to good comedy. You should never go further than high school. Very few men who have gone through college have become successful comedians.

"To be a successful comedian you've got to stay down to earth. There's something about having had a good college education that keeps you a little bit too aloof. Your wordings, expressions and delivery and the words you put together in a sentence for comedy become, I would say, a little too brilliant. It just isn't funny. I think that maybe writers could go to college without suffering. But even they, if they have a good high school education, would be better off.

"You asked me what I've missed in life. I'll tell you. I never even went to high school. You would never know it. Nobody would ever know it the way I now conduct myself. But I never had a proper education. I finished school in public school. I went one year, to high school. I haven't got too much knowledge. I missed that. I even missed a public school education because I wouldn't study. I wouldn't learn anything. Whatever I learned, I learned all by myself. But I wished I had more—at least a great college education."

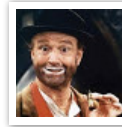
I repeated to Benny what he had previously said about a college education not mixing with comedy. "Maybe," he conceded, "an education would have kept me from reaching my present position. But it wouldn't have made any difference. I wouldn't have known any better. Now, at my age in life, when am I going to go to college? I don't have time for it.



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

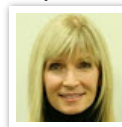
### Cartoon Research

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 -

"A lot of people when they got old took courses in college. I remember Fred Allen did. He took English at Columbia. I've been wanting to do that for years. Just never got to it. So that's the only thing I miss, a proper education. But as I say, nobody else knows about that except me. Who could possibly guess that by talking to me?

"I regret the fact that if a book is hard reading I have a difficult time with it. My mind wanders. I have too many other things to think about. If I had had a good education, my brain would work in the proper way. It would be used to hard reading, hard thinking.

#### BAFFLED BY VIETNAM

"To tell you the truth I have a hard time understanding the whole situation in Vietnam. But I'm not the only one. Even highly educated people don't know what's going on. But I'm not as well versed in politics as I'd like to be.

"This is due to lack of education. Some people like Georgie Jessel have educated themselves. Georgie practically never went to school at all. But he was able to do it himself.

"You see, the trouble with me was that when I first got into show business, I toured in vaudeville in 1911. I liked it too much. I stayed in it instead of going back to school.

"Now, I'll tell you where a better education would have helped me. I'm a pretty good writer. I'd rather say co-writer. I'm a good co-everything: co-producer, co-director, co-writer and a real good editor. That's my business, but if I had the education that I wanted, I would have been a really good writer. I would have been able to write plays. With my sense of humor, with the ideas that I turn over to my writers and the fact that I'm such a good editor—that's the only thing I brag about. I am a great editor—then I would have been a truly fine writer.

"It isn't the fact that I have a lousy vocabulary. I haven't. My vocabulary is all right. I just never use it."

Like most headliners of the show business world, Jack Benny isn't particularly sure of his true identity. He does know, however, what he is not. "I am definitely," he asserts, "not the kind of guy I play on stage and I'm constantly amazed that so many people, even sophisticated people, think I am."

A few weeks ago, for example, Benny was interviewed by a reporter who asked him seriously, "How long have you owned a Maxwell?" Maxwell is the name of an automobile popular in the early years of the century. Benny dropped the name into one of his early radio broadcasts as a humor prop, but many fans believe he still retains such a vehicle.

In truth Jack drives an \$18,000 Rolls-Royce. When he bought it 3 years ago, he proudly drove it to the home of his oldest and best friend, comic George Burns. The Burns' maid inspected the sedan with its ultraconservative lines, later remarked to her employer, "With all his money, you'd think Mr. Benny wouldn't drive such an old-fashioned car."

Benny is constantly embarrassed by repeated references to himself as a veteran penny pincher. To dispel that specter he always overtips: \$1 to a doorman, \$5 to a cabbie, \$10 to a waiter.

As a vaudevillian in the 1920's, Jack used to eat regularly in many of the automat restaurants, where nickels are dropped into machines to permit the purchaser to lift a glass window and extricate his food. For years following his great success, Benny was most anxious to continue eating in these New York City restaurants, but was fearful that his fans would recognize and chastise him as a miser.

#### HOW TO EAT IN THE AUTOMAT

Not too long ago lie finally figured out how to dine in the automat without embarrassment. He took over the entire branch on 45th Street, invited 400 guests, hired a dance band, installed 3 bars and hosted a gala black-tie affair. As each guest arrived Jack handed him \$3 in nickels to work the food machines.

Benny claims sadly that he suffers from a poor money sense. "I don't think anybody throws more money away than Mary and I do. Unfortunately I know very little about economics." But here again, what Jack Benny actually is and what he thinks he is are two different men.

In the entertainment industry he has long been recognized as a shrewd cookie when it comes to finance. In 1948 he moved his program from NBC to CBS, got Bill Paley of CBS to pay \$2,260,000 for Amusements, Inc., a company he controlled. In 1961 he sold his production company, J and M Productions, for \$2,750,000 in Music Corporation of America stock. In both deals lie made fortunes in capital gains.

A few months ago, fed up with the tactics of Jim Aubrey, CBS program chief, he gave Aubrey's network exactly five days to pick up his option. When the network stalled he promptly signed next day with NBC, where the executives rolled out the financial red carpet for him, meeting all his demands.

By nature a generous man, Benny likes to be treated generously by others. His public cheap skate image bugs him. He was particularly elated therefore when the late President Kennedy wrote him a thank-you note for a money clip he had sent to the White House via Peter Lawford. The money clip contained a single dollar bill, but Kennedy wrote that he for one knew how truly extravagant Benny really was. He was sure Jack had sent



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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him not \$1 but \$750, and he was equally sure, he joked, that Peter Lawford had kept \$749 as his commission. Unlike most comedians who are tyrannical and temperamental with their employees—especially their writers—Benny is kind, thoughtful and tactful. His four writers and his cast of characters, Don Wilson, Rochester, Mel Blanc and Dennis Day, have worked with and for him from 15 to 32 years. Benny has almost always treated them as gentlemen. "I am not interested in myself," he tells them over and over again. "I'm interested in the continued excellence of our show.

BE A DIPLOMAT


"I've learned over the years" Benny maintains, "that one of the most important things in life is human relationships. I start on the supposition that people are just as sensitive as I am, writers are even more so. "For me the best time to work with my writers and cast is in the morning, that's when I'm most cheerful. I've learned never to tell anybody, especially writers, that this stinks or this satire is lousy, because then I merely put them in an antagonistic frame of mind. "In the first place, my writers don't write lines which stink. They get too much money for that. Second, I may disagree with them but I listen anyway. I like to let everybody know they're doing a good job, and even though it's for selfish purposes, I get the best results that way. "I'm not an ad-libber. You know what Fred Allen said about me? I couldn't ad-lib a belch after a Hungarian dinner. But I appreciate ad-libs and wit and humor and talent. Nobody laughs as hard and as genuinely as I do at the routines and jokes of other comedians. I appreciate them and I don't mind showing it. "This isn't because I'm such a nice guy. I know it's the way to get results, to make friends, to make life pleasant. We all have selfish motives. Everybody thinks I'm a nice guy because I give concerts for charity, because I go overseas to entertain the troops, because I play at benefits. The selfish motive is that I like to do those things. They give me pleasure. "Writers like to make me out a very complex screwed up guy. They say I have everything in life I can possibly want, that there's no need for my ever getting depressed or lost or moody. The truth is that I'm a simple guy, a grateful guy who loves what he's doing, and if I get moody once in a while, so what? I'm a character, not a 24-hour-a-day clown, a man, not a laugh machine, a tipper, not a tightwad. "Matter of fact for a comedian I am surprisingly normal. I have never been to a psychiatrist and I've only been married once. A fellow could hardly be more normal than that."

Posted by Yowp at 07:31   
Labels: Jack Benny

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