



Sunday, 16 March 2014

It's All About Me

Jack Benny had a pretty nice radio show in 1936. He'd been on the air for four years, had grabbed the attention of the radio audience with his newsreel spoofs and send-ups of feature films. A revolving door of singers, bands and recognisable supporting players was starting to stabilise a bit. But the show started making leaps and bounds once one thing happened—Jack Benny got a new writing staff.

Jack had no choice. His writer left. And his writer explained why in a note to the *Albany Evening News*, published on August 25, 1936. In reading it, one is struck by how Conn seemed to think everything revolved around him, that he was the key to the Benny's show success. And it's a little ironic of Conn to point out how stars keep clippings when *he* was the one reading them. The newspaper clippings aren't the focus of the story. But the newspaper columnist has decided newspaper columns are worthy of being the headline.



Radio Stars Watch Newspaper Comment

By THE LISTENER

Words from a very live "ghost."

Harry W. Conn has been heard from in this column at least twice before on the subject of radio comedy programs to which he has contributed a great deal of the things that have made us laugh as we have listened to Jack Benny. For Mr. Conn was Benny's "ghost writer," or his script man, to be more accurate about it. Recently, in response to a letter from Mr. Conn at Saratoga, this column invited him to stop off in Albany on his way back from the races and talk over radio matters.

This was not possible for Mr. Conn to do, so he sent us the following letter from New York.

"SAW the article you printed in reply to letter I sent you and thank you very much. Sorry I could not stop over in Albany to see you as I came through with the 'Easy Aces' (Mr. and Mrs. Goodman Ace) and they were in a hurry to get back to New York as they broadcast three times weekly and spend the other three days at the races, and they use up all day Sunday for writing. Goodman Ace does all his own writing."

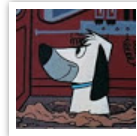
Mr. Conn says that the radio stars keep close tabs on the comments of radio columnists. Most of them subscribe to a clipping agency service and have press books as thick as a New York phone directory. Jack Benny has at least 10 books full of clippings.

"Several radio editors around the country," continues Mr. Conn, "have carried stories on why I split with Jack Benny. Most of them were guesses when did me no good. 'Aircaster' in the New York Journal said that I split on account of Mary Livingstone, not giving her enough jokes. That's not true. I gave Mary Livingstone her name and characterized her as a plain girl from Plainfield and took care that she would not overdo the character. I gave Schleppeyman his name. I took care of him and he is a star today, making pictures and getting big money on another program.

"I started with Benny from his first program over four years ago. I was with Burns and Allen at the time, having started with them from scratch. Burns got me the Benny job and I got along for four years without any trouble. For a long while I worked for him without contract. The real reason why we split was on account of publicity. A writer must have this. I was not getting enough to further my interests financially, so we talked it over and decided to call it quits. There is no money in 'ghost writing' after you have hit your stride.

"The picture companies hire you according to your credits. For instance, Fred Allen gave his writer (Harry Tugend) credit and 20th Century Fox Films gave him a great contract. If Fred Allen had taken credit for

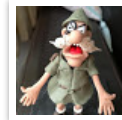
About Me



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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 fernandollera.com
3 hours ago

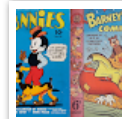
Movies with Michael



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

himself, his writer could not have gotten this contract. A writer gets screen credit in Hollywood; also program credit in a show. Radio gives you nothing but what you can pick up from friendly radio editors. This season, they promise me plenty of publicity.

"I am leaving for the coast next week to organize the program that is to star Joe Penner and will let you know from time to time what's going on."

Conn was either being naïve or disingenuous. Certainly it would have been fair for him to get a credit mention at the end of each programme—although no radio show that I can think of was doing that in 1936—but to think film companies didn't know who was writing and producing radio shows because their names weren't mentioned is silly. Show business is a small world. People know people. And people had to know who was writing what was one of the top radio shows (even if they didn't have "friendly radio editors" to remind them in columns). Conn also fails to mention a teensy fact. He left Benny in the lurch by walking out on him days before a broadcast and a script had to be quickly put together.

The columnist in Albany revisited the Conn situation on October 7, 1936 to make a couple of points, one about Conn.

HARRY W. CONN, who writes the Joe Penner scripts and used to write Jack Benny's jokes, told this column that the main reason he quit Benny was that the latter would give him no air "credit" — that is, mention of his name as the man responsible for the comedy skits.

Last Sunday night we listened to Penner because we wanted to see if Harry Conn could completely—or even approximately — change him from the Penner of old. We found very little change and heard no air credit for Harry Conn.

If Penner really is going to be different, it will have to be from next Sunday on. He was last week pretty much the same Joe, changing a duck for a black sheep. But can any comedian really change his style? We have heard many of them on stage, screen and in radio and have yet to find one who, despite any criticism, did not go on using the same old comedy tricks.

The Conn version of Penner's show vanished. Conn then mounted and starred in his own programme—he'd show them who the *real* talent was—and it died unlamented. Meanwhile, Benny got new writers and went on to bigger things. Many of the things you associate with Jack Benny today were products of writers other than Harry W. Conn—skilfully edited by Benny himself.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:44](#)


Labels: [Jack Benny](#)



No comments:

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 Comment as:

Garth (Google) ▼

Sign out

Publish

Preview


☐ Notify me

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 -




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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