



Sunday, 24 August 2014

Singing Star Teddy Powers

One of the great, long-time cast members of the Jack Benny radio and TV shows was Teddy Powers.

You don't remember Teddy Powers? You should.

Of course, he wasn't using the name Teddy Powers then. He tossed out that stage name and picked another. He called himself Dennis Day.

It's an oft-told story in old-time radio circles about how Dennis got his job on the Benny show. But here's probably the most contemporary version. His first appearance on the show was October 8, 1939. This story appeared in the radio section of the *New York Sun* on October 21st, accompanied by an artist's portrait of Dennis that we can't reproduce. The part about Verna Felton's hiring is new on me.

The New Day in Radio

Jack Benny's Young Tenor Won Place Over Horde of Applicants.

By K. W. STRONG.

Take one natural tenor voice, add an eagerness to achieve prominence, mix well with an ingredient known as ambition to justify parental faith, sprinkle generously with good old Irish luck, stir briskly in a New York cauldron and you have Dennis Day's recipe for success.

The local boy who's making good in a great big way as Jack Benny's tenor discovery on the Sunday night NBC series out In Hollywood had sung a note professionally four months ago. And as recently as last November he hadn't even considered earning a living as a singer.

More than a few New Yorkers will remember Day as one Eugene Dennis McNulty, son of a city engineer, choir boy at St. Patrick's Cathedral, second ranking honor student at Manhattan College, president and soloist of that school's glee club, and winner of Mayor LaGuardia's vocational scholarship upon his graduation in 1938. "Mac," as he was better known in those days, chose to exercise the scholarship by accepting a job at Radio Station WNYC. His four amateur appearances with Larry Clinton's NBC Campus Club the previous spring had whetted his appetite for radio. But far from becoming an immediate tenor sensation, Mac put in his time at WNYC as a glorified office boy, saving every penny he could toward the day when he could afford to enter law school. At times he showed up at WHN where as Teddy Powers he sang as soloist with the Ballou and Albert orchestras.

In October an appendectomy upset his well-laid plans. When he was released from the hospital his savings were gone and he was faced with the necessity of making money quickly to regain lost ground.

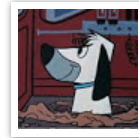
Friml Recognized Talent.

Spurred on by Rudolph Friml Jr., who recognized his vocal talent after hearing him at a party, McNulty took the more appealing professional name Dennis Day (his own middle name plus his grandmother's maiden name) and began the heart-breaking routine of auditions. He was rewarded finally in June, when Del Peters of CBS signed him for the tenor spot on Ray Block's Musical Varieties. He started at the stupendous salary of \$21 per week, of which an agent got 10 per cent.

A faux pas made during the second and last broadcast with Block made Dennis believe that he had snuffed out a promising career. After singing one song Dennis stepped out of the studio momentarily for a drink of water. Maestro Block, crossing him up, went immediately into the introduction of Day's next song instead of a band number. Dennis reached the mike



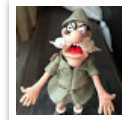
About Me



[View my complete profile](#)

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...

1 hour 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

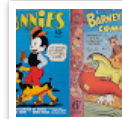
Movies with Michael



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..."
5 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

on cue, but his first note should have been put through a wringer.

The error wasn't as tragic as Dennis had assumed, however, for he next was given the vocal berth on Leith Stevens's "Accent on Music," and was making his debut on this CBS series when Mary Livingstone heard him. She located his manager, obtained a record of the broadcast and flew with it to Jack, who was then in Chicago. After playing the record Jack returned to New York to audition Day.

Over 200 Vocalists In Try-outs.

All in all, Jack listened to more than 100 of the nation's best tenors during the summer, and his radio producer, Murray Bolen, heard that many more. But Dennis, a shy youngster who came along about number fifty, had the inside track from the moment Jack heard him.

Funny thing, too. Last June, when Day heard that Kenny Baker wouldn't be with Jack this fall he stroked that piece of Blarney Stone without which he wouldn't feel completely dressed, and immediately was seized with the feeling that he was destined to be the next Jack Benny tenor. Common sense told him that it was a crazy idea, since he had only one professional broadcast behind him at the time, and a few weeks later, when Jack Benny asked him to audition, Dennis felt as if he'd known about it and had [two words missing] it all along. [Dennis left New York for Hollywood and] arrived early in September and made an immediate hit with the rest of the gang. But still no contracts were signed. On the spur of the moment Jack embarked for Treasure Island, pushed on to New York, Detroit and Chicago, and headed home with his mind made up to send for Dennis and give him a trial. But when Jack reached Hollywood he found that Dennis was still in town. No one had told him to go home. Dennis, figuring that he ought to stay under cover lest the cat get out of the bag and spoil his chances, had been practically hiding out for four weeks—and was he homesick!

Selected Own Stage Mother.

Homesick . . . mother . . . stage mother!! Jack had an idea. Why not introduce Dennis by means of a hard-boiled, domineering stage mother, who'd see to it not only that Dennis was protected from Hollywood, but also that Jack's life was made characteristically miserable?

Benny, his secretary, Harry Baldwin; his writers, Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin; Mary Livingstone and Producer Murray Bolen began auditioning "stage mothers," with Dennis sitting in. They finally eliminated all but two, voted, and wound up in a three-three deadlock. "Dennis, it'll be your mother," said Jack. "You cast the deciding vote."

Thus Dennis Day, probably the only lad on record who's had the privilege of choosing his own mother, said: "I like Miss Felton, Mr. Benny. She sounds like she'd be a world of protection to me. And so Verna Felton, who has been mother to Phil Harris, Don Wilson and "Tom Sawyer Benny," became the bass-voiced maternal protector of Dennis Day.

Now that he's been made a regular member of the Jack Benny gang and is succeeding in one of the toughest spots so young a singer ever had to fill, there to just one question that's uppermost in Dennis Day's mind: "Mr. Benny, will we do a show or two from New York this year?"

Day turned out to be a brilliant find. Somewhere along the way, Benny and his writers discovered he could do broad dialects and comic impressions, and enhanced the show by adding them to the scripts. And his timing was tops too, something you can probably say about all the main cast members on the Benny show. Day died June 22, 1988. He had a 40-year marriage and a longer career in entertainment. You might say a break and talent were his special Powers.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at 07:35



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:

 **J Lee** 24 August 2014 at 09:07

There's a certain irony in Teddy Powers getting his first big break on WHN, since that was the New York City radio station owned by MGM, which also was the studio that Kenny Baker ended up with when he left Jack's show. So Metro was both responsible for taking Jack's tenor away and setting up his replacement.

[Reply](#)

Enter your comment...



Comment as:

Garth (Google) ▼

Sign out

Publish

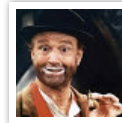
Preview

☐ Notify me

additional covers you could share! ...

14 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

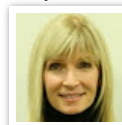
[Cartoon Research](#)

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

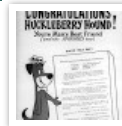
[The World of Knight](#)



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](#)

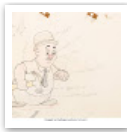
Wabbit Twouble: A Small Addendum to An Outstanding Podcast -

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)




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

Blog Archive

- ▶ [2020](#) (216)
- ▶ [2019](#) (376)
- ▶ [2018](#) (379)
- ▶ [2017](#) (380)
- ▶ [2016](#) (396)
- ▶ [2015](#) (389)
- ▼ [2014](#) (390)
 - ▶ [December](#) (37)
 - ▶ [November](#) (30)
 - ▶ [October](#) (33)
 - ▶ [September](#) (31)
 - ▼ [August](#) (32)
 - [How to be a Radio Comedian](#)

[Cartoons of 1947, Part 1](#)[Familiar Publisher](#)[Hungry Sword](#)[Hans, the Personality](#)[Step Down](#)[Porky Pig on Sunset
Boulevard](#)[Singing Star Teddy
Powers](#)[Boing Boing, You're Dead](#)[Dance of the Van Beuren
Maidens](#)[Spare the Rod, Spoil the
Cartoon](#)[Not Quite a Cartoon
Decapitation](#)[Game Show Perils](#)[Early Jones Take](#)[Jack and Sid](#)[Cartoons of 1946, Part 2](#)[What Was That, Mighty
Mouse?](#)[Running From
MacPoodle](#)[The Stars' Address](#)[If It's Rabbit Baby
Wants...](#)[Long Pan to Bugs](#)[Fred Finchley's Stylised
World](#)[Benny in Italy](#)[J.R. Bray Moves to
Paramount](#)[Blackboard Jumble](#)[Inside Out](#)[Flame War, 1950-Style](#)[Jump, Granny, Jump](#)[Histrionic Horse](#)[How to Survive on TV](#)[Cartoons of 1946, Part 1](#)[The Carpet's a Giraffe](#)[► July \(34\)](#)[► June \(31\)](#)[► May \(36\)](#)[► April \(33\)](#)[► March \(31\)](#)[► February \(29\)](#)[► January \(33\)](#)[► 2013 \(388\)](#)[► 2012 \(397\)](#)[► 2011 \(106\)](#)

Labels

[Aline Mosby](#) (17)

[Art Davis](#) (33)

[Bad Luck Blackie](#) (9)

[Bob and Ray](#) (10)

[Bob Clampett](#) (82)

[Bob McKimson](#) (59)

[Bob Thomas](#) (53)

[Chuck Jones](#) (142)

[Columbia](#) (33)

[Counterfeit Cat](#) (8)

[Cynthia Lowry](#) (26)

[Dick Thomas](#) (14)

[Don Patterson](#) (17)

[Earl Wilson](#) (6)

[Erskine Johnson](#) (37)

[Felix the Cat](#) (27)

[Film Daily](#) (50)

[Fleischer](#) (154)

[Frank Tashlin](#) (24)

[Fred Allen](#) (43)

[Fred Brunish](#) (11)

[Friz Freleng](#) (137)

[Gene Deitch](#) (18)

[George Pal](#) (10)

[Grant Simmons](#) (4)

[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (99)

[Hanna-Barbera](#) (2)

[Harman-Ising](#) (61)

[Henry Morgan](#) (13)

[Irv Spence](#) (8)

[Jack Benny](#) (454)

[Jay Ward](#) (30)

[Jimmy Durante](#) (17)

[John Crosby](#) (84)

[John Sutherland](#) (28)

[Johnny Johnson](#) (27)

[Kenny Baker](#) (6)

[King-Size Canary](#) (8)

[Laugh-In](#) (11)

[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (6)

[Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)

[Magical Maestro](#) (9)

[Maurice Noble](#) (12)

[Mel-O-Toons](#) (4)

[MGM](#) (553)

[Norm McCabe](#) (5)

[Pat Matthews](#) (10)

[Paul Julian](#) (13)

[Paul Terry](#) (2)

[Sara Berner](#) (5)

[Screwy Squirrel](#) (34)

- [Spider-Man](#) (1)
- [Terrytoons](#) (84)
- [Tex Avery](#) (468)
- [Tom and Jerry Human](#) (29)
- [Tralfaz Sunday Theatre](#) (17)
- [Ub Iwerks](#) (80)
- [UPA](#) (57)
- [Van Beuren](#) (94)
- [Vernon Scott](#) (42)
- [Virginia MacPherson](#) (14)
- [Walt Disney](#) (145)
- [Walter Lantz](#) (241)
- [Warner Bros.](#) (586)
- [Who Killed Who](#) (10)

