



Sunday, 26 October 2014

## The Friars' First Victim

If you're of a certain age, you'll recall the Dean Martin Celebrity Roasts. People seemed to love them in spite of the corny old jokes, intrusive laugh track and meat-cleaver editing job. That's because it was about the only place you'd see all those great old stars together in one place. And who doesn't love Dean Martin?

The Martin shows were an off-shoot of the far-better Friars Club roasts, sponsored on NBC by Kraft. Their humour was, shall we say, edited for home viewing. The Friars began in New York in 1904 as a private club for show folk. Testimonial dinners to its members soon followed; as they were behind closed doors, risqué humour the Friars would never use on the vaudeville or legitimate stage was acceptable (and, I suspect, encouraged).



The death of vaudeville and rise of the film industry brought many show people to Los Angeles from New York and so a West Coast monastery of the Friars was set up in 1947. And who was the victim of their first Roast? None other than Jack Benny, with his old pal Georgie Jessel in charge of the proceedings.

Erskine Johnson of the National Enterprise Association was apparently on the guest list. He also attended when Benny presided over a Jessel roast in 1948. But to read Johnson's report, the comic material at the roast doesn't sound any different than the gags you'd hear when a star guest-starred on another star's radio show. Orson Welles does everything. Sam Goldwyn gets tagged with more "Hugo" jokes (he called Hoagy Carmichael "Hugo" at that year's Oscars ceremony). Guess what Benny movie got ribbed? The same one that was a running gag on the air for years. Bing Crosby's insistence on no longer doing his comedy-variety show live was fair (and tame) game. Johnson doesn't even hint that some comic stars liked and told dirty jokes. And I suspect that back then, many of his readers didn't want to know it, either (oh, how times have changed). But they would have loved to have been there and Johnson was there for them. I would, too.

Johnson's column ran on July 5, 1947.

Hollywood — (NEA) — Fred Allen would have been drooling. All of Jack Benny's friends were insulting him at the first stag beef-steak dinner given by Hollywood's new Friars Club (Jack consented to appear only after being assured that he wouldn't be charged for his dinner.)

The speaker's table looked like a million-dollar movie cast—George Burns, Danny Kaye, Groucho Marx, George Jessel, Sam Goldwyn, Eddie Cantor, Parkyakarkus, Orson Welles, George Murphy and Pat O'Brien. The greatest wits in show business, plus the nit-wit—Benny.

Benny was the Friars' first victim—the questionable guest of honor—in what will be a series of roast dinners with Jessel as roast-master.

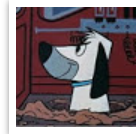
Jessel stared things off by telling a Benny anecdote and then adding, "I was married but I can't recall to whom at the time."

Eddie Cantor just couldn't insult his old friend and praised him instead. So Jessel insulted Cantor.

"It's easy to wax sentimental," said Jessel, "when you haven't got any jokes."

But everyone else ripped Benny to shreds. "They charged 85 cents to see Benny's last movie, 'The Horn Blows at Midnight,'" said Groucho Marx, who then added, "They charged it but they didn't get it."

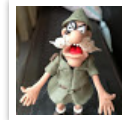
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Knox...and families of these comic artists can see these gems... - made with fimo clay I had ago and its not very easy to do...

1 hour ago

#### Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



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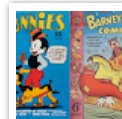
#### Movies with Michael



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

Fred Allen, of course, wired from New York: "There isn't a beefsteak big enough to cover the black eye Jack Benny has given show business."

Jessel introduced Sam Goldwyn as "Hugo Goldwyn, the man who makes all those mistakes in English but when he makes pictures we should make such mistakes."

Pat O'Brien thought Goldwyn's speech about Benny was much too sentimental. "'It sounded,'" said Pat, "like the 'Best Tears of Our Lives.'"

Orson Welles cracked that the only reason Benny was guest of honor was to remind movie makers of Benny's existence.

But Orson got it, too. Jessel introduced him as the "distinguished everything. When we called up Orson to join us he told me, 'I'll be there, I'll cook the dinner, dress the room, make all the speeches and clean up.'"

Benny took it all with a smile. "This," said Jack, "is not a spot for suave comedian."

Jack thought it was a mistake to appoint Bing Crosby as a Friar Dean. "He isn't here tonight," said Jack. "In fact, he didn't even send in a transscription."

Jack looked at Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz of Los Angeles and quipped: "He looks like a sheriff in a Pine and Thomas picture."

The Friars just moved into their new clubhouse—the onetime Clover Club where Hollywood folk once lost thousands at the dice and roulette tables. "We were a little late in opening," said Jessel. "It took us three says just to get the dice out of here."


Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:18](#)    

Labels: [Erskine Johnson](#), [Jack Benny](#)

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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...  
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 **The World of Knight**




TONIGHT, 11:54 PM. - COPYRIGHT 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT  
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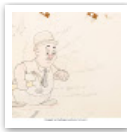
 **Yowp**



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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