

Sunday, 28 December 2014

Remley

As Don Wilson reads an inside reference to Bert Scott during a Jack Benny radio show, a loud chortling voice can be heard in the background. No, it's not Benny and it's not Scott (Benny's personal manager). It belonged to radio's most famous left-handed guitar player, Frank Remley.

Remley had what must be the most improbable career in radio, as part of the career wasn't really his. It came about very gradually. Remley was part of Phil Harris' orchestra and when Harris was hired as Benny's orchestra leader in 1936, Remley came along. Harris started out as a combative foil for Benny (or, occasionally, very vocally subdued) until the writers realised making him a brash boozier was a far better character. And the only person even more of a boozier than Harris, said the scripts, was Harris' guitar player. Finally, the writers decided to use Remley's name and pretty soon, Remley's phoney alcohol-soaked antics were getting huge laughs. All during this time, Remley was never heard on the air, except when his unidentified laughter soared into the microphones from the bandstand on the back of the stage.



Harris became such a hot commodity, he was courted for his own radio comedy show. His writers went looking for characters, and since Remley was synonymous with Harris from the Benny show, the writers decided to make Remley a character on the show. But Remley didn't play Remley. The great radio producer-actor Elliott Lewis did. And that caused no amount of confusion for him, as we can see in this syndicated story from the North American Newspaper Alliance. This was in the *Long Island Star-Journal* of July 29, 1949

Remley Hopes Film Job Will Prove He's Real

By Harold Heffernan

PERSONALITY PARADE: Frank Remley gets so confused at time that he pinches himself to see if he exists. Most people who have heard Jack Benny talk about him on Jack's radio program, and Phil Harris and Alice Faye on theirs think he's strictly a fictional character.

They say when introduced to Frank, "oh, come now, you're not Frank Remley on the Phil Harris show. You can't fool us. We know—because the announcer at the end of the program always says, 'Frank Remley was played by Elliott Lewis.'"

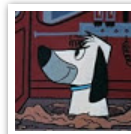
Remley then tries to explain that Elliott Lewis does play him on the radio but nevertheless he—Frank Remley—does exist in the flesh and blood. He's no fictional character. He does play the second guitar in Phil Harris's band and when the instrument is heard, that's the genuine Frank Remley. But when Frank Remley talks, that's Elliott Lewis.

...

"I'M NOT GOOD enough to play myself," said Remley. "I tried out for the role but everybody said that a famous character like Frank Remley should sound better over the air. They chose Elliott Lewis which is okay by me because I want to sound good. He's given me quite a reputation back in my home town of Fargo, N. D. Remley, who's been a pal of Harris's for 27 years, is coaching Phil now on how to make love to Betty Grable in "Wabash Avenue" at 20th Century Fox. Vic Mature provides the competition. Remley himself is acting a small part in the film just to prove to people that he's not something out of Jack Benny's imagination.

"Jack started it all," said Remley as he awaited his next appearance in the movie. "When Phil went on the Benny show 13 years ago, I was playing second guitar, like I had been in Phil's band for 10 years before that. Jack took pot shots at me in his ad libbing and soon I was getting fan mail.

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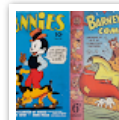
Movies with Michael



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..."

1 hour ago

Termite Terrace headlines

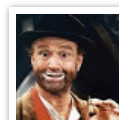


Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! - OK so I've been doing some looking around. Bosko apparently had a comic book and I'm wondering if any of you know of additional covers you could share! ...

10 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

(f...

1 day ago

Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons



'Cozy Bear' Group Tied to Hacks on Covid Vaccine Research. - ©2020

fernandollercartoons.com

1 day ago

...

"WHEN PHIL and Alice started their show four years ago Phil decided to give me a buildup. At first it gave me a strange feeling to watch Elliott Lewis play me. I felt like I was watching my own ghost. But I've gotten used to it. I go to rehearsals, sit there strumming my guitar and saying to myself, 'golly, that Frank Remley's a great actor.' I always say to Elliott before the show starts, 'don't let me down tonight. Remember, my reputation is at stake.'

"Elliott has played me so well that, the other night, when I went to a party with Phil and Alice, a producer offered me a leading role in a film. I said, 'but you've made a mistake. I'm not Frank Remley. I mean I am but not the guy you think I am.' He got sore and said, 'wise guy, eh? Well, I'll give the role to someone else.'

"Elliott is swell about it. Here he is building up my name but not his. But he doesn't mind. Sometimes when we go out together, someone will shout, 'hello, Frank.' At first, we didn't know what to do. Now, we both shout back and the fans probably think one of us is crazy."

...

A HAIL-FELLOW-WELL-MET with a rugged physique and a handsome face, he finds the fictional character of Frank Remley embarrassing at times.

"Especially that part about me being a hard drinker," Frank said. "If I go to a bar where I'm known, I always hear someone whisper, 'uh-uh, there he goes again.' I'm so conscious everyone's watching me that I usually down a coke and go home."

On the "Wabash Avenue" set, Remley plays gin rummy by the hour with Phil. The two met in 1922 on a ship when Harris was taking a band, the Dixie Syncopators, to Hawaii for an engagement. Remley was playing a banjo in the ship's orchestra and Harris offered him a job. They've worked together ever since.

"Many of the incidents we use on the air actually happened to Phil and me," he said. "We blow them up of course, to get the most laughs possible but basically they're true stories."

Release of this movie will be a red-letter day for him, Frankie says.

"Folks will know then," he declared, "that in spite of Benny and Harris there is a real Remley. That is," he added and the thought almost overcame him, "unless they slap me down on the cutting-room floor."

Remley's on-air situation got more bizarre. Harris left the Benny show at the end of the 1951-52 season. But his orchestra stayed, including Frank Remley. But this seems to have sparked a change on Harris' own show. Starting in the 1952-53 season, Frank Remley was known as "Elliott Lewis." Yes, Lewis used his real name and a contrived explanation was given for the name change on the season opener. All those years of Remley jokes went down the drain; Elliott Lewis being called Elliott Lewis just didn't seem right. The real Remley ended up making the occasional on-camera appearance on the Benny TV show and even had a line or two. As an actor, he was no Elliott Lewis. But he was a great friend of Benny's; they took trips together and Jack wrote him letters which, I understand, weren't quite G-rated.

Remley had a heart attack and died in Newport Beach, California on January 28, 1967, age 67. He may have provided more laughs for more radio listeners by not being on the air than anyone else.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:37](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

3 comments:

Anonymous 20 January 2015 at 09:14

This is a very factual account of my Uncle Frank and I really enjoyed it. One thing I'd like to add, Frank chose to stay with the Benny show for his wife who said she wanted more stability in their lives and felt the Benny show provided that. This caused a big riff in the friendship of Frank and Phil, Phil never forgave him and wouldn't come to his funeral but Alice Faye did. Funny thing was the Jack Benny show was soon cancelled so my Aunt's stability was gone. The letters to my Uncle Frank from Jack Benny are in the Library in Boston, MA. They are quite funny.

[Reply](#)



Yowp 20 January 2015 at 21:01

Gee, Anon, I'm sorry to hear about the friendship falling apart. Phil already had Walter Scharf's band on his show, so he really didn't have a place for Frank or his other ex-bandmates (Wayne Songer, Charlie Bagby, Sammy Weiss and so on) on his show. All stayed on the Benny programme.

[Reply](#)

Unknown 18 February 2017 at 12:36

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



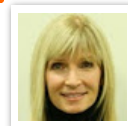
Cartoon Research

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...

3 days ago



The World of Knight

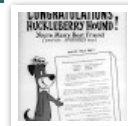
TONIGHT, 11:54 PM. - COPYRIGHT 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT



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



Phil and Frank must have made up at some point, though; Frank appears on Phil's episode of "This Is Your Life" in the late 50's.

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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


 **Peter Gray's Comics and Art**



An early
Tom Thug
page for
sale and
other comic
art by Lew
Stringer go

[to link and ebay..](#) -
<http://lewstringercomics.blogspot.com/2020/02/original-art-for-sale.html>
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5 months 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...
1 day ago

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