Sunday, 31 May 2015

### Benny By Vilanch

Jack Benny touched many lives, and the proof was in the seemingly countless eulogies in newspapers across North America after his death in 1974. It seemed everyone had some kind of personal story, either from meeting Jack or through his weekly appearances in living rooms via a box with tubes and dials.

One remembrance was written by Bruce Vilanch. He's known today for a number of things, including gag writing for the Oscar telecast, but at the time of Benny's death, he was a writer for the *Chicago Tribune*. That's where this story appeared on December 31, 1974.

## Remembering a 'tightwad' who enriched our lives

ONE OF THE EARLIEST television memories among members of my generation is the vision of Jack Benny. Just standing there, one arm across the chest, the hand

clutching the opposite elbow, the fingers placed pensively on the cheek, looking for all the world like somebody who has just had his foot run over by a Prussian regiment that he just found leaving his bathroom. Eternally perplexed, forever befuddled, Benny mastered the art of letting everything go on around him and only then making you laugh by his reaction. He was the king of the slow burn, the absolute ruler of the throwaway line or ges- ture. He was funnier standing still than any 10 comics on the hoof.

UNLIKE MOST other people who are writing about him now, I never really knew Benny. I interviewed him once-in the middle of a Mill Run engagement that had him more perplexed than usual because he was working on a stage that wouldn't stop twirling, and it kept distracting him. At the time, he was chuckling over an offer he had just received from David Merrick.

"He wants me to play 'Hello, Dolly!' in drag," Benny said, with a half-ironic smile on his face. After we had finished laughing, he quietly added, "Of course, I'll do it ... but only if he lets George Burns play Horace." The Benny-Burns practical joking was one of the longest-running merry pranks in show business and, toward the end, when Benny was making most of his impact on talk shows, it had achieved legendary proportions. My own favorite story was the one about Benny and Burns at a big party. Benny was standing silently in a corner of the room, just about to light up a cigar. Suddenly, from across the room, Burns called out In a loud voice, "Stop! Everybody stop! Jack Benny is going to do the match bit!"

OF COURSE, there was no match bit. Benny just stood there, holding the lighted match and the cigar, as 100 Hollywood eyes bore down upon him, waiting to be doubled over by his trick.

"So what could I do?," he later related, "I just turned on my heel and walked out of the room." The crowd roared.

Of course, there was much more to Jack Benny than his slow burns or his George Burns. He knew timing like no one else, he knew story-telling like no one else, he knew silence like no one else. He was as funny without words, sometimes even without gestures, as anyone ever has been.

More than that, tho, he knew how to make fun of himself in a way that few performers ever figure out. LIKE LIBERACE, who anticipates the audience's mild outrage at his manners and dress and, therefore, comes on in the brightest sequins imaginable, with a joke to match, Benny understood his myth and wasn't abashed by it.

They said he was a tightwad, and he joked about it, but outrageously. I'll never forget one of his early television shows, where he had to get the money out of the vault in order to repair the Maxwell which, after 135 years of service, had finally broken down.



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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...

57 minutes ago

### Termite Terrace



Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! OK so I've been doing

looking around. Bosko apparently had a comic book and I'm wondering if any of you know of additional covers you could share! ...

9 hours ago

# Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog Born on July 18, 1913 - Red

### Sorn on July 18, 1913 - Red Skelton -



\*Today's post commences with the Guzzler's

Gin routine

(f... 23 hours ago

### E Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons



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

fernandolleracartoons.com

1 day ago

"Just a minute," he said to Rochester, "I'll be right back." And he then led us on a half-hour descent to the subsub basement of his home where, in order to reach the money, he had to cross a moat filed with alligators, an elaborate booby-trapping system, and finally a 200-year-old man, covered with cobwebs, standing poised next to the vault, a bow and arrow at the ready.

You don't run across this sort of self-placed humor any more. Maybe it's because comedians today aren't as self-defined as Benny, or maybe it's because, in the new age of fear and loathing, no one intentionally sets himself up as a fool.

Whatever the reasons, we won't be seeing anything like Jack Benny ever again-they don't make 'em that brave

HOLDUP MAN-Your money or your life!

BENNY-[silence].

HOLDUP MAN-I said your money or your life!

BENNY-[a shout] I'm thinking it over!

Oh, Rochester. Get him his blue suit.

Posted by Yowp at 07:22



Labels: Jack Benny

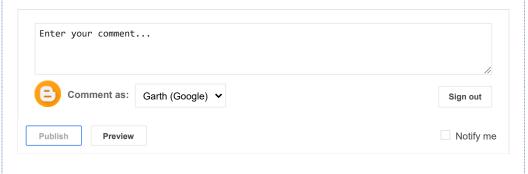
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#### J Lee 31 May 2015 at 09:52

It's interesting Vilanch mentioned the TV versions of the vault gag and (presumably) the hold-up gag, because both played out better on radio, where you could visualize in your mind the trip to Jack's vault via the voices and sound effects, on the case of the hold-up bit, didn't require an elaborate set-up that downplayed the payoff. But that also went towards showing Jack's greatness in that his visual reactions and the timing involved worked as well, or even better in some cases, on TV than they did on radio.

Reply



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### 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

### 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.blo gspot.com/2020/02/originalart-for-sale.html https://www.ebay.co.uk/sch/ graphite47/m.html? \_nkw=&\_armrs=1&\_ipg=&\_f rom=

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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Cinderella Swirl

Boogie Woogie Bunny

It Pays To Be Ignorant

The Magic Fluke

That Cat Can Play!

Jack Benny Goes Home

Censor That Woody!

Nyah, Nyah

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