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Wednesday, 22 July 2015

Don't Talk About Toscanini

The most baffling censorship demands were forced on Fred Allen. He related once how he was banned from using a certain phoney name on the air unless he could prove someone with that name didn't exist.

NBC also told him not to refer on the air to Arturo Toscanini. who led the network's symphony orchestra starting in 1937. Why? Perhaps the Maestro didn't have a sense of humour about himself. Nevertheless, Allen was told Toscanini jokes were out. I'm sure you can guess Fred's reaction.

Well, you don't have to. Here's a Chicago Tribune column from November 20, 1938 explaining what happened before an Allen broadcast.

FUNNY TO HEAR, ALLEN SHOW IS **FUNNIER TO SEE**

Jester Saves Best Stuff for Studio Crowd. BY LARRY WOLTERS.

When television comes the Fred Allen show ought to be even more fun for listeners. A goods show aurally, it is still better visually. It is funny from the moment you enter the big 1,200 sent studio until Fred has finished off with the last autograph seeker.

Before the show goes on early arrivers get laughs out of watching the page boys struggling to keep the reserved seats unoccupied. A little section is kept open for Fred and Portland's relatives and friends and for a few others favored by NBC.

New Yorkers put up a strong fight to get into those seats. But NBC attendants, sturdy fellows, fight back. They don't manage to save all the seats they intended to. But they do succeed in keeping a row for Portland's mother and sister, Lastone. Papa Hoffa, you remember, named his daughters for the cities in which they born, and the final one he called Last One. She changed it to Lastone. The family pronounces it "lastun."

Portland Gives Attention.

Portland, sitting on the stage before Fred makes his appearance, definitely maintains the attitude of the most interested spectator. And throughout the performance she hangs on every word Fred utters. And the laughter appears to be the spontaneous.

A minute or two before air time Harry Von Zell warms up the audience with a few jokes. Then he spies Fred sitting below in the audience, invited him to come up and address the audience.

Fred saves his wittiest cracks for the studio audience. Perhaps he has to. Many of them NBC's blue pencil department might otherwise scratch.

The network bosses do not like jokes about Toscanini. So Allen puts the maestro at the head of his list for joke

"You will notice," he explained the night we saw his show, "that all the page boys are in stocking feet tonight. Toscanini opens here next Saturday and all the boys with a squeak in their shoes higher than E flat have had to turn them in to have them tuned."

Says What He Pleases.

The sharpest blue pencil in Radio City cannot eliminate all of Allen's salty cracks because he doesn't set them down on paper. Given a continuity labeled "last revision" will not go on the air as it is written. When Fred gets to the microphone he will say what pops into his head at the moment. Or perhaps it is what he intended to say all the time.



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Old TV History



May 1940 -You couldn't blame David Sarnoff if he

uncomplimentary comments at the F.C.C. in May of 1940. The Commission made two rulings, basically tell...

1 day ago

Yowp



Wilma -Jean Vander Pyl didn't have a big name

television when she was cast to play Wilma Flintstone in 1960. The others were a bit different. Bea Benaderet ap... 3 weeks ago

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III News From ME

Mushroom Soup Monday -My "to do" list has enough items on it that I need to put up one of these soup cans that tells you not to expect much (if any) posting here todav. A friend...

1 hour ago

That must have been the case the other evening when he interviewed an NBC studio guide. He asked the chap what the various colored uniforms the page boys wear signify. One type of braid indicates television guides, another the lads who conduct tours, and so on, the youth explained.

"And the vice-presidents, I suppose, wear mess jackets," Fred interrupted, "to indicate the state their minds

When Fred presents his weekly guests whom he calls "people you never expected to meet" they also meet a person they never expected to meet-Fred Allen. For Fred at the microphone is a different fellow than he was in rehersal [sic]. During rehersal he is meek enough but on the air he can't resist being a bad boy. His kidding invariably gets him a long way from the text.

Relies on Uncle Jim.

And that is where Uncle Jim Harkins, Allen's assistant of many years, comes in. As Allen ad libs and the guest flounders hopelessly through the pages of the script wondering how they will get back into it, Uncle Jim stands beside them giving help and counsel. He puts his finger on the script at the point he deems best to reenter it. And if the guest becomes flustered Allen ad libs further to ease the situation.

Fred has his uncomfortable moments, too. An inveterate tobacco chewer, his pained expressions are believed to be due to the fact that NBC will permit him no receptacle to get relief from his cud. When there is a break in the program for music Fred sometimes sneaks out back behind a screen. And he looks happier when he comes

In every broadcast there are bound to be dull moments for the studio audience. Fred does his best to brighten these.

For instance, when Von Zell interrupts the program so that station announcements may be made across the country, Alien steps to the front of the platform and informs the studio audience, "This is the point where we ask Hitler whether we can go on with the program."

A Hard Worker.

Fred probably works harder on his show than any other of radio's major comedians. With the exception of Friday, which is his day off, and on Sunday morning when he and Portland go to church, he spends almost the entire week working on Town Hall scripts, his associates say. The Allens seldom go out or entertain. They live in a two room apartment in a modest hotel near Radio City.

Posted by Yowp at 07:34



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Termite Terrace headlines



Today's Post: The 1964 World's Fair Documenta ry and other

64 World's Fair stuff - This documentary is quite good. Most of you have probably already seen it, but I'm sharing it here anyways. While I'm add it, why not share some ... 22 hours ago

Movies with Michael



The World's Greatest Super Friends Lex Luthor Strikes

Back (1979) - A wonderful episode. In this episode, Lex Luthor escapes from prison by switching places with Lois Lane. After escaping he captures each of the Supe... 23 hours ago





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I started reading some old "animal" comic strips and books for study and enjoyment. I've already tried out...

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Tomorrow Afternoon at Niles: Silent Era Animation and Jerry

Beck -2 days ago

AFRTS Archive



Your audience awaits! -Many of us saved a tape or

acetate or two. There are a lot of people that would like to hear them again. The airchecks from AFN/AFKN/SCN etc usually t

2 days ago

Mark Kausler's CatBlog

Felix Vs. A Spy From
Brigandia - In these Felix
strips from 4-24 to 5-7-32,
Felix returns from the Moon,
only to encounter a spy
from the kingdom of
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