



Sunday, 9 August 2015

They Couldn't Stand Him

Running gags are a staple of comedy, but Jack Benny's writers tried stretching that to running scenarios embracing part or all of a radio season. So we were treated to Jack warring with the Sportsmen Quartet (1946-47), Jack and the missing Oscar (1947-48), Jack and the echo (part of 1948-49) and Jack the songwriter (1951-52).

The most successful running routine had to be the "I Can't Stand Jack Benny" contest, which took up part of the 1945-46 season. The idea was brilliant. It was a way to get the Benny audience involved in the show and, at the same time, get publicity.

Radio Life magazine of February 3, 1946 explains what happened.

They "Can't Stand Jack Benny" because . . .

By Evelyn Riggsby

Fourteen years ago, Jack Benny pulled a comedy switch in radio. Instead of having a cast full of stooges, he became a stooge for his cast; instead of telling jokes on the other fellow, he let the other fellow turn the joke on him.

A few weeks ago Benny pulled another switch. This time, instead of conducting a contest on "I like Crunchy Munchies (or) Soapsy Sudsies (or) Itsy Bitsies in fifty words or less together with a box top or reasonable facsimile" contest, he launched a "Why I Can't Stand Jack Benny" deal with no tops, no wrappers, no facsimiles—no, not even a strand from a 1945 model Benny toupe. It was a contest to satirize all contests, an insult routine to end all insult routines.

But to fifty-three winners it will pay off in \$10,000—a first prize of \$2,500, a second of \$1,500, a third of \$1,000 and fifty added awards of \$100 war bonds each.

Proof that the radio fans can go along with a gag was the mail response, which, it is estimated, will finally tabulate at between three and four hundred thousand letters. Final judges Fred Allen, Peter Lorre, and Goodman (Easy) Ace will name the winners.

Almost Called Off

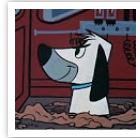
There's an interesting story behind this contest which, it is claimed, will break all records for any such competition ever held in the state of California. A few months ago, Benny's writers presented the idea as a sequence for one program, suggesting that the \$10,000 of which the radio Benny character had been robbed was really a publicity stunt. While the sequence was being "kicked around" someone said, "There are 130 million people in the country, but only thirty million listen to you, Jack. So one hundred million people must hate you. Say! There's an idea. Why don't you run a contest—a legitimate contest, "Why I Hate Jack Benny?"

"Why not?" replied Benny. "Only it's no good to use the word 'hate.'"

This is just the time when we're trying to eliminate that four letter word from the national and international vocabulary."



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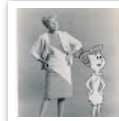


May 1940 - You couldn't blame David Sarnoff if he

mumbled some 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 on

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

3 weeks ago

Blogs to See

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 today. A friend...

1 hour ago

At this point the contest idea was almost abandoned until someone came up with the substitute wording "Why I 'Can't Stand' Jack Benny," that carried the germ of the idea, but took the curse off the hate notion.

Enlarge Staff

The contest was announced on the December 3 [actually, 2] program and ran three weeks and one day, ending Christmas Eve. To handle the anticipated replies. Benny rented a shop in an off business street in Beverly Hills—some space that could be spared for a month. He figured six girls, working without too much pressure, could handle perhaps 20,000 letters a week.

By the end of the second week, the mail was 150,000 for seven days and it was necessary to add three girls to the day staff and to put on a night staff of nine workers who hurried into the room at nightfall like little gnomes, slit open the letters, and segregated them as to categories for the workers coming in the morning to read.

About half of the replies came in rhyme. As for the reasons people can't stand Benny, they were divided between stinginess, ill-treatment of Rochester, ill-treatment of Fred Allen, fiddle-playing, and miscellaneous. In the miscellaneous category was a certain group which seized the contest as an opportunity to write nostalgic and "Hello, I haven't seen you in a long time" letters. Some letters went even so far as to include foot notes telling Benny they really loved him and that he shouldn't take the entry reply as anything more than a chance to latch onto same money—as who wouldn't, including Jack Benny?

The accompanying box contains quotes which were chosen while the contest was still in progress and which were picked because they were typical replies. Some, sent in by Benny's friends, were not trying, to compete, but were intended as gags. *Radio Life* will print the winning answers.

Radio Life also published some losing answers. Actually, some were gag responses by some of Jack's show biz friends. These were found in the same issue. Detroit Tigers star Hank Greenberg was a running gag on the show that year, heard moving to third base whenever Jack listened to play-by-play baseball. Tom Breneman had a morning show on ABC catering to elderly women, who filled his studio audience. He tried on their funny hats and gave them orchids; Jack was an honorary pallbearer at his funeral.

WHY SOME CAN'T STAND HIM

I can't stand Jack Benny because my husband won't miss his program, then we are late for church. He'd rather miss his chance to heaven than to miss Benny's program. —E.H.R., Glenarm, Ill.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he's had me on third base since the World Series, and I want to come home! —Hank Greenberg.

Sincerely regret St. Joe residents can't qualify for contest. We still love you here. —H.B., St. Joseph, Mo.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he doesn't play more violin solos on his program—Napoleon Bonaparte, (P.S. My two roommates, Julius Caesar and General Grant, prefer Fred Allen's singing—but they're crazy! N.B.) —Capt. A. J. H., Portland, Ore.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he obviously hasn't read my book. —Dale Carnegie

I can't stand Jack Benny because he puts rocks in his pockets when he weighs himself to get more for his money's worth. —J.O., Waukesha, Wis.

I can't stand Jack Benny because, while he continually talks about "good old Waukegan," he was smart enough to leave and never come back. —F. F., Waukegan, Ill.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he's always disguising himself as an old lady to get a free meal at "Breakfast in Hollywood." Worse yet, he won an orchid and I had to kiss him. —Tom Breneman.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he is giving \$10,000 in prizes to people who can't stand him and I like him so much I don't stand a chance to win. —M.E., Erie, Pennsylvania.

I can't stand Jack Benny because four years ago he took the role of Charley's Aunt away from me. —Lucille Ball.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he's so young, so firm, so fully, packed, so free and easy with his purse. That is, I don't like him too because my great grandmother told me when she was a little girl Jack used to give her a new Indian head penny if she would go to bed when he came to see her older sister. —Mrs. C.H.O., Spokane, Wash.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he is the type of person who would swear he had no relatives if you asked him "Brother, can you spare a dime?" —L.C.H., Denver, Colo.

I can't stand Jack Benny because I have no sense of humor. —M. C., San Leandro, Calif.

I can't stand Jack Benny because I saw him mature from a man to a boy. —Fred Allen (who isn't even eligible, as he is a judge.)

I can't stand Jack Benny because he's tight as an olive jar when you're having a party. —H. T., Glenside, Penn.

I can't stand Jack Benny because he's too much like a close friend of mine, and by close I do mean Bergen! —Charlie McCarthy.

The Exposure Sheet



Craig
Kellman's
Hanna
Barbera
Redesigns:
Old Faces,

New Looks - Every famous cartoon character, from Mickey Mouse to Bugs Bunny, has been redesigned and reimagined many times over the decades, and the classic character...

2 hours ago

Fernando Llera Cartoons



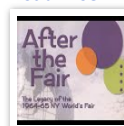
Israeli army
breaks
Gaza Strip
into two
parts. -
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fernandollera.com
3 hours ago

Cartoon Research

Two Must-Have Cartoon Collections - David Gerstein was pivotal to both these projects - both are close to his heart: Disney Comics and Flip The Frog.
9 hours ago

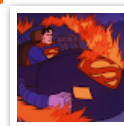
Termite Terrace headlines



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

I can't stand Jack Benny because I can't stand Fred Allen; I can't stand Fred Allen because I can't stand Charlie McCarthy. In fact, I can't stand any of these silly dummies who sit on a knee and use their noses for talking. Give me a HE-MAN like Joan Davis. —S.Y.C., Clifton Forge, Pa.

Benny's real-life popularity ensured the contest got plenty of publicity. Arthur Godfrey, according to *Variety*, got chastised in mid-programme by management for mentioning it on his morning show; the Redhead was on CBS at the time while Benny was on NBC. *Variety* wrote a think piece on not only whether the whole contest was a bad idea (with the potential of contest losers getting upset and no longer listening), but whether reading the winning entry was wise (Fred Allen, according to the publication, felt it should be kept off the air). In fact, *Variety* reported on February 6th that Benny himself, and not the Benny "character" was "disturbed when a Los Angeles suburbanite won his capital prize" but doesn't say why. The item seems odd, considering Benny continued to milk the Can't Stand Contest on his show for a number of years. And it seems silly to not read the entry. Benny's huge audience was, no doubt, dying of curiosity to know what it was.

The winner was submitted by Carroll P. Craig, Sr. Craig's poem was more than funny. It had a ring of truth, and I'm sure that's why it was selected.

*He fills the air with boasts and brags
And obsolete obnoxious gags.
The way he plays his violin
Is music's most obnoxious sin.
His cowardice alone, indeed,
Is matched by his obnoxious greed.
In all the things that he portrays
He shows up my own obnoxious ways.*

It was read beautifully by maybe the finest actor Benny ever had on his show, Ronald Colman, who after finishing it, added to his wife: "You know, Benita, maybe the fellow that wrote this letter is right. The things that we find fault with in others—are the same things that we tolerate in ourselves."

Carroll Piper Craig was originally from Altoona, Pennsylvania, born on December 26, 1896. His father was a lawyer. The family moved to Harrisburg where Craig enlisted in service in World War One. In 1940, he was living at 735 Radcliffe Avenue in Pacific Palisades, working as a draftsman for the Douglas aircraft factory in Santa Monica for about \$2,900 a year. You see a fuzzy photo of him from a poor scan of *Radio Life* to the right. He died in Los Angeles on June 12, 1958.

Perhaps one other thing to mention about the contest is it brought about the invention of the character of Steve Bradley, Jack's P.R. flack, who thought up ridiculous and impossible stunts to create publicity. He appeared only rarely after the contest ended. Bradley was originally played by Dick Lane, then resurfaced as "Dick Fisher" and then again as Bradley in the '50s, voiced by Hy Averbach. Lane was an actor in short films in the '30s and worked on a number of radio shows in the '40s, usually as some kind of fast talker. As much as I like Averbach, he was far inferior to Lane in the role. Lane had a distinctive voice and delivery which became eventually famous in Los Angeles as the voice of professional wrestling and roller games.

You can hear the winning entry read. Click on the arrow for the February 3, 1946 Benny show. The poem is at the 25:38 mark.

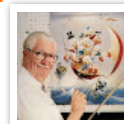
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Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:08](#)



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

1 day ago

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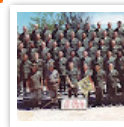


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[Beck](#) -

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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

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2 comments:



Steve Bailey 9 August 2015 at 11:42

Dick Lane is also well known to Laurel & Hardy buffs as "Hotshot" Coleman, the fast-talking publicity man in L&H's last Hollywood movie, "The Bullfighters."

[Reply](#)

Anonymous 20 December 2016 at 14:34

Dick Lane also appeared a few times on the Phil Harris Alice Faye show. He plays the same type of character, except he owns a Burlesque house. This is in one of the later seasons, when the show changes over to RCA.

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