



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?"

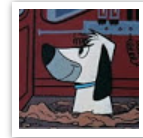
"Why not?" replied Benny. "Only it's no good to use the word 'hate.'"

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

At this point the contest idea was almost abandoned until someone came up with the substitute



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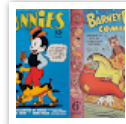
Movies with Michael



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 People..."

56 minutes ago

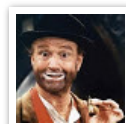
Termite Terrace headlines



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! ...

9 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...
23 hours ago

Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons



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

fernandollera.com
1 day ago

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. —Date 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.

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, can't stand Charlie. I can't stand any of these sissy dummies

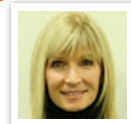
mc News From ME

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

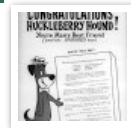
The World of Knight

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

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.

▶ 0:00 / 29:30 🔊 ⋮

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



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

2 comments:

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>
https://www.ebay.co.uk/sch/graphite47/m.html?__nkw=&__armrs=1&_ipg=&_fom=

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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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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