

Sunday, 6 September 2015

The TV Plunge

The question every radio star faced in the late 1940s was not whether they were going to get into television but when. Granted, there were a few exceptions (Jim and Marian Jordan, Phil Harris), but everyone in the radio industry saw more and more sponsor money being drained and moved into quickly-growing network TV.

Entertainment reporters kept asking Jack Benny when he'd make the jump. In interviews, he never seemed sure. But obviously talks were going on behind the scenes with CBS, American Tobacco (his sponsor) and his handlers to make it happen.



Finally, by August 1950, they were ready. Almost. *Variety* reported on the 21st that Benny would be on the air for Lucky Strike every eight weeks on a Sunday night, beginning October 29th. Eddie Anderson's Rochester was speculated to be a full cast member; American Tobacco had scuttled a Rochester daytime radio show only months before. Guest stars would be part of it and the format would be a cross between the Benny radio and stage shows. The first problem was all the air time on CBS was booked. American Tobacco had a half-hour from 7:30 to 8 on Sunday it could preempt but Benny insisted on doing a 45-minute show and refused to go a half-hour or an hour. The

other problem was CBS discovered it didn't have Benny sewn up for television. Amazingly, the contract with the huge bucks the network poured into the Benny vault to take him away from NBC in late 1948 didn't have a clause including television. And NBC had been talking to Benny for months about doing a TV show on Chime Time (*Variety*, October 4).

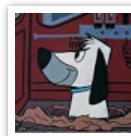
The problems were all solved. CBS worked out a new Benny deal including television. American Tobacco bought 45 minutes of time on Saturday night that Anheuser-Busch owned for the Ken Murray Show (*Variety*, Oct. 11); Murray made an appearance on the Benny show as part of the deal.

Jack prepared for his TV show by sitting in as a producer on the Wier Brothers' TV show on CBS; Benny had convinced CBS president Bill Paley and underling Harry Ackerman to sign the Wieres (*Variety*, Sept. 18).

Critics were generally pleased with the Benny premiere though several, including Jack Gould of *The New York Times* and Joe Csida of *Billboard*, complained there was too much old radio and not enough television (Gould wrote two reviews, one for the Sunday magazine edition). But Benny must have known his audience tuned in to his radio show because of familiarity and that's what he was going to give them on TV; John Crosby of the *New York Herald-Tribune* admitted that approach made the most sense (you can read Crosby's review [HERE](#)).

Here's what *Weekly Variety* had to say about the show in its November 1, 1950 edition.

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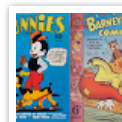


Cowboy Church #67
- Hello my friends and welcome back for another

service of cowboy church. Today's musical selection begins with Gene Autry singing "Dear Hearts and Gentle People..."

44 minutes ago

Termite Terrace headlines



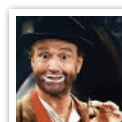
Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! - OK so I've been doing some

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

fernandollercartoons.com
1 day ago

JACK BENNY SHOW

With Jack Benny, Eddie (Rochester) Anderson, Don Wilson, Sportsmen Quartet, Artie ("Mr. Kitzel") Auerbach, Mel Blanc; music conductor, Mahlon Merrick; guests, Dinah Shore, Ken Murray

Producer: Hilliard Marks

Director: Dick Linkroum

Writers: Sam Perrin, Milt Josefsberg, George Balzer, John Tackaberry

45 Mins.; Sat., 8 p.m.

AMERICAN TOBACCO CO.

CBS-TV, from New York

(BBD&O)

No question about it — Jack Benny is as big a video click as he has been on top of the radio heap for so many years. With that conclusion established unequivocally, the rest of his CBSTV premiere is a matter of degree. (Actually this is not his video debut, Benny having done an al fresco stint on the Coast last year on KTTV and at the time it was far from a signal bow through faulty makeup and a general haphazard production technique; or rather lack of it). For CBS-TV, under his Fort Knox deal, Benny proved himself a very worthy asset.

He has poise, pace and polish. His debut vehicle of what was announced a once-every-eight-weeks' series was insured by his writers through reincorporating the trademarked Bennyisms — the close-student-of-the-dollar guy, including all the props that ran the gamut from 8c for an autograph (bus-fare type joke) to the coin phone, Bendix laundromat and coin-vending cigarette machine in the parlor. Not forgetting the garrulous polly who snitches on Rochester; the latter's references to his boss' asthmatic motor vehicle; the goodlooking vis-a-vis who dates Eddie Anderson via a phone bit. The Ameche is again well utilized for a telephonic "audition" by Dinah Shore of "I'm Yours." The songstress took her camera angles very flatteringly throughout "Tess' Torch Song" and her finale duet with Benny, "I Oughta Know More About You"; per usual, of course, she handled her vocal chores in big league manner.

The cohesiveness which usually distinguishes Benny's AM shows came through on his TV debut with an ear-pulling bit for the LSMFT commercial (first with Don Wilson, on cue, and later as a more affectionate bit with Miss Shore); the Sportsmen Quartet's outlandish parody rhapsodizing of the commercials ("No Business Like Show Business," and later, in tails, with Miss Shore in "Ought Know More About You").

In excellent composure, Benny attacked the new medium with such kidding-on-the-square asides as "I'd give a million to know how I look" and "I wasn't nervous; it was just that my sponsor didn't have the nerve." His monolog, as he pondered the pattern of his new adventure into TV, accented "I'm not stingy," and from there on the bits and scenes gave lie to the premise by continuing his trademarked radio characterization, such as checking up on Rochester's banana-swiping, and the rest.



well foiled by Artie Auerbach, likewise proved a solid interlude.

Ken Murray and Anheuser-Busch, his beer sponsor, who relinquished this Saturday-at-8 slot got a commercial credit, and Murray came on for an effective comedy bit, including what probably was a genuine cue that time was running out. As it developed, Benny could have done the full hour solidly but for some reason the comedian picked on a compromise 45 minutes as more "right" for him on TV. That's fielder's choice although, from the network's viewpoint, it



While this first show was essentially a transmutation of his AM format into TV, there's a funny bit with Mel Blanc, as the video technician who came onstage to expose some of the back-of-the-camera stuff. The mike boom was utilized as a conveyor for a prop pack of Luckies for the Don Wilson commercial which the rotund announcer handled well. It was here that Benny reprised another radio-familiar running gag — the Warners and "Horn Blows At Midnight." Rochester's scene was a good pace-changer for a song-and-dance to "Blue Heaven," and the "Mr. Kitzel" bit,

mc News From ME

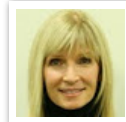
Sorry... - As far as I know, I do not have any diseases. I just have too much to deal with right now so I won't be blogging much if at all. I'm postponing all the web...

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...

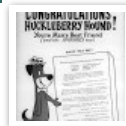
3 days ago

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

permitted Sam Levenson to hitch-hike importantly for that comedian's own 15-minute premiere. For the finale Benny pompously essayed "Love In Bloom" on the fiddle to a walkout audience and the usual finaleing commercials.

One salient emerges from the Benny show.

It is common to all the topflight comedy programs—and that is the necessity for instantaneity of telecast. This may not militate as much as it sounds, against the video prognosticators that film, eventually, will constitute the bulk of TV programs because there are many voids and off-hours to be filled. But for the top shows, particularly' the comedy, variety and revue shows, the knowledgeability [sic] that all the obvious little nervousness habits, the fluffs, and the uncertainties of coming out on the button, makes for an important common denominator in the audience reflex. It's like seeing Saturday gridcasts as they're happening, or the Friday night fights—after you know the winnah the film versions are relatively road companies of the original cast. If you know the score there's something lacking; and while we've gotten to accept taped AM shows, somehow for a long time TV had better adhere to the live technique in order to preserve that human equation of maybe the jokes won't come out as scripted. But when they do it's that much more boffo.

The back-of-the-camera credits are generously apportioned to all. Mahlon Merrick did a good music accomp but what is there about video bands, when they get their innings, they want to make sure they're heard? It's probably more the director's fault in not using the music fader to maintain volume balance with the dialog. In short, the ear is attuned to the comedy but give the average TV orchestra half a chance and they go into high and blast the looker's eardrums. This has been a noticeable shortcoming on almost all networks, and usually with comedy programs, as if the maestros resent having been held in check as mere musical accompaniment.

But Benny won't blast anybody away from the video screen. If New York is such a magnet to the comedian he's a cinch to accelerate that once-in-eight-weeks' schedule. He should. Benny is bigtime looker-innering. *Abel*



The choices of guests were interesting. Dinah Shore was about to open at the Palladium in London with Benny. A half-hour Kitzel radio show was for sale and Artie Auerbach (photo left, with Jack) had already cut a pilot. Mel Blanc was one of Jack's close friends who had gone from occasional appearances to being on the radio show almost every week in a variety of one-shot and regular roles. And judging by Jack's respect for Eddie Anderson (who always rated highly with the Benny audience), I'm sure he wanted to showcase him with the dance number, though there was so much living room furniture in the way, he didn't get a chance to cut loose.

Benny, arguably, had the best timing in show business, but his timing was way off on his TV show. 45 minutes was too short. A duet with Dinah Shore wraps up far too quickly. The last gag (the audience walking out) doesn't play out; it's cut off. Director Linkroum cuts to Dorothy Collins who doesn't seem to notice she's been cued to sing the cigarette jingle. In fact, that wasn't supposed to be the ending at all. Benny was annoyed with what happened but he really only had himself to blame. He could have, and should have, taken the full hour (Wildroot bought the last 15 minutes for Sam Levenson). *Variety* of November 1st reveals:

Luckies' Comm'l Must Go On, Vexes Benny As TV Finale Is Scissored

Jack Benny was irked at Lucky Strike sacrificing what he thought was more important—an inaugural first show—in order to get in a finale commercial by The Sportsmen Quartet with Dinah Shore. The comedian said so in an afterpiece which included Miss Shore singing another song, the comedian telling some off-beat stories which went so well that he observed "television would be a cinch if I could use this kind of material," and a personal by film star George Montgomery. Montgomery is Miss Shore's husband, and the surprise topper was to have been Montgomery's appearance on the show, chiding Benny for trying to date his wife (Miss Shore), who had just done a double-vocal with Benny, "I Oughta Know More About You." The Bennys (Mary Livingstone) and the Montgomerys flew back to the Coast Sunday night (29) to tape a few

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=&_arms=1&_ipg=&_from=

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

Blog Archive

- 2020 (215)
- 2019 (376)
- 2018 (379)
- 2017 (380)
- 2016 (396)
- ▼ 2015 (389)
 - December (33)
 - November (30)
 - October (33)
 - ▼ September (32)

more shows before Benny and Miss Shore fly to London for the Variety Artists Federation "Command Performance" Nov. 13. He does his next TV show from New York on Dec. 11, this time cutting down to 30 minutes and preempting the 7:30-8 period currently occupied by the Lucky Strike-sponsored "This Is Show Business." Thereafter he's slated to fly to Korea to entertain the GIs around the Xmas holidays.



This was post was supposed to be a lead-in to a video site link to view the actual show. I had never seen it until this week. But, silly me, I've discovered it was shared on the public [International Jack Benny Fan Club Facebook group](#). If you're on Facebook, you can see it there. The chemistry between Jack and Miss Shore in the song is great, Mel Blanc is always funny, there's a singing pumpkin and people in weird Hallowe'en costumes in the far-too-long opening commercial (I didn't realise until now that Snooky Lanson sounds like Kay Kyser), and Artie Auerbach shows off some subtle TV acting. The show was off to a good start. If you're not on Facebook, content yourself with viewing my favourite Benny TV show: Jack trying to win money from guest star Groucho Marx on guest show "You Bet Your Life."

The Jack Benny Program: Jack Is A Contestant (...)



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:03](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

3 comments:



[J Lee](#) 6 September 2015 at 11:34

Jack would reuse the exiting audience gag 24 years later, to close out of on his final NBC specials prior to his death.

[Reply](#)



[bgrauman](#) 6 September 2015 at 15:55

To fill the final quarter-hour [8:45-9pm(et)], CBS [and Wildroot Cream Oil hair tonic] essentially gave Sam Levenson an "on-air audition". He was well known on TV for his monologues about his Jewish childhood and family life in Brooklyn, and his days as a high school teacher.....and was already established as one of the panelists on "THIS IS SHOW BUSINESS" (sponsored by Lucky Strike).....and this informal program was so well received, the network gave him his own weekly series [for Oldsmobile] on early Saturday evenings in January 1951.

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- [Heart of a Prince](#)
- [The Unhappy Man With the Confetti](#)
- [The Hawk](#)
- [Self-Referential Tex](#)
- [Forever A Cub Reporter](#)
- [His First Car Wasn't a Maxwell](#)
- [Radio on Record](#)
- [Bob Clampett Drives Parents Mad](#)
- [Cat-Ass-Trophe](#)
- [Unlucky Horseshoe](#)
- [He Got a Million of 'Em](#)
- [Let's Play Radio](#)
- [Rubbery Wally](#)
- [The Feud Ends](#)
- [The Past, Present and Future of Animation, 1936](#)
- [Clementine a la Avery](#)
- [The Cats Bah In-Between](#)
- [Liberace, Man of Letters](#)
- [Dog Trouble Eye Takes](#)
- [That Makes Me Mad](#)
- [The TV Plunge](#)
- [Bosustow as Disney](#)
- [Rotor Head](#)
- [Reused Indian Gag](#)
- [How To Be a Lampshade For Profit](#)
- [Ptui](#)

- [August](#) (34)
- [July](#) (32)
- [June](#) (33)
- [May](#) (33)
- [April](#) (31)
- [March](#) (33)
- [February](#) (30)
- [January](#) (35)
- [2014](#) (390)
- [2013](#) (388)
- [2012](#) (397)
- [2011](#) (106)



bgrauman 7 September 2015 at 17:41

As I've previously said on Facebook, Jack was VERY CAUTIOUS about appearing on TV in 1950. That's why he preferred a 45 minute time period, instead of an hour-long or half-hour time slot. Unfortunately, CBS didn't HAVE any further "open" 45 minute time periods in December 1950 to schedule his next program- none of their regular advertisers would relinquish "their" scheduled 8pm(et) time slots for another Benny special. And American Tobacco was now insisting to Jack that they had a perfectly good 7:30pm(et) half-hour on Sundays where he could appear ANY TIME HE WANTED {they sustained "THIS IS SHOW BUSINESS" in that time slot, but were really waiting for Jack to appear regularly in that time period}. Finally, Jack agreed to try to stage a half-hour program in January 1951.....and discovered he COULD be successful on TV in a half-hour format.....and there was the added bonus of being on right after his radio show, where he could "plug" his next TV appearance. Still, Jack slowly increased the number of TV shows he did every season, while continuing on radio.

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Labels

- [Aline Mosby](#) (17)
- [Art Davis](#) (33)
- [Bad Luck Blackie](#) (9)
- [Bob and Ray](#) (10)
- [Bob Clampett](#) (82)
- [Bob McKimson](#) (59)
- [Bob Thomas](#) (53)
- [Chuck Jones](#) (142)
- [Columbia](#) (33)
- [Counterfeit Cat](#) (8)
- [Cynthia Lowry](#) (26)
- [Dick Thomas](#) (14)
- [Don Patterson](#) (17)
- [Earl Wilson](#) (6)
- [Erskine Johnson](#) (37)
- [Felix the Cat](#) (27)
- [Film Daily](#) (50)
- [Fleischer](#) (154)
- [Frank Tashlin](#) (24)
- [Fred Allen](#) (43)
- [Fred Brunish](#) (11)
- [Friz Freleng](#) (137)
- [Gene Deitch](#) (18)
- [George Pal](#) (10)
- [Grant Simmons](#) (4)
- [Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (99)
- [Hanna-Barbera](#) (2)
- [Harman-Ising](#) (61)
- [Henry Morgan](#) (13)
- [Irv Spence](#) (8)
- [Jack Benny](#) (453)
- [Jay Ward](#) (30)
- [Jimmy Durante](#) (17)
- [John Crosby](#) (84)
- [John Sutherland](#) (28)
- [Johnny Johnsen](#) (27)
- [Kenny Baker](#) (6)
- [King-Size Canary](#) (8)
- [Laugh-In](#) (11)
- [Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (6)
- [Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)
- [Magical Maestro](#) (9)
- [Maurice Noble](#) (12)
- [Mel-O-Toons](#) (4)
- [MGM](#) (553)
- [Norm McCabe](#) (5)
- [Pat Matthews](#) (10)
- [Paul Julian](#) (13)
- [Paul Terry](#) (2)
- [Sara Berner](#) (5)

Screwy Squirrel (34)
Spider-Man (1)
Terrytoons (84)
Tex Avery (468)
Tom and Jerry Human (29)
Tralfaz Sunday Theatre (17)
Ub Iwerks (80)
UPA (57)
Van Beuren (94)
Vernon Scott (42)
Virginia MacPherson (14)
Walt Disney (145)
Walter Lantz (241)
Warner Bros. (586)
Who Killed Who (10)

