



Sunday, 15 November 2015

## Benny, Writing and Ratings

We've been talking a bit about writers of old-time comedy/variety shows as of late, so let's delve into the subject one more time.

Jack Benny talks about his writers in this 1959 *TV Key* syndicated column. But a couple of other subjects spring out a little bit more.

It's incredulous that Jack would say he'd been trying to get out of the 7:30 time slot since 1939. Setting aside the fact that his show was on radio through the '40s and '50s at 7 p.m. Eastern (and 9:30 on the West Coast), it's hard to believe a star of Benny's magnitude couldn't get a time slot he really wanted, especially after jumping to CBS in 1949. The trades in the early '40s pointed out Benny was powerful enough to fend off an attempt by his sponsor to switch to Grape Nuts from Jell-O earlier than it happened.



And Jack seems unwilling to accept the possibility his ratings were slipping because people wanted to watch something new, and then dismisses the ratings altogether. Ratings are a funny thing. When they say you're number one, you don't disagree with them. But when they say you're number four, you find all kinds of reasons why they're wrong.

Whether Jack was merely putting on a good face about the time change is unclear. He didn't hesitate in 1963 to publicly complain when CBS (well, Jim Aubrey, to be precise), moved Red Skelton back a half hour and put *Petticoat Junction* as his lead-in.

This column appeared in papers on September 30, 1959.

### Jack Benny To Shift Time Spot

By CHARLES WITBECK

Jack Benny is moving into the 10 p.m. spot on alternating Sundays beginning Oct 4. The network, CBS, is a little worried about the change, but Jack isn't.

"For twenty years I've been trying to get out of my 7:30 p.m. time slot," said Benny in Hollywood. "But no one would listen to me."

Jack isn't running from "Maverick." "Listen, I think good weather hurt me much more than "Maverick." When it gets light in the spring back in Chicago I lose viewers."

"Funny thing about "Maverick," he continued. "I checked the ratings once and found both of us in the first ten. Explain that."

#### 'Like the Fella'

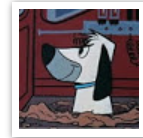
Jack thinks "Maverick" will keep going when many other westerns die out. He says comedy is much harder to keep going. "As for a western, a bad one is not much different from a good one. No issue is involved. But you get a bad comedy show and you're in trouble flight away. I think it's very important too in a western for the fans to like the fella. If they like the fella, it's hard to do a really bad show."

Benny slides the same comparison over the show. He says one reason why his programs don't suffer much is because fans like his cast of Mary Livingston, Rochester, Dennis Day and Don Wilson.

"And with his familiar cast and alternate week shows, at least I have a chance to be meticulous," Jack went on.

"I sit in with my writers and we throw around ideas maybe for two days before we put one on paper. If it were

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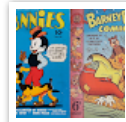


**Cowboy Church #67**  
- Hello my friends and welcome back for another

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

34 minutes ago

### Termite Terrace headlines



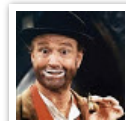
**Question for All You Cartoon Collectors!** - OK so I've been doing some

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

a weekly show we'd have to grab the first few ideas that came up."

Jack says he's more of an editor than a writer. He wrote better years ago in vaudeville than he does now. "If I did a lot now," Jack said, "and you met me in the street, I'd be thinking so hard I wouldn't recognize you."

### Sits in With Writers

Jack is really pleased because his four writers including oldtimers Sam Perrin and George Balzer want him to sit in with them. Jack can smooth out switches so that even if the jokes don't play too well, it won't be embarrassing.

"We have a lot of laughs together," Benny said. This is where he gets his kicks. Jack doesn't press his writers either. There's no set time for work and when the men get together none of them worry about topping last week's show.

"All I say is try not to write a lousy show," Benny remarked. "And don't try to write a great show." When it gets down on paper, editor Benny can usually feel how good a show it is. "Take our first show on the fourth with Jimmy Stewart and his wife, Gloria," Benny said. "We have a very funny thing about to come off. If it works it win be a very good show."

Benny qualifies this by laying that both he and the writers always think their shows are better than they are. They're an appreciative audience. Benny is more nervous with a good show than a bad one because he wants to get the most out of it.

Jack doesn't keep check on ideas used on Sunday. He says he can't remember after a show which writer suggested what. "I can't even remember ideas I thought up," he added. "Not long ago Ed Sullivan wanted me on for a bit. I was thinking of something to do when I remembered a bit I was going to do on the Perry Como Show. Goodman Ace, an old friend, was the writer on the show, so I called him up to see if I could use it. Goody laughed when I told him and said, 'Go ahead; it was your idea anyway.' So help me, I can't believe it was mine now."

Editor, part time writer, violin player and comedian, Benny does take credit for two things he learned in his old vaudeville days and he offers the message to aspiring comedians. "One," says Jack, "if you do a monologue, talk on a subject. Use oneliners and you're due for trouble. Two, work out situations where you're frustrated. Also try to be different. Don't be afraid of this life. I'd be bored stiff in a situation comedy."

Many of the things Jack has grown famous for have started by accident, like his feud with Fred Allen in the days of radio. One night on Allen's show a ten-year-old boy got up and played "The Bee" on his violin. When he finished all Allen said was "Jack Benny should be ashamed of himself."

### Feud Grows

"Next week I picked it up," said Jack. "Then Fred brought in three or four stooges from my home town to prove I couldn't play the violin. In my next show I have my stooges on."

"Well we're into the feud for over half a year before Fred and I even talked to each other about it. There was nothing rigged before-hand."

Beany paused. "I tell you if Fred were alive, the feud could last forever because we didn't do it every week."

"Me, I can only take bows for knowing what to leave out And I'm sure I've taken out good things and replaced them with something not so good. We make mistakes. But we're meticulous and I think we know enough to keep a show from stinking up the air."

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:04](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 5 comments:



**J Lee** 15 November 2015 at 08:33

Jack would have trouble with westerns again in the 1961-62 season, when NBC's move of Bonanza from Saturday to Sunday night vaulted it into the No. 2 spot and resulted in Jack's show moving to Tuesday nights the following season (where it finished a very respectable 11th in the ratings, even if it wasn't up to past levels and CBS programing honcho Jim Aubrey already was planning to kill it completely by the end of the season).

[Reply](#)



**bgrauman** 16 November 2015 at 14:03

Even Jack admitted "BONANZA" was a problem, as he recalled he decided to watch a few minutes of it before his own show aired (at 8:30pm Pacific Time, 9:30 Eastern). He was impressed {"It was good, darned good"}, and became so interested in it, when he finally checked his watch to see what time it was, "Hell, it wasn't 8:30, it was 8:50!!!!". He'd missed over half of his own program by sticking with 'BONANZA'. He then concluded that if he, himself, was so engrossed watching the competition to miss the start of his own show, what chance did he have with millions of other viewers who were doing the same thing? "I knew I was through"....in that time period, that is. Jim Aubrey wisely moved him away from 'BONANZA', and



**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

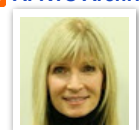


**Cartoon Research**

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**

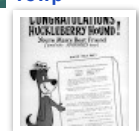
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4 days ago



**Yowp**



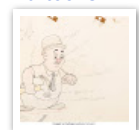
**Hanna-Barbera Birthday Did-You-Knows** - 63 years ago today, some

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

gave him a very "cushy spot" in between "THE RED SKELTON HOUR" and "THE GARRY MOORE SHOW" on Tuesdays the following fall.....

[Reply](#)



**bgrauman** 16 November 2015 at 14:09

It was because Aubrey "shoehorned" "PETTICOAT JUNCTION" in between Red and Jack the following season that Benny objected to it- mostly because NO ONE at CBS had asked him how HE felt about the idea. "Why would they split up Red and me?", he demanded. According to his version of events, he tried to call Bill Paley ("Mr. CBS"), the man who brought him over from NBC in the first place fourteen years earlier, and discuss the schedule change.....but got no response from him. Jack then decided, if THAT'S the way I'm was going to be treated, the hell with him! He then asked MCA to make the deal that would bring him back to NBC the following season. Other versions of this have Aubrey telling Jack to his face, "You're fired".

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**rnigma** 16 November 2015 at 18:54

Is it any wonder why Aubrey was called "The Smiling Cobra"? He reportedly had an actress fired from "Petticoat Junction" because he wanted someone with a bigger bosom. And his set-tos with Keefe Brasselle would be fictionalized in Brasselle's book "The CannibalS." Paley decided enough was enough, and when he went into Frank Stanton's office and said "He's got to go," Stanton, the #2 man at CBS, didn't have to ask who.

[Reply](#)



**bgrauman** 16 November 2015 at 14:18

In 1959, P. Lorillard Tobacco had been the primary sponsor of whatever they "bought" for their Sunday night time period on CBS [10-10:30pm(et)] since 1952. That included "THE WEB", "FATHER KNOWS BEST", "APPOINTMENT WITH ADVENTURE", "THE \$64,000 CHALLENGE", "THE \$64,000 QUESTION", and finally "RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE". However, in order to accommodate Lever Brothers' plans to alternate Jack Benny and George Gobel on Sunday nights in the fall of 1959, Lorillard would have to relinquish their time slot.....and they didn't want to. As CBS president Louis Cowan discovered, when he told them they'd HAVE to, in order to keep Jack Benny on the network, Lorillard was VERY UNHAPPY with the decision [they moved "RICHARD DIAMOND" to NBC's Monday night schedule in the fall of '59]. And after all that finagling and planning.....Lever moved Jack up a half-hour earlier the following season (State Farm Insurance became Benny's new alternate sponsor, as a weekly series), and co-sponsored "CANDID CAMERA" with Bristol-Myers at 10pm.

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**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>  
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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)

[The Buzz Trap](#)

[Jack Benny in 1935](#)

[Newer Post](#)

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[The War of 1620](#)

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"Farewell"\)](#)

[Cartoons of 1950, Part 2](#)

[Walk This Way](#)

[It's the Warden](#)

[Writing For Radio, 1933](#)

[The Cats Bah](#)

[Goodbye, Waves Barney  
Bear](#)

[Benny, Writing and  
Ratings](#)

[A Pencil, A President and  
Others By Allen Swift](#)

[Dachshund Meets Hare](#)

[Jerry Mouse Gets Caught](#)

[Writers and Network  
Radio](#)

[Transitioning in the  
Unicorn in the Garden](#)

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[Memorials to Jack Benny](#)

[Cartoons of 1950, Part 1](#)

[A Fink! Ain't That Funny!](#)

[Bimbo Gets the Chair](#)

[Did Somebody Really  
Bawl For Her?](#)

[Buzzard Burger](#)

[It's a Cat-Eat-  
Woodpecker World](#)

[The Tralfaz in the  
Stafferzat](#)

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

[► 2011](#) (106)

## 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)

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