



Sunday, 13 December 2015

The Singing Ciccio

At first glance, Jack Benny seemed to like unknowns when his show had to hire a vocalist. Kenny Baker (1935-1939), Dennis Day (1939-1944, 1946-1955) and Larry Stevens (1944-46) came out of nowhere before landing on the Benny broadcast. But it wasn't always that way. In the '30s, the show employed Jimmy Melton for a short period. And then there was Frank Parker.

Parker had been a vocalist on a variety of radio programmes before he was signed for the Chevrolet show hosted by Benny in fall 1933. Parker stayed around for two seasons and then signed a movie contract with Universal. Considering the long, lucrative career Day carved for himself, thanks to the Benny show, hindsight shows Parker's career move wasn't the best one (can anyone other than a diehard old film fan name a Frank Parker movie?). He had topped a number of polls proclaiming him radio's best tenor, showing what the exposure with Jack Benny did for him.

Parker was picked up in the '50s by Arthur Godfrey (another man not known for bringing in established acts) and made a bit of a comeback. Rock and roll made Parker passé.

Let's go back to the time when Parker was at the top of his career. We found this in the *Long Island Press* Radio and Screen Weekly section from December 1, 1935. By this time, he had left Benny and struck out on his own.

Parker retired to Florida where he died on January 10, 1999, age 95.

The Singing Kid From Mulberry Street

Frank Parker Still Can't Take Himself or Fame Seriously

By Hilda Cole

TODAY, tenor Frank Parker, man-about-town-ish in his grey tailored suit and white gardenia, bears little resemblance to the younger edition of himself, Frank Ciccio, the kid from Mulberry St.

But Frank has one tiling in common with most of the boys who rose to prominence from lowly beginnings in New York's turbulent East Side—a twinkle in his eye, a rare sense of humor, and a sympathy for all stragglers. However, his success story, and its been a pretty phenomenal one in radio, doesn't run along the conventional boy-from-East Side lines.

For instance, he never sold a newspaper, in his life. Nor did he save his pennies to get along in the world.

Ask him, fully expecting an affirmative answer, whether he was an ambitious kid.

Frank will give you a quit-kidding look out of his grey eyes and reply: "I was as lazy as they come. In fact—my only ambition was to have a good time."

WHEREUPON you find yourself grappling for an angle on his rise to the top of show business. I think I found an answer in a story he told me which had nothing to do with his actual career at all.

Frank and some buddies were out for a good time in Palisades Amusement Park, that mecca for roller coaster fans and cotton candy, overlooking the Hudson River just across the way from Manhattan.

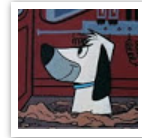
His buddies dared him to ride a horse around the ring. It wasn't the kind of tame horse usually hired out to kiddies. It was no Shetland pony.

Frank took the dare. He'd never been on a horse before. This one took some dozen quick runs around the ring, Frank had all he could do to hang on, and finally brought the steed to a stop. He got off shaking.

Well, it wasn't a question of getting back on the horse that has thrown you. In the first place, Frank wasn't actually thrown. In the second place, he didn't have the price of another ride. But he determined then and there that one day he would learn how to handle those critters.

Now, as you probably know, Frank is one of the most skilled riders in the show business. One horse in his stables, Ginger, was outlawed in the Army for his ornery antics. Frank bought him because he was lively and interesting, put in a terrible bout with him one day in Central Park when a newspaper blew across the bridle

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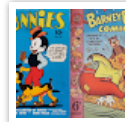
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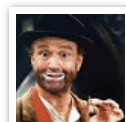
Cowboy Church #67
- Hello my friends and welcome back for another service of cowboy church. Today's musical selection begins with Gene Autry singing "Dear Hearts and Gentle Pe..."
27 minutes ago

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

path, and has now trained him into a prize-winning saddle horse.

Regarding that day in Central Park, Frank says, apparently mentally wiping his brow. "It was like a rodeo, really! I don't think I ever had a more interested audience in my life than gathered around to watch Ginger try to throw me."

BUT, to return to the East Side, young Frank Ciccio had no idea he would one day own a stable of saddle horses. He went to school, played hooky whenever possible, and never sang a song until he was dragged to church by Mrs. Ciccio to sing in the choir.

After high school, the show business appealed to young Frank. I regret to report, because it looked easy. He had no particular bent in any direction. He had learned to dance the dog around hurdy gurdys, and a few sleek steps in dance halls. So he decided to answer calls for chorus boys.

That was 1925 and the producers were calling all smoothies for the chorus of the first edition of "Greenwich Village Follies." Frank slicked back his hair, put on his best shirt and reported backstage. He got a job.

In the early part of the season, Frank Parker—as he was listed among the chorus boys in the program—got a so-called break. One of the singers in "Greenwich Village Follies" developed a fine case of laryngitis, and Frank was picked out of the chorus to do a one-night stand-in for the star.

"It was no special orchid to me," Frank says, "but I was the only logical one to do it I knew all the songs."

And how did they know that Frank knew all the songs? Well, while dressing backstage before performances, Frank had suddenly discovered the existence of vocal chords. He had begun to yodel the numbers from the show out of "sheer youthful exuberance." And his singing was duly noted and marked down for future reference by the producers.

FRANK didn't much want to get out there and sing. But he took it more or less in the spirit of a dare—the way he had got on that horse at Palisades Park when he was a youngster. He came off shaking, the same way he dismounted from the horse. And, like that other incident, he determined that one day he'd be able to face an audience and sing with assurance.

Frank's one-night stand made a great impression on the producers, though he didn't know it at the time. In several weeks he signed a contract to sing a star role in the next year's edition of the Follies.

He can't even remember the songs he did, he's sung so many since. But he recalls dimly it was something about "a nightingale and a rose" and that his romantic tenor got a hand. Frank didn't particularly want to be romantic. He wanted to be funny.

Well, Frank has always loved to get laughs. His next move in the show business was to do a double in vaudeville. He and his partner, a fellow who has since retired from the footlights, did funny patter, dance routines and comic songs Frank can't remember anything very significant that happened then.

"We just had an awful lot of fun," he grins reminiscently, "and we played poker with probably every old stage door man on the circuit."

Then Frank got homesick for Broadway. He returned, informed booking offices and producers that the prodigal was in town again, and presto, he had a job singing in "Little Nellie Kelly." Two more musicals, "No, No Nannette" and "My Princess," followed. By this time Frank was convinced that his voice was his fortune. BREAK Number Two came about this time. A friend of Frank's was scheduled for a guest appearance on a radio show. Frank's old ally, laryngitis, made this impossible. And Frank was asked to pinch-hit. His one-time-shot made a big impression on the network's Artists Bureau, and Frank was signed immediately. For a year he made special appearances on variety shows as guest artist, then he was signed by A. & P. Gypsies. He was featured in that show for five and a half years.

Radio looked like an excellent idea to Frank. It kept him busy all the year round. It had no dead seasons like the theater.

Ever since Frank came to the airwaves, he has had no lengthy vacations from the mike. He used to do as many as nine programs a week until this year, when he signed as star of "The Atlantic Family," heard on Saturdays at 7 p. m. (E. S. T.) over the Columbia Broadcasting System, and decided to make it his exclusive show. Life was too short. Frank decided, to keep going every minute. He wanted more time to ride and study. His most difficult broadcast occurred about four years ago when Frank did a stunt show from a fishing boat which was rolling around the Atlantic Ocean.

"Lord, was that a dandy ideal," Frank exclaimed disgustedly. "It was one raw day. We started out early in the morning in a fog and were almost run down by a steamer. To top that, it got rougher and rougher, we were out all day making tests, and by evening, when the program was scheduled, everybody was seasick. My songs probably sounded lovesick—but what ailed me was the well-known mal de mere!"

HE HAD a laugh out of his experience with pictures.

"I was out on the coast singing with Jack Benny—then I came back East to make a picture!" He shakes his head in bewilderment. The picture is "Sweet Surrender." "I think I had more fun out there than I've ever had in my life." Frank says. In the first place, he met up with two old cronies and fellow clowns at heart, Clark Gable and Jack Oakie.



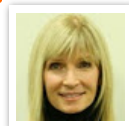
mc News From ME

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

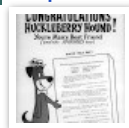
The World of Knight

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

"I'll never forget the night of our special broadcast with Ben Bernie from Catalina Island, in the hotel's big dining room. Well. Oakie and Gable came skulking in reading papers. They sat down in the front row and very conspicuously read papers and yawned all through the broadcast. Even Bernie went up on his lines!"

He has some gag snapshots taken on fishing expeditions with Gable and Oakie—but he won't part with them for purposes of publication.

"After all, Oakie and I are matinee idols." he chuckles. "Maybe Gable can get away with making faces'—but Oakie and I have to think of our public!"

And there you have Frank Parker. At heart he's still the kid from Mulberry St., who would rather do almost anything than take himself seriously.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:13](#)


Labels: [Jack Benny](#)



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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>
https://www.ebay.co.uk/sch/graphite47/m.html?_nkw=&_armrs=1&_ipg=&_from=
5 months ago

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[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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