



Sunday, 12 June 2016

Eddie Anderson's Big Role

It should be no secret why Rochester became the second-most popular person on the Jack Benny show, next to Jack himself. Who doesn't identify with an overworked employee who's one step ahead of his boss, and someone who likes to have a good time? And having a funny voice didn't hurt, though Eddie Anderson's character was far more than just a voice.

Rochester (seen to the right with Phil Harris) was given more and more air time as the radio show evolved from being a straight performance from a stage to one about the (fictional) life of Jack Benny, star of stage, screen and radio. In the "stage show" version, he interrupted the proceedings with a "phone call," allowing Jack to engage in a comic dialogue with him. In the "life of" version, he would be found puttering around the home, sometimes carrying the first few minutes of the show in a monologue. Regardless of the situation, audiences laughed.



Though he had been on stage and in film B.B. (Before Benny), it was on radio that Anderson made his mark and a very large amount of money as a result. Here's a great story from the *Radio Mirror* of January 1940. Anderson would appear in two Benny broadcast-related movies that year—*Buck Benny Rides Again* (as in radio, he was charged with caring for Carmichael, the Polar Bear) and *Love Thy Neighbor*. The story in this fan magazine about the Paramount boot black seems odd. For one thing, the man would have had to have been a member of AFRA to have been on the show. And I find it difficult to believe a complete unknown, who wouldn't have been pulling in a lot of money from his regular job, would turn down \$300 for a few hours work on a Sunday.

The two photos accompanied the story.

ROCHESTER VAN JONES RIDES HIGH

By KIRTLLEY BASKETTE

IF A black cloud threatens the private and professional prestige of radio's number one playboy, Jack Benny—his name is Eddie Anderson, *alias* Rochester J. Syracuse, *alias* Rochester Van Jones, *alias* just Rochester. He's small and he's dark and he's not a bit handsome. He's bug-eyed and getting shiny like a tan shoe at the temples. But he's got more steam than a calliope, more bounce than a golf ball.

Already Eddie Anderson has become such a lodestone for laughs on the Benny Jello show that if Jack were the jealous type he'd be pea green with envy by now. On the screen too, Eddie has butted so bumptiously against the funny bones of the nation that he's being hailed as the greatest colored comic since Bert Williams. Theater owners hang his name right up along side that of his boss Jack in the bright lights. Critics call him a sure fire picture thief. He has more jobs in Hollywood than he can handle. He's the only member of the whole Benny troupe who made the picture of pictures, "Gone With the Wind."

But if Rochester is just beginning to rival Jack Benny in a show business way, on the personal side he left him panting in the shade long ago.

It's the private life of Rochester Van Jones that's handing Jack Benny an inferiority complex. And no wonder. Rochester is stepping out—high, wide, and handsome. Just exactly who's the butler and who's the bon vivant—Jack or Rochester—is strictly a matter of opinion. But here are the lurid facts:

Rochester smokes bigger cigars than Jack. He drives a sportier car and airs a much more splendid

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5 hours ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



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19 hours ago

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

wardrobe. He pilots a plane, he sojourns at swank desert dude ranches. He canters his own saddle horse on the bon ton bridle paths; he races thoroughbreds under his silks at Santa Anita and Hollywood Park (a luxury Jack Benny gave up long ago.) For a while Rochester even had his own night club in the sophisticated center of Los Angeles' Harlem, Central Avenue. He whips about in silken high hat and tails, far more socially *arrivé* in his circle than Jack ever was in his. He has his own gentleman's gentleman to keep him in "the glass of fashion and the mold of form." He sports more official badges, civic citations and honors than Jack ever bagged. He plays a snappy game of golf. His wedding this year was one of the gala social events of the Central Avenue cafe society season.

Even Jack Benny scratches his thinning gray thatch in wonder as he surveys the smoke in Rochester's wake and mutters his favorite line, "What's that guy got that I haven't got?" Last Christmas Jack presented Rochester with a lucky rabbit's foot on a gold chain. Now he wishes he had it back. "Rochester doesn't need it," grins Jack. "I do!"

THE transformation of Eddie Anderson, in and out colored vaudeville hooper and straight man, into the professionally and personally glorious Rochester Van Jones is mixed up mainly with two frolics of Hollywood fate. One involved a train trip of Jack Benny's gang back to Hollywood from New York; the other certain delusions of Oscar, the Paramount studio bootblack. It happened like this:

Some two and a half years ago, Jack and his ace writers, Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin, who plot all the funny business each week on the Benny show, huddled their harried heads with no more ideas for the show next week in Hollywood than rabbits. They were riding west, somewhere near Chicago. The roadbed was bumpy.

"How can you think on a train anyway?" grumbled Jack. "It's a headache."

"Headaches can be funny," said Bill. "Let's work out a train routine."

"What'll we use for a straightman?" asked Jack. "The conductor?"

"A porter's funnier," offered Bill.

"Boys," cried Jack, "we've got it. Wire Hollywood and get a colored porter for the show. Now let's get a script together."

Maybe you remember the "Albuquerque" program of Jack Benny's a couple of years ago. The gang were supposed to be rattling Westward on the Santa Fe Chief. The gags were screaming; it was one of Jack's funniest shows. A negro porter gave him the business all through it. The porter was Eddie Anderson. He almost wasn't. Because the colored boy who shined Jack's shoes on the Paramount lot, Oscar the bootblack, was Jack's choice in his Hollywood wire. But Oscar, picture wise, had an agent. The agent demanded \$300 for Oscar. Now, Jack's not quite as stingy as he makes out on his program, but that was too steep. Oscar kept on shining shoes and Eddie Anderson was plenty glad to take the break. The show was on Easter Sunday, 1937. When it was over Rochester Van Jones hadn't exactly risen, but he was certainly on the ascent.

He wasn't "Rochester" on that show, just an unnamed porter. But Eddie Anderson got laughs. And like all people who get laughs the first time in radio, he came back. Once as an elevator boy; once as "Pierre," the western waiter in Jack's "Buck Benny" series. Then Jack decided to build a house in Beverly Hills. If you know the Benny show, you know right away that every halfway important act in Jack Benny's personal life is gagged to the limit for the air. The house was too good for Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin to pass up. "What would certainly make you look funny as a householder," mused Bill, "is a butler."

"I resent that," huffed Jack. "Who'll we get?"

Well, to tidy up a story, Eddie Anderson got himself that job too.

Rochester, the eye-rolling eight-ball, not only clicked from the start-he rattled right out loud.

Eddie has shivered through a lot of lean and cold years for this his day in the sun. He peddled firewood on the side streets of San Francisco as a pickaninny. He hoofed for pennies later on as a kid and worked his way through grammar school, until he finally busted in and out of corny negro revues that folded as regularly as Chamberlain's umbrella. He was sick and hungry and footsore a million times before he hit Hollywood.

Even his first few picture parts, such as Lowell Sherman's valet in "What Price Hollywood" and Noah in "The Green Pastures," before he hooked up with Jack Benny, hadn't lifted Eddie out of the red. It was strictly from hunger with Eddie Anderson until he met up with Rochester Van Jones. Then suddenly it was plush. Eddie sort of figured he had a spree coming. So the first thing Rochester Van Jones did was open a night club. Eddie Anderson thought he knew the night club business inside and out. When he first hit Hollywood he had snagged a semi-steady meal ticket for a year or so in Frank Sebastian's Cotton Club, heaven for Hollywood's colored entertainers. Eddie joined the Sons of Syncopation and did riffs and scats and jives and things before they ever caught on to become famous. Peckin' started at the Cotton Club, and if you believe Eddie Anderson,



Animation #276 Many references may be found regarding two-strip Technicolor. I have been guilty of discussing Walter Lantz's King of Jazz (1930)...
1 day 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...

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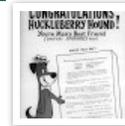
The World of Knight



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Yowp



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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

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

Termite Terrace headlines

Porky's Hot Dog Intake - Western Publishing definitely isn't free of

truckin' did too.

Anyway, when he caught on with Jack, Eddie put a little cash with a lot of credit and became mine genial host of Central Avenue in a big way. He bought himself a high, shiny silk hat, white tie and tails. He put them on and hustled over to the broadcast.

The Benny gang almost swooned when they saw Rochester buttlng so magnificently in soup and fish. But when the show was over, they all took a run down for a quick look. It was a good thing they did. The club didn't last long. Eddie Anderson had a hot high-brown spot, but his hospitality obscured his business judgment. His darktown friends put their drinks on the cuff-Eddie's cuff. Pretty soon the cash register tinkled with a hollow sound. The club folded and Eddie was broke. But he still had (1) his job with Jack Benny and (2) his high hat and tails. He kept the job-but he changed the ensemble.

Every turn in Eddie's private projects, social or sporting, has involved a little private fashion premiere at the Jello broadcast. When Eddie shows up with a new outfit, the Benny gang know some new blossom of Eddie's personality is bursting the bud. Eddie believes clothes make the man. He hired himself a colored valet the day his option was taken up, to lay out his sunburst creations, checks, zig-zags and stripes which comprise the wardrobe of the sartorially perfect Central Avenue boulevardier. When it comes to the well-turned-out man, Eddie refuses to miss a trick, and he is really stepping high.

NOR does anything substantial loom in the offing to slow him down. Not even marriage. A few months ago Eddie decided that a man of his position, having reached the mature age of thirty-five, should take unto himself a wife. His choice was Mamie Wiggins, a comely, dusky worker in the County Clerk's office. Their wedding was a big event. The Benny show troupe were on hand, of course.

"Madame Queen"—that's what Eddie calls his new wife—has no intention of cramping Eddie's splendiferous style as a public figure. In fact, right after their wedding, she accompanied Eddie as he achieved the greatest triumphs of his career—in Waukegan, Illinois, where Jack Benny took him for the world premiere of "Man About Town".



In Waukegan, "Mr. and Mrs. Rochester" stayed at the best hotel, were feted at the country club, and mobbed for autographs as enthusiastically as any movie star could wish. State and town potentates called on Eddie and bestowed honors. In no time at all Eddie had a flock of official badges—city collector, deputy sheriff, special investigator, mayor's assistant and four or five more. He pinned them all on his suspenders and strutted into Jack Benny's hotel room. Jack exploded.

"Say," he yelled, "whose home town is this anyway? Mine or Rochester's?"

Right now Eddie Anderson is trying to work a little black magic and cut down his outgo to squeeze under his income—the while maintaining his scorching pace as Rochester Van Jones, man about

Hollywood. The reason is that Eddie and the missus crave to be solid citizens and build themselves a big house. They want one like the place Phil Harris has out in the Valley.

Eddie's chances of getting that big house, too, aren't a bit bad. Because while he still keeps up his private spend-for-prosperity campaign, his checks are ballooning every week. He just finished a fat part as Uncle Peter in "Gone With the Wind". and Bill Morrow was writing more Rochester than ever into Jack Benny's next picture, "Buck Benny Rides Again."

The other day Jack looked over the advance script. After a few pages, he rolled his cigar thoughtfully and said. "I've got a suggestion."

"What is it?" asked Bill Morrow.

"Let's change the title." said Jack.

"Let's make it 'Rochester Rides again'. Who's this guy Benny, anyway?"

Posted by Yowp at 07:34



Labels: Jack Benny

1 comment:

Anonymous 5 November 2016 at 18:12

I just happened to see "Buck Benny Rides Again" the other day and Jack was right ... Anderson was half the picture. That was no accident either. Most comedians would never have allowed a cast member to steal a scene, much less a whole picture ... but Jack Benny was an uncommon entertainer. He appreciated his cast and was always very generous with parts and pay, contrary to his on screen persona. He and Anderson also made Rochester a breakthrough character in racial terms as well. The Rochester character



cannibalism when it comes to comics featuring Porky Pig. These are

just some of the covers in which Porky is ei...

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=&_fom=

5 months ago

What About That?

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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was far removed from the old stereotyped roles Blacks usually got back then. He was intelligent and written as if an equal with Benny and other cast members. America loved the jovial, faithful, smart aleck Rochester ... he was embraced by Black, White, North, South, by everyone. It speaks volumes about both Benny and Anderson that those old programs do not seem dated at all nowadays, unlike many shows from that era.

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