

Sunday, 10 July 2016

It's TV Day

The big money in radio was gone in 1951. No one knew better than Dennis Day.

Day had been axed by NBC in July because he wouldn't reduce his demand for \$11,500 a week for his radio package. The same thing happened to Judy Canova, who was let go making \$8,500 a week but told she could come back for \$5,000. The big sponsorship money to pay the stars was moving faster and faster from radio into television. (Day, by the way, was getting \$12,500 a week to sing in Las Vegas).

Jack Benny wasn't a cheapskate like he played on the radio and Day wasn't a naïve kid he portrayed. He proceeded to do what his mentor Benny had done several years earlier—played NBC and CBS off each other to land a new contract. He finally signed with the former, reported *Variety* on October 31, 1951. It was a TV-radio deal sponsored by NBC's parent company, RCA. Not only did the contract let NBC plug its TV sets on the Day programme, it plugged Dennis' records, which happened to be on the RCA label.

As the ink on the signed agreement dried, Day hit the promo circuit to push his coming TV show and fit in a mention for his new movie while he was at it. Hence this column by the Associated Press found in papers starting November 26, 1951 which also focused on Day's savviness.



Dennis Day Prepares for Video Debut

By BOB THOMAS

HOLLYWOOD, Nov. 27. — (AP) — Eugene Denis McNulty [sic], better known as Dennis Day, portrays a dim-witted character on The Jack Benny radio show. If Day is dumb, many another show business personality would like to have the same brand of ignorance.

Here are some examples of Day's dumbness.

1. After years of biding his time, he landed himself a fat movie contract with Twentieth-Fox.
2. He is the only Fox player who has television rights.
3. He just signed a TV contract with NBC after weeks of bidding by that network and CBS.

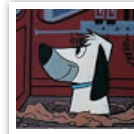
Day, who talks like a normal human being and not the breathless, half-baked character he plays on the radio, indicated that he doesn't believe in rushing into things. He has had many movie offers but not until a couple of years ago did he sign up for one picture a year at Fox. The deal kept him a free agent for TV, while most other movie contract players were prohibited from the new medium.

The tenor is presently working in "The Girl Next Door" and will play a whimsical ax murderer in his next film. He has another film to follow that one, and so his TV show may not debut until the fall of 1952.

"They wanted me to start in January," he said. "But since I'm virtually doing three pictures a year instead of one, I may have to put the TV show off. Anyway, I'm in no hurry to get started. I've seen too many performers jump into TV before they were ready. Now the public is getting tired of them."

A few weeks ago, Day was in the enviable position of being wooed by the networks. Each day, top emissaries from NBC and CBS would visit him at the studio. Each call hiked the bidding price up

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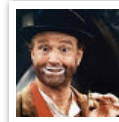


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News From ME

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23 hours ago

Cartoon Research

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a notch. Finally he accepted NBC's offer.

"It will be a variety show format," he said. "I made pilot films of both kinds—variety show and situation comedy along the lines of my air show. The situation comedy show turned out to be deadly. It just doesn't seem adaptable to TV."

Day indicated that he would concentrate on getting good writing for his show, "That is the most important element in a show's success," he said. "The trouble with a lot of the writing on TV today is that the writers are still thinking in terms of radio technique. They concentrate on gags. Fortunately there are a lot of new young writers coming who realize that TV depends on sight, not gags."

Day's own radio program is off the air and he said he might be giving up radio altogether.

"Jack (Benny) may drop his air show after this season," he reported. "Jack was very happy with his last TV show and thinks he has found the format that will work for him in TV. And I think he's right. He was playing the real Jack Benny and people loved him."

With Benny and others threatening to desert it, what will happen to radio?

"I guess it will be limited to recorded shows and music," Day observed. "Daytime radio will still be the same, but all the big nighttime shows will be dropping off. There's no money in radio any more."



Day's variety show debuted (or is that day-buted?) on February 8th, alternating weekly with Ezio Pinza. He tried to go the sitcom/songs route he had trod successfully on radio, with Verna Felton, Hanley Stafford and Kathy Phillips slotted as regulars. Day wasn't so successful this time. On the East Coast, the premiere was opposite CBS' *Mama*, which had a 40 share. Directors came and went. Writer Parke Levy bolted in late March; his final episode didn't air in the East because of a blizzard in the Denver area cutting the NBC circuit. A show doctor was hired in May. The programme was replaced by a dramatic show in June and re-worked during the summer hiatus, returning in the fall.

Incidentally, the "ax murderer" movie role mentioned in the story never materialised and I have not been able to find out what it was supposed to be. However, *Variety* reported on March 13, 1952 that a deal was set for Day to play one of the leads in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Not only did it not happen, but a lead in *Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* announced in the *Hollywood Reporter* a year and three days later didn't come to pass. In fact, Day never made another movie. Of course, mentor Benny had been out of the movie business by that time, too. Sticking to the small screen never hurt either of them.

Posted by Yowp at 07:24



Labels: Bob Thomas, Jack Benny

3 comments:



Randy 10 July 2016 at 17:09

Day's luck with series TV wouldn't improve during the 1953-54 season, when NBC scheduled his show opposite top-rated favorite I LOVE LUCY. He fared no better against Lucy and Desi than anyone else had.

[Reply](#)

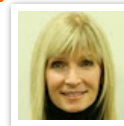
Tony 11 August 2016 at 19:02

My father interviewed Dennis Day in the 1970s for a nostalgia magazine. While the interview was mostly concerned with Dennis's radio work, it did touch on his television series. My father found Dennis still very bitter, more than twenty years later, over NBC's decision to schedule his TV show opposite ratings powerhouse I LOVE LUCY. Dennis said it was a tough year, with everyone knowing the show was doomed as soon as they heard what the competition was.

It's probably safe to say that Dennis's career had peaked when the article you ran above was published, though he would have had no way of knowing that. Ironically, he wound up back on radio for a single season in 1954-55, starring in a variety series on NBC. RCA Victor, his longtime record label, dropped him around the same time the radio show ended, and a new contract with Capitol Records began and ended with a single LP. He continued to make periodic guest appearances with Jack Benny, though television made it very obvious that, age-wise, Dennis wasn't "the kid" Benny referred to him as.

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

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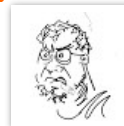


Mary Turner
1985 - Mary Turner today Mary Turner really

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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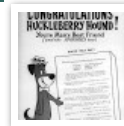
The World of Knight



TONIGHT, 11:54 PM. - COPYRIGHT 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT

3 days ago

Yowp



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1 week ago

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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

My father's interview found Dennis of two minds about his work with Benny. On one hand, he seemed genuinely grateful and appreciative over the continued popularity of those shows, and seemed proud of his work on them. He had nothing but kind words for Benny. On the other hand, he seemed a little annoyed that his work on Jack Benny's show was ALL that most people remembered or knew from his long career.

Enjoy your site. Just thought I would make a little contribution, though somewhat belated.

Reply

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Yowp 11 August 2016 at 19:53

Tony, thanks for the note. Dennis, from what I gather, made a nice little career for himself in Vegas and the other resorts in the '50s and '60s. But, realistically, the average person really only knew him from the Benny show. He certainly wasn't in the same league as Perry Como or Nat King Cole when it came to record sales (And then music took a shift in the mid-'50s).

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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

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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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