

Sunday, 17 July 2016

The Hensir of Comedy

There seems to have been a fascination with how Jack Benny and his writers put together the Benny radio show. We've posted several contemporary newspaper columns about it. Here's another one.

This is from Earl Wilson's column in the *New York Post* of January 22, 1945. The radio show being discussed aired the night before. And "hen, sir" was part of the dialogue.

Gag Busters in Action—Jack Benny's Brain Trust

I'm a candidate for a booby hatch today. I've survived a Jack Benny gag-rewrite session.

Assigning myself to find how Jack manufactures his jokes, I hopped up to his 33d floor penthouse at the Sherry-Netherland. In an orangeish dressing gown, chewing a cigar that had gone out a long time ago, Jack faced the crowd—17 people by actual count—and asked, "Where the hell's Phil?"

Meaning Phil Harris.

Nobody knew. Mary Livingston said maybe he couldn't get a cab. Rochester ran around behind a long cigar, showing off a yellow shirt and a blinding tie.

Phil arrived to chants of "Always late, always late" from the crowd, and read his part. Coming to the word "humanitarian," he innocently read it:

"Human-tarian."

One writer fell down laughing. "You don't have to write jokes for Phil," Jack said. "He reads things wrong anyway." Finally the rehearsal ended.

"Everybody scram but the geniuses," somebody in authority said. "Just the writers stay."

This your clever reporter had come to hear—the four writers, probably top joke men in the country, probably each a \$25,000-a-year man, cutting and polishing the first rough script. They sagged into chairs or onto couches, with coats off and collars opened. Jack lighted his cigar—which went out. He kept chewing it. They began kicking jokes around. Jack wanted a gag about him appearing before FDR. Somebody would ask, "Did the President like you?"—and then the gag.

"Roosevelt laughed and Jimmy Byrned," said Writer George Balzer of Van Nuys, Calif., but he took it back with a wince.

"Roosevelt hasn't laughed so much since he saw Herbert Hoover," flung in either John Thackaberry of Houston, Tex., or Milt Josefsberg of Brooklyn—I forget which. They were in their '30s. The fourth writer, Sam Perrin, of the Bronx, held his script mirthlessly, but business-like. He is 40ish. Silence gripped the room. A clock ticked loudly while the geniuses thought. The script girl, Jane Tucker, waited for a witticism she could write down.

Perrin called out, "Did the President like your show? You say, 'Oh he liked it swell. He sat next to Gen. Hershey and now I'm in 1-A.'"

Jack smiled—for the first time so far. "I would put it in," he said. Jane Tucker wrote it down in her script book.

"That'll play good," one writer said. That's what they said repeatedly—it would play good.

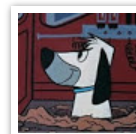
I listened as they hauled gags out of their heads for an hour and a half, and threw most of them away.

Occasionally a writer would have a paroxysm of laughter over his newest joke, yell it out, and nobody would laugh. I gave them one of my own gags. They gave it back to me. Two writers wanted to get in a gag about Col. Elliott Roosevelt's dog.

"It's a good laugh, but I hate to pan anybody, and I'm afraid of it," said Jack. Out came a joke about Don



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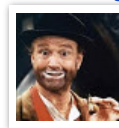
Some Cartoons For Saturday Morning #80 - Hello my friends

and welcome back for another selection of classic cartoons. Today's selection begins with one of the great Mickey, Donald and Goofy car...

4 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 (from Zieg...

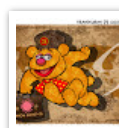
5 hours ago



Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons

'Cozy Bear' Group Tied to Hacks on Covid Vaccine Research. - ©2020

fernandollera.com



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...

23 hours ago



Cartoon Research In His Own Words: H.T. Kalmus on Disney in Technicolor - Suspended

Wilson arriving late: "He lost his priority on an elevator." Out came another where Jack asked Phil Harris, "How do you keep warm—Red flannels?"

"No, Black Label."

They were running too long. Jack wanted a joke about how skinny his legs look in knickers. "You look like two champagne glasses with ridiculously long stems," one writer suggested. Another thought he looked like V for Victory upside down. But another one came up with "You have to tie knots in your legs to make it look like you have knees."

"Got that Janie?" said Jack. She had already written it down.

I was restless. But apparently loving it, they weren't. They were meticulous. For 5 minutes, they discussed a gag in which Jack complained to a waiter about an egg costing 20 cents. "What's in an egg that could make it cost 20 cents?" he said.

"Well, sir," replied the waiter, "it's a whole day's work for a hen."

The burning issue was: Shouldn't the "sir" be at the end of the sentence? "... It's a whole day's work for the hen, sir." I think it was Josefsberg who said "sir" after "hen" would produce a new word, like "hensir."

"Like saying, 'Somebody's at the door. Will you please hensir?'"

Our session had gone on almost two hours, and they were only in the middle. It was orderly, nobody even had a drink, and all I could think about was the new word, "hensir." Jack denied the story he has no hair—said he has hair at home he's never used. So on that I left, thinking how nice they were, and, also, how long could they stay sane?

Benny's writers continually found ways to work old jokes into a new script, and the "hen, sir" was no exception. The new version appeared on the radio show of May 3, 1953. Jack was, in real life, appearing for several weeks at San Francisco's Curran Theatre. On the show he complained about the price of a breakfast at the Fairmont Hotel. Only the audience didn't get a "hen" this time. Said waiter Mel Blanc: "Well, it's a whole day's work for a chicken." But joke continued:

JACK: That's a very old joke.

MEL: Well, I thought it was funny when I heard it last night at the Curran Theatre.

Benny's writers did it again.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:52](#)



Labels: [Earl Wilson](#), [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:



bgrauman 17 July 2016 at 21:55

"...and now I'm in 1-A" meant you were ready to be inducted into the military. Get it?

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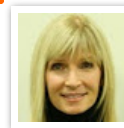
Preview

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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...

3 days ago

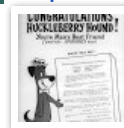
The World of Knight



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

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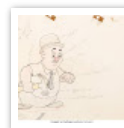


Hanna-Barbera Birthday Did-You-Knows - 63 years ago today, some

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

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

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

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Peter Gray's Comics and Art



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Tom Thug
page for
sale and
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rom=

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

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