



Sunday, 18 December 2016

Benny on Benny

Benny Rubin was a star, so big a thoroughbred race horse was named for him. But unlike his friend Jack Benny, he didn't remain one when vaudeville died. Rubin went into movies and had his own series of shorts. He hosted an amateur variety show for Feen-a-mint on WOR in the mid-'30s. But for whatever reason, he didn't maintain his huge success from vaudeville. He was soon reduced to bit parts in films and continued to be handed roles on the radio, and then television, by his old friend, Jack Benny.

Jack managed to carry on with his regular show until he finally ran into an unbeatable obstacle: CBS programming boss Jim Aubrey. Jack thought he should have the time slot and lead-in shows that he wanted. Aubrey decided he was running the network, and a bunch of rich stars weren't going to put together his prime-time schedule to suit themselves. So when Jack howled in public after *Petticoat Junction* was made his lead-in for the 1963-64 season, Aubrey told him to like it or lump it. Jack saw the writing on the wall and signed a deal with NBC for the following season. He lasted one more year, though there were occasional specials up until his death in 1974.

Rubin was there when Jack's final regular season TV show was recorded. It aired April 16, 1965. *TV Guide* asked Rubin to reflect on Benny's career, and his thoughts were published in its week of August 28th issue. Reader Rick Greene sent a scan of it to pass along to you. Some of these stories you may have heard before. I have not been able to find where Benny Rubin and Ben K. Benny were on the same bill, but the change in name to Jack Benny happened during an Orpheum stop in Chicago in September 1920, according to contemporary issues of *Variety*.

A SENTIMENTAL FAREWELL

The weekly 'Jack Benny Show' has ended, but the memories linger on.

By Benny Rubin

I had just finished doing *The Jack Benny Show*, and there was a lump in my throat the size of a tennis ball. Not that I'm an especially sentimental man---after all, I've done I'd guess 500 shows with Jack—but this was different. This was the *last* show, the end of an era, the climax of 33 incredible years on top of the radio and television heap. When this one was locked up, there would be no more regularly scheduled weekly Jack Benny show. For me this was like saying the sun would not rise tomorrow.

As I looked around the huge Universal City soundstage, I wondered what Don Wilson, the Smothers Brothers (who were guests that week), director Norman Abbott, producer Irving Fein and some of the others were thinking. Every one of the 50-odd members of the cast and crew knew it was Jack's swan song as a regular performer. Yet, like a pitcher working on a no-hitter, no one mentioned it.

When it was time to go home, there was a sudden stillness. I sensed that if anyone made a sad speech, I couldn't stand it. So I ran backstage, where the makeup man was waiting to remove the beard I was using to play the Viennese psychiatrist. My only thought was to get out the door as far as I could without running into anyone, especially Jack.

Naturally I ran into him. Only then did I notice waiters wheeling in a long table loaded with goodies. A voice said, "Aren't you going to stay for my party, Bee-yammy?"—that's what he's called me for 45 years.



The Editor of RADIO MIRROR (right) presenting Arnold Johnson (left) with a gold baton on his one hundredth performance on the Feen-a-mint Amateur Hour over MBS, while comedian Benny Rubin makes a face.

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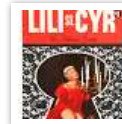
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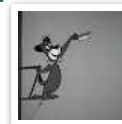


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11 hours ago

Yowp



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animated as gracefully than on the little cartoons between the cartoons on his show. It's so nice to see Huck and the ...

1 day ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog

Now I'm known as a guy you can just say hello to and he'll tell you 10 jokes. I can talk more in 10 minutes than Milton Berle can in an hour. But not then. Instead I was thinking, Jack, what are you going to celebrate? That you got yourself into a bind with Jim Aubrey [the now-departed head of CBS Television] over a time slot, that when you had the temerity to switch networks your old bosses clobbered you by flooding the market with your reruns, that because of this, audiences are to be deprived of one of our great talents?

I thought it but I didn't say it. I turned and faced him. We didn't speak for a few seconds. Finally, he said softly, with a smile on that pixy kisser of his, "Some party." I squeezed his arm and ran out of there.

I got in my car and put the key in the ignition. It was then that the memories came flooding over me. They took me back 45 years to Keith's Theater in Syracuse [N.Y.], where there was a young guy—he was then 27—named Ben K. Benny on the bill. That's when we first met. He was a stand-up single with a fiddle under his arm and a bow dangling from his fingers. I was a fast-talking, loud kind of comedian, and I just couldn't believe that soft, slow delivery. He'd come out and say to the orchestra leader: "How's the show up till now?" The leader would say "Fine," and he would say, "Well, I'll put a stop to *that*." Then he'd go on with his jokes, waving the fiddle.

The night he became Jack

I was there the night the wire came from Pat Casey, head of the Vaudeville Managers' Protective Association, telling him he couldn't use the Ben Benny tag because it sounded too much like Ben Bernie, the orchestra leader. Benny was beside himself. In those days sailors called everybody "Jack." A couple of them breezed into the restaurant where we were sitting. "Hey, Jack!" one of them said. "Didn't I catch your act at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station?" That's how he got to be "Jack" Benny.

The next time I saw him was in 1923 in Kansas City. He'd given up carrying the fiddle, borrowing one from the pit man for the finish of his act. Instead he had a straw hat under his arm and a cigar dangling from one hand—that was because he had got so use to the fiddle and bow, he had to have something. Later, he gave up the cigar and hat. That's how the famous Benny folded arms originated; he had to have something to do with his hands.

We became great friends although exact opposites. I loved the horses. He didn't. I loved the girls. He didn't. I used bad language. He didn't. After Jack played the Orpheum in 1927, he signed to do a movie. I happened to be at MGM, too. We had adjacent dressing rooms, and a sign stretched across the both of them. JACK-BENNY RUBIN, it said.

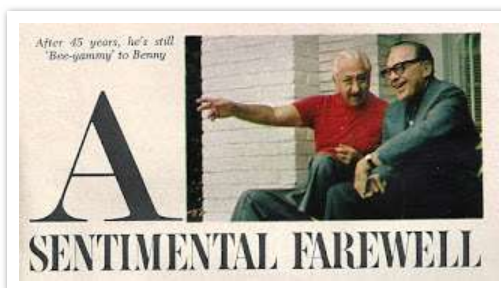
In was involved in the first—and last—of just about everything he did. In Chicago in 1931 he was in Earl Carroll's "Vanities" and I was in "Girl Crazy." One day he came to me and said, "They want me to go with this radio thing and I'm scared."

Actually, what the station wanted was a one-shot, 15 minutes. Jack figured he could come up with 10 minutes of solid minutes of material. He planned to fill in with a song by Harry Stockwell (Dean's dad), who was appearing with Jack in the "Vanities." On the night of the broadcast there was a blinding snowstorm. Jack was eight minutes into the routine and no Stockwell. He was frantic. At the break I whispered to him to tell the listeners he would now do an imitation of Benny Rubin. He did and I stepped out and told the biggest joke I knew. Stockwell never did show up.

It filled the 15 minutes OK but it drew fire from the Chicago critics. "Jack Benny was very good until he tried that terrible imitation of Benny Rubin," Hazel Flynn wrote. "Then he was awful." Jack hated the whole experience and swore never to go on radio again.

That was pretty funny because the following year Ed Sullivan, the New York Daily News columnist, began his first radio show, "Broadway's Greatest Thrills," and conned everybody he could into going on for him. All our gang went, Burns and Allen, Block and Sully, Blossom [Seeley] and Benny Fields, Jack and Flo Haley—and Jack. Benny was soon signed for a radio show. He worked with a band and a stooge, Sid Silvers, then noted as the stooge in the box for Phil Baker. He had been on about two weeks when he made a horrifying discovery: In radio—unlike vaudeville—you run out of material. He came to me in a dither. We took some of my dialect jokes, switched them to English, and found we had enough for about two weeks. Jack was saved only by the arrival backstage one day of one Harry Conn selling jokes at \$10 a shot three for \$25. Jack bought 50 of them. As it turned out, however, Conn jokes worked best with a girl. So suddenly Silvers was out and Jack's wife, then known by her real name, Sadie Marks, was in. And that's how Mary Livingstone was born.

Oh, I loved the guy. So did Conn—in his own way. It was Conn who sold Jack on the idea that you just couldn't tell jokes. You had to have a "situation"; that is, the audience knows that you are stingy or vain, and you bounce the humor off that. In short, the first situation comedy. Conn wrote the first stingy jokes and thereby rocketed Jack to the top along with Fire Chief Ed Wynn, Jack (Baron Munchausen) Pearl, Eddie Cantor, Rudy Vallee and Major Bowes. In the end, though, Conn outsmarted himself. He began figuring that the \$1500 a week he was getting wasn't enough. He told Jack, "Without me you are nothing. I want half." Jack held a council of war at the Lombardy Hotel in New York. There was Don Wilson, a sponsor's representative named Stauffer, an agency man named Harrington, Jack and myself. We each took a batch of scripts from aspiring writers and in the end we chose two young guys, Ed Beloin and Bill Morrow, later to become top men in their



This Weekend in San Francisco: Godzillafest 2019 - *As of 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on August 23, 2019, Godzillafest is back, bombarding San Francisco's B...
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Mark Kausler's CatBlog
Close Up On The Eggs -
Here's the third part of Cathy Hill's epic story: Racketty Ann and The Lost World! In pages 9 through 12, Racketty Ann continues her story (I love how the ...
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Tortoise Beats Hare: Protagonist Loses; Shreds Opening Credits -
Release date: 3/15/1941
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Top 10 in My Opinion-Little Red Riding Hood Cartoons - Today, I'll be sharing what I believe are the ten greatest cartoons based on the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood. But first... Honorable Mentions: 1. ...
1 week ago

The World of Knight AT PRESENT - A new painting. *** Done with leftover paint at end of day.

new field of comedy writing.

Conn? He became a performer, lasted a short time and ended up as a doorman in a theater. When things got really tough it was Jack (and he'd kill me if he knew I was writing this) who contributed to his support.

Generous with laughs

Not very many people really know Jack. Maybe I don't even know him. But I do know this. He is the only truly generous comedian I have ever known. I mean with laughs. I remember once we were three and a half minutes over on a show. Jack, who is his own best editor, said, "Take this out, take that out." "But, Jack," complained the director. "That's seven minutes!"

"OK, so give the extra three minutes to Benny Rubin. He kills 'em with that German doctor routine."

I know his bad points, too. Jack is sensitive; he can't stand criticism. It bugs him—except from his writers. He is disappointed if they don't criticize him. He has a terrible temper, particularly where incompetence is concerned. His worse vice is preoccupation; he can know you a hundred years and walk right by without noticing you. And yet there is a great kindness. I wish I had a nickel for every time I'd seen an actor goof up lines, and Jack had turned to the audience and inquired, "Wouldn't you think after all these years I'd know what I'm doing?"

A tough man to say professional good-bys to. Really tough. But somehow of other, that night in the studio parking lot, I managed to get the car started and drive to my tiny house on a crowded street in West Hollywood. I was sleepless a long time.




Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:42](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

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*** I found the opening of PSYCHIAT RICKS a bit bare of human

expressions, so I reworked

...

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Peter Gray's Comics and Art



New blog on my Art work...Original art...prints for sale petergrayart

ist@gmail.com for prices

etc.. -

<https://petergrayart.blogspot.com/> Will update it like I do on facebook.

1 month ago

What About Thad?

[Chris Reccardi Interviewed](#)

- I don't want to start a practice of publishing an interview every time someone from Ren & Stimpy dies, but Chris Reccardi (1964-2019) was too important a f...

3 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...

7 months ago

Kids, Eh?

#1288: [Bird Call](#) - #1288: [Bird Call](#)

11 months ago

Cartoons, Model Sheets, & Stuff



Pete Hothead Model Sheets - Here are a few model sheets from

the first Pete Hothead short. Released in 1952 and directed former Tom & Jerry animator Pete Burness. Ted Parmelee was the...

1 year ago

Dr. Grob's Animation Review

Misa u A-Molu (Mass in A Minor) - 'Mass in A minor' is the first computer animated film made in Croatia.

1 week ago

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