



Sunday, 23 July 2017

Jack Benny in Action

Sitting in a theatre seat watching a bunch of people reading from a script for 25 minutes doesn't sound very entertaining, but during the Golden Days of Radio, plenty of people did just that. Part of the attraction was seeing the stars in the flesh. Another was to watch how the ingenious sound effects were made. And there was an entertainment factor besides looking at people who were looking at papers and saying funny things; variety and comedy shows generally had an orchestra and a singer/singing group.

Jack Benny seemed to prefer a smaller radio studio, from what I've read over the years, despite the fact he had played in large, big-time vaudeville houses. The first few years of his broadcasting career were mainly spent at Radio City in New York. He worked out of Hollywood for two months in 1934 and for much of the last eight months of 1935 before permanently packing up for California in 1936.

The *Washington Star* provided an interesting word-picture of a typical Benny broadcast from New York in its edition of March 3, 1935; presumably the columnist caught the East Coast show of February 24th (the second live broadcast for the West Coast would have started at 11:30 p.m. Eastern time).

Incidentally, the photo to the right came from Kathy Fuller-Seely and is from the 1934-35 radio season. Writer Harry Conn is second from the left with Frank Parker on the right. Don Wilson is standing behind Jack. At the far right, next to Mary, is bandleader Don Bestor. Sam Hearn is not in the photo. I don't know if the other two men are from NBC or Young and Rubicam, Jell-O's agency. Frederick Wile, Jr. was the agency's publicity man for the Benny show but I have no idea what he looked like. Wile later worked as vice-president of programmes and production in the early '50s at NBC under Pat Weaver, who oversaw the Benny show for Y&R in the mid-'30s.

BENNY AND CREW ARE HAPPY LOT

Spontaneous Cheer Held Real Reason for Success.

By Martin Codel.

Finding the formula for Jack Benny's enormous radio success on the radio during the last few years—a success reflected in the recent poll of the Nation's radio editors, who voted him their favorite comedian and his show the most popular of last year—is not difficult after a visit to one of his broadcast performances. Attend one of his broadcast shows, as the writer did the other night, and, even if you are not already a Benny fan, you will readily discern why the radio editors of Main street joined Broadway's in heaping their encomiums upon Jack Benny.

You find him and his trouble in one of the medium-sized, and thus more intimate studios, amid the magnificence that is Radio City. There are not more than 250 spectators in the studio, all seated. It is 10 minutes before the show goes on. Jack Benny is clutching a script, a partially burned but unlighted cigar clenched between his teeth. He is nervously pacing the slightly elevated rostrum on which most of the cast and orchestra are sitting or standing, the principals all likewise with scripts in hand.

Jack raises his right arm, with the other yanking the cigar from his mouth. He grins broadly, an infectious grin, and the audience chuckles. We are still not on the air, and we wonder at the need for the hush that follows. "I want you to meet the members of our cast," Jack says, and with appropriate joshing he introduces Mary Livingstone, Frank Parker, Don Wilson, Don Bestor and Sam Hearn, who is the "Mr. Shlepperman" of



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 6 hours ago

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Five Million Years To Earth! - It's felt like five million years sometimes. I've yearned to have *Five Million Years to Earth* *or as it's otherwise know* Quatermass and the Pit i*n my ...
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 Grade: B+ To be honest I didn't care for the first *Angry Birds Movie*. I simply just did not find that film enjoyable. That is what made ...
 12 hours ago

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 15 hours ago

Termite Terrace headlines
Screwing the Name Up: HB edition - A while ago I wrote

many other dialects besides his better known Yiddish.

Actors Loosen Up, Too.

All of the actors have been intently studying their scripts, but they take their bows—all grinning. Then they return to a serious perusal of their scripts, for 7 o'clock is fast approaching.

You wonder next why Jack Benny has to deliver himself of his ensuing peroration. "I want you all to enjoy yourselves," he tells the studio audience, "and you don't need to be afraid to laugh and applaud as loudly as you like." An invitation for "background noise" to stimulate the artists, if not to impress the unseen audience? It seems so, and you are a bit disappointed at such artificial tactics.

At precisely 7 o'clock the orchestra signs on, Announcer Wilson delivers himself of his blurb over the musical background, he finishes and the orchestra breaks into crescendo. The usual wisecracking introduction by Wilson and discordant blare of the band, and Jack himself addresses the microphone. He engages in repartee with the chubby Wilson, whose moon face is all smiles and whose rotund form often shakes with laughter.

Benny has the microphone at the left, Wilson being at another about 12 feet to the right. The rest of the cast breaks in at one or the other mikes in the well-known manner of that particular show, according to their parts in the script. Everyone laughs, of course, but why do the performers themselves laugh so heartily, and especially why is the orchestra literally convulsed?

There you have the secret of Jack Benny's show, quite aside from the excellence of the script. Cast and orchestra are enjoying the performance even more than the seen and unseen audience, and there is no question about the spontaneity of their enjoyment. You learn why after the show when you can talk about whispers to your host, a studio attaché, and then talk to Jack Benny himself.

The performer, with the exception of Benny of course, saw the script for the first time that morning. They rehearsed it for only three or four hours, studied their lines through the afternoon, perhaps puzzled to themselves how some of those lines could "pull a laugh"—and returned to the studio at 6:30 relatively fresh for the show. All of them are experienced troupers or radio artists, yet all are as nervous and eager as for any first night performance.

The orchestra members, you also learn, had been barred entirely from the rehearsals! Thus the written lines are utterly new to all of them but their leader, Don Bestor, who has some script parts. The result is that every laugh from the orchestra is wholly unaffected.



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:29](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

2 comments:



Gregg Hammond 23 July 2017 at 14:59

The photo of Jack, Mary and the cast is just marvelous. Don Wilson is so enthused!! What a great amount of information you give us on Jack every Sunday. Thank you for your two wonderful blogs.

[Reply](#)

Ted 24 July 2017 at 16:31

I've read an article on Jack (I'm sorry, but I can't remember where) which discusses his being a stickler for "good behavior" by the cast when they were at their microphones. He was referencing comedians who would do things to make the studio audience laugh, such as goosing other cast members or standing behind someone who was reading a line and making silly faces at the audience. The article stated that Jack found this practice dishonest and unfair to listeners at home.

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about the spelling Walt Dinsey. Today, I'll be talking about

Hanna and Barbera. We all know that William Hanna and Joseph Barbera defi...
2 days ago

[Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons](#)



Trump is high on gun reform chances despite NRA resistance.

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fernandolleracartoons.com
2 days ago

[Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog](#)



Sunday String Swing - *Continuing the thread from last Sunday's

post, as the following caricature of Django ...
2 days ago

[Yowp](#)



Hanna-Barbera Fans Write Back - Is it possible to fairly compare

cartoons made by Hanna-Barbera and the Jay Ward studios? I don't think so. The two studios had a different attitude and p...
3 days ago

[The World of Knight](#)



LAST NIGHT - The sky was a beautiful color last night.

1 week ago

[Mark Kausler's CatBlog Racketty Ann's Mystery Flight!](#)

Here are pages 5 through eight of "Racketty Ann and the Lost World". There's delightful fantasy here as Racketty Ann and Bla Bla take a ride on the back o...

3 weeks ago

[Peter Gray's Comics and Art](#)



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

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.com/ Will update it like I do on facebook.
5 weeks ago

Supervised By Fred Avery: Tex Avery's Warner Brothers Cartoons



Coming Soon To This Blog...

2 months 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...
2 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...

6 months ago

Kids, Eh?
#1288: Bird Call - #1288: Bird Call
10 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

Paranoja (Paranoia) - 'Paranoia' is a short film (lasting only four minutes) about a young man who thinks he's followed on the street.

1 day ago

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