



Sunday, 17 September 2017

Jack and the President

Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In had Billy Graham and former vice-president Richard Nixon as guests.

Big deal.

Jack Benny did the same thing first. He had the Rev. Dr. Graham and former *President* Harry S. Truman on his show.

Truman, like Marilyn Monroe, Humphrey Bogart, and a number of others, made their TV debuts on Benny's program; they refused all other offers. They knew, from years of listening and watching, Jack would make them look good by making himself the butt of the jokes.

We posted about Graham's appearance [HERE](#). Now let's post about Truman's. A media throng jetted to Missouri for the taping in early September. Here's one story from October 17, 1959, the day before the broadcast. Maybe the most interesting thing revealed in the story is something that has nothing to do with the broadcast. It's about the casual approach to security for an ex-president. The JFK assassination four years later changed that.



Benny's Aim on Truman Show: Entertaining Yet Dignified

By MARGARET McMANUS

It would appear, in this fall of 1959, that Mr. Benny is off to the kind of galloping start that win bring him both the envy and the awe of his competitors. Never has the bidding for illustrious guest stars on television reached such a peak, but in any company, it would be hard to top the name of Harry Truman.

"I wouldn't do this for anybody but Jack Benny," said Mr. Truman. "I've had hundreds of requests to be on television, from everybody from Lawrence Spivak to Jack Paar. Jack Benny's an old friend. He came out here and played with the Kansas City Symphony for me; raised \$52,000. "When Jack asked me to be on his show, I said I'd be delighted. I trust him. Course I was advised by a lot of people not to do it. I know there will be some people who will criticize me, but that never bothers me. I'm used to it. I do it to suit myself.

"I know Jack will do this show in a dignified way but it's his show and I'm taking directions like all the other actors. My part will be to take him on a tour of the Truman Library. I'm not going to play the piano."

The portion of the show on which the former President is appearing was taped in the library at Independence, Mo., a handsome, modern building which houses the letters and documents and memorabilia of Truman's almost eight years in the White House.

There is a replica of Truman's White House office with the mammoth mahogany desk and behind the desk, a library table with pictures of Bess and Margaret in silver frames.

In the library, there is also the office and reception room where Mr. Truman works every day, spending six or seven hours at his writing and seeing visitors.

He drives himself to and from his home, a Victorian white house, no more than a five-minute drive from the library.

"I like to drive myself to the office," he said, obviously enjoying the freedom of his private citizenship.

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Yowp



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Rip Jagger's Dojo



At The Earth's Core! - *At The Earth's Core* is a delightful romp of

Asked if it is possible, after holding the most important job in the world, to take up a more normal life again without feeling the loss of excitement, Mr. Truman said:

"Course it is. My life is as exciting as it ever was. You should follow me around some time. You know there are lots of things about being president that are not so desirable. You should talk to the 'Boss'. She'd have a few things to say about that."

MR. TRUMAN said he didn't think his appearance on Benny's television show would open up a new career for him.

"Look, I've been on television since 1945. I know almost as much about it as he does," he said, pointing to Benny. "But I'm no performer. Takes a good looking gal for that. I know all the tricks though. I know about wearing a blue shirt tomorrow."

For the run-through, before the actual taping, Mr. Truman was wearing a blue suit, a shade lighter than navy, a white shirt, a light blue silk tie and two-toned shoes, black, with a vamp of gray, silky material.

HOLDING HIS script in one hand, looking like a man about to make a speech, Mr. Truman paid nodding, meticulous attention to the words of Seymour Berns, the director. His most often repeated answers were: "OK. Just tell me what you want me to do" and "shoot, whenever you're ready."

At one point, when there was some delay in setting up the cameras, and Mr. Truman and Mr. Benny were forced to stand and wait for some five minutes, Mr. Truman said: "I'm glad we're not using any stand-ins, Jack. The real big stars always do the whole thing themselves, don't they?"

At another time, a group taking the regular Library tour suddenly realized what was happening in their midst and mobbed the roped-off section to watch. They quickly became loud and excited, until Mr. Truman called to them: "You're welcome to stay, but you have to be quiet, or we'll throw you all out." To which Mr. Benny replied:

"And he can do it. It's his store."

Through the long tedious hours of rehearsals and run-through, Mr. Truman and Mr. Benny were unfailingly good-humored, treating each other with courtesy and consideration. In the matter of taste, Mr. Truman has absolutely nothing to worry about. Jack Benny feels keenly the responsibility of presenting the former President.

"Don't think we haven't given this the greatest amount of thought," said Benny. "Sure, we want it to be an entertaining show but we went over and over every laugh to be certain there is nothing questionable involved. I'd sacrifice the laughs anytime. I don't want Mr. Truman to have any regrets about doing this."

UNDER UNION regulations, the former President must receive at least scale pay for appearing on the show, so the check he received as his guest fee was for \$155. It is reliably reported, however, that a substantial contribution will be made to a cause of Mr. Truman's choosing, probably to the Truman Library.

As to what he will do with his check for \$155, Mr. Truman said: "Oh, I expect I'll give it to the 'Boss.' She'll figure out a way to spend it."

Blue eyes twinkling behind his rimless spectacles, rosy cheeked, white hair smoothly combed from its side part, Mr. Truman, 75 years old, looked fit and untired after his afternoon's work. In the reception room outside his office, he put an arm around Benny and an arm around Seymour Berns.

"See you in the morning, nine sharp," he said. "Don't suppose you fellas want to walk with me in the morning? No, of course not, we'll be doing a lot of walking here all day."

Since Mr. Truman answered his own question. Jack Benny didn't have to answer, and just as well. The comedian, whose idea of a long walk is the sidewalk between the front of the hotel and the taxi, had a look on his face of ill-concealed disbelief, a look that said his ears must be playing him tricks.

It was Mr. Berns who merrily turned the conversation away from early morning exercise.

"Look at our guest star," he said. "He's so nervous about the taping tomorrow, he won't sleep tonight."

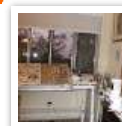
"Who? Me?" asked the former President.

At the conclusion of the run-through, the only sign of weariness Mr. Truman, 75 years old, showed was a slight dragging of his right foot as he walked back to his office.



pure science fantasy. The classic tale by Edgar Rice Burroughs is well told in this John Dark produced and ...
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The World of Knight



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

2 days ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Happy Birthday to 20th Century jazz great Lenny Breau! -

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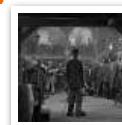
Termite Terrace headlines



Commercial Corner August--Mel Blanc (In Person) - Mel Blanc

had been in several commercials as an actor. All of which he mentions that he is the voice of the Looney Tunes characters. In the American Expre...
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Movies with Michael



Seeing The Gold Rush (1925) at the Old Town Music Hall - Last night I had

the incredible pleasure of watching Charlie Chaplin's* The Gold Rush* (1925) at the Old Town Music Hall in El Segundo, CA. This is a movi...
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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...

2 weeks ago

Peter Gray's Comics and Art



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

How did the broadcast go? Reviewed "Helm" in the *Daily Variety* the following Tuesday:

Jack Benny had to overcome one of the roughest tape jobs of the season to prove that he's still tv's top "straight man." The acoustics, lighting and other technical attributes were shoddy enough without the added woes of groans and squeaks on the sound track. But he rode it out with his guestar, ex-Prez Harry Truman, no less, and despite all the debits, it was a comedy classic with HST handling the laugh lines off JB's feed like they've been teaming for years. Benny knew his subject well and didn't press him, taking him along leisurely and pausing to help the laughs along with his pained look of surprise. But the element of surprise, an enduring quality of his unprecedented success in radio and tv, was used to even more surprising effect. Those who expected to see Benny sawing away at a fiddle while Mr. T punched out "Missouri Waltz" on the ivories had to be content with off-camera sounds of the same.

Benny's penury, long a main prop, wasn't short-shrifted either. The 39 age bit evoked one of the show's biggest laughs when standing under a portrait of George Washington, Benny balked blushing with "you're making it difficult." If the laughs were clocked, the guestar was the main comic. But that's Benny and it has paid off handsomely over the long years. The tour through the Truman library was the best thing that ever happened to it and should prove both beneficial to him as a public benefactor and future visits to the treasure trove of epic documents. Seymour Berns produced and directed with the gentle touch of humor and to the avoidance of offending the dignity of a great American.

A day later, "Trau" in the *Weekly Variety* pointed out the two men had some things in common:

It was a natural that Jack Benny and Harry S. Truman would become a team for this half-hour one-nighter spec. Each yens a basic musical instrument that he has made part of his personal trademark. Each is a one-man chamber of commerce for a certain city in Missouri and in Illinois. Truman has a deep and abiding respect for the office of the President; JB has a ditto for the fine art of comedy. History will surely show that each was an American institution in his time, a condition that is just as certain to rub off on posterity.

Truman died December 26, 1972. Benny died exactly two years to the day later.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:56](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:



M. Mitchell Marmel 17 September 2017 at 08:21

A couple of classy gent indeed...

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 - 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
[Leptiri \(Butterflies\)](#) -
 'Butterflies' is a film from the
 Zagreb Film studio, when
 the once famous studio was
 already in its decline.
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