



Sunday, 29 October 2017

## Observations on Jack Benny

Social media and 24-hour news channels magnify pop culture, especially when someone dies. They don't even have to be A-listers for the internet and airwaves to be filled with mourning.

That wasn't the case years ago when you had local newspapers and a few channels on TV. Someone had to be incredibly important in show business to be eulogised and analysed in the media upon their death.

Jack Benny was one of those people.

It's somewhat remarkable to read the editorial sections of small town newspapers, where the editor or columnist would use up space to explain what Benny meant to the world. Major papers did the same thing. The *Boston Globe* had at least a couple of columns.

One columnist gave a personal remembrance of Benny in his missive to readers on December 28, 1974, two days after Jack died. I haven't been able to divine the date of the Met appearance. Benny appeared at that theatre in 1936. Sam Hearn was on the radio with him from Boston, but didn't appear at the Met with him. Hearn did appear with Benny in 1942 in Boston, but it wasn't at the Metropolitan. No matter, I suppose. It's a nice personal reflection.

### Jack Benny was an institution

By Ernie Santosuosso

Globe Staff

Jack Benny, who died Thursday night, aged 80, was not only funny, he was also persuasive. Long ago when radio receivers were encased in wood cabinets, Jack Benny influenced me to eat his sponsor's product, Jello.

His opening greeting each Sunday night at 7 was "Jello again, this is Jack Benny."

Before Don Law invaded the Music Halls with his electric rock-'n-rollers, dressed-up people would flock to the then Metropolitan Theater (its original name), to see and hear the bands and the touring movie stars.

The first in-person show I ever attended was a Jack Benny performance at the Met. This marked a milestone in my life. His wife Mary Livingstone sang a song, and Jack brought out another member of his radio family, Sam Hearn [sic]. On the radio show, Hearn was known as Schlepperman, to whom Benny would feed straight lines and Hearn would fire back Yiddish-dialect gags. Much of that show is only a hazy memory now but I'll never forget the ingenious windup.

Benny, insisting on playing his violin, bowed on and on, totally oblivious to the fact that the opening credits to the feature picture were being shown on the screen and his squeaky fiddle playing ie's [sic] sound track music.

Jack stole the show at Symphony Hall on Feb. 11, 1968, when he played violin in front of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The event was a benefit concert for the orchestra's pension fund. He told the audience that the violin cost him \$110, although the comedian did own a



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### Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons



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### Yowp



Jazzstones - Hoyt Curtin seemed quite comfortable with jazzy,

brassy arrangements, so perhaps it's appropriate one of his famous theme songs got a guitar jazz workout. ...  
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### News From ME

Today's Video Links - I'm having a great deal of trouble not thinking about the recent shootings. Here are James Corden and Trevor Noah on the topic. In the days of Steve Allen,...  
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### Cartoon Research

Bugz' Livez: Antz (Pt. 1) - No, this article's not all about Dreamworks or Pixar. It's summer - so I figured we need something appropriate for the season. Summer means picnics. And p...  
10 hours ago

### Rip Jagger's Dojo



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

Stradivarius. The newspaper review appearing the morning after noted that his performance contained "some of the best musical clowning since the Hoffnung Festivals of London" and that he had "the best portamento" (passage from one note to another in a continuous glide) the reviewer had ever heard."

Surprisingly, the comedian seized upon a portion of my review of his appearance at Framingham's Carousel Theater in July 1967, to create a genuinely funny bit. I had written: "He could read off the back of a cereal box and the people would fall on the floor."

The following night Benny walked on stage carrying a package of corn flakes. After alluding to my reference to the cereal, Benny announced that he wished to test the audience's risibilities and check out my assessment of his laugh-getting talent. Donning his reading glasses, Jack began to read the ingredients list on the cereal box. "Milled corn ... sugar ... salt ... malt flavoring," he intoned straight-facedly. The initial titters swelled into rolls of laughter as he toiled on. "Sodium ascorbate ... niacin ... thiamin ... preservative BHA ..." The then 73-year-old comedian had knocked them dead with an improvised script out of Battle Creek. Michigan. I recall the provincial line he threw in that night, too. "Three cities in the world I have always wanted to see," he said. "London, Paris and Milford." Jack Benny, the Waukegan wit, was unquestionably an institution. If not, then why do I continue to eat Jello.

Another *Globe* columnist put his thoughts together about how important Benny was to the entertainment world and what made him so great. If you're a fan of Jack Benny, you may have thought some of the same things, though perhaps in simpler language. I suspect you don't use "extirpation" in every day conversation. This was published January 5, 1975 and we'll let the author have the final words in this post.

## Forty years of healing laughter

DAVID B. WILSON

Somehow we had the feeling that Jack Benny would go on forever, like the Mississippi River or the telephone company. There was Jack Benny like there was ice cream and "Silent Night." There always had been and there always would be.

It is no exaggeration to say he was a self-made work of art. As Jack Benny, the private man, kept his distance and dignity, Jack Benny, the comedian, sacrificed both for us.

Allen was wittier, Hope was and is faster and other had and have their gifts. But Benny, in the stark simplicity of his comic genius, was greater than all of them.

He had only one joke, and it was Jack Benny, and it just about always worked for him, and for us. The sheer courage involved in doing the same bit for 40 years and getting away with it is perhaps the least appreciated aspect of the man.

Listening to Benny was like listening to a familiar piece by Beethoven: You knew what was coming, and he knew you knew, and you knew he knew you knew, so you let him build up to it, and then it happened, but always just a bit differently, so you knew a little more than you did before.

The raw clay from which he fashioned Jack Benny was all of our weaknesses and inadequacies and self-delusions and we were taught to laugh at them instead of worrying ourselves sick about them. Petty tyrant, coward, tightwad, schemer, Jack Benny was both contemptible and ineffectual, like the rest of us, and somehow the realization did not hurt so much.

The voice was most of it. The appearance was almost a distraction, sometimes complementary, with the nancy gestures, but most often unnecessary. How do you evaluate a comedian whose funniest lines were "Well..." "Hmmm..." and "Now stop that!" And whose funniest line of all, perhaps, was simply silence, gradually obliterated by a rising tide of laughter.

Most mockery is sick. That is what is generally wrong with topical humor, which depends parasitically upon the defenseless objects of its wit for sustenance.

Jack Benny's stuff was mockery, all right, but it was mockery of the magnificent skinflint cad he had, himself, created. And it was poignant, too, because you knew that this hero in his own eyes never quite persuaded himself of the accuracy of his vision.

It must be difficult for persons born after, say, 1935, to comprehend the importance of Jack Benny in the late Thirties and Forties, before television accelerated the remorseless extirpation of the national intelligence.

Jack Benny on the radio at 7 o'clock Sunday night was almost as obligatory as church on Sunday morning, and in many families more so. All day Monday, Americans related to each other what they had heard on the program. It was a great leveller and social adhesive, like major league



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

12 hours ago

### 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! -

\*\*\*Lenny Breau was the best guitarist to ever shit between two boots." Jerry Reed\* \*\*Lenny was a comet passing through" Chet Atkins\* \*\*If you had dropped...

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### Termite Terrace headlines

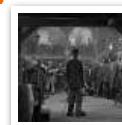


Commercial Corner August--Mel Blanc (In Person) - Mel Blanc had been in

several commercials as an actor. All of which he mentions that he is the voice of the Looney Tunes characters. In the American Expre...

2 days ago

### 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...

3 days 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...

2 weeks ago

### Peter Gray's Comics and Art



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

sports and the weather.

In a time when Saturday movie money was not always available, even though admissions were 25 cents or less, Jack Benny was free, and you knew he would be there on Sunday night, welcomed like a favorite uncle back from a trip.

Try to imagine the Super Bowl, “All in the Family” and Johnny Carson, all wrapped up in one half-hour of audio, and you will be groping for it, but you will not quite be there.

All week long, we waited for Don Wilson’s voice and the spelling out of Jell-O, and we wished the too-brief 30 minutes would never end. I can still see the glowing, Cyclopean eye that was the dial of our four-legged Atwater Kent radio and feel the smooth, wooden curves of its cabinetry.

And remember Rochester, Mary and the May Co., Schlepperman, Dennis Day and, earlier, Kenny Baker, the feud with Fred Allen, the vault where Benny stashed his wealth, the Maxwell, Phil Harris and the lugubrious insults he and his musicians absorbed, Benny’s pathetic parvenu attempt to ingratiate himself with his tony British neighbors, the James Masons [sic], and Buck Benny rides again.

People laugh mostly with their nasal sinuses today. At Jack Benny, you laughed with your belly and lungs and whole soul—at yourself. That was the extent of his genius, the genius of a kind and gentle man who made a lot of money but blessedly always gave more than he received. George Burns said it best:


“I can’t imagine my life without him. I’ll miss him very much.”

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:54](#)  
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**Supervised By Fred Avery: Tex Avery's Warner Brothers Cartoons**  
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**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...  
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**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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