



Sunday, 22 October 2017

Jack and Fred

Radio's most famous feud was a fraud.

Jack Benny and Fred Allen had both worked on the Orpheum circuit in the vaudeville days (though there's no evidence they appeared on the same bill) and respected each other's talents. On radio, both tossed in some inside jokes. At the end of a broadcast at the end of December 1936, Allen ad-libbed a crack about Benny's supposed poor violin playing; something that was the subject of jokes on Benny's own show. The following week, Jack tossed out a retort mostly for Allen's benefit as unless someone listening had heard the Allen show in question, they would have had no idea what he was talking about. That started the "feud."



It was supposed to end several months later with Benny's appearance on the Allen Show in New York. But the truce was only temporary. The feud was too good to end. It manifested in a Benny-Allen movie ("Love Thy Neighbor," 1940) and bubbled up on radio throughout the '40s. Arguably, the change in writers on the Benny show in 1943 made it even more funny and clever. It even carried on after Allen ended his show in 1949; a wonderful routine on the Benny radio broadcast of April 24, 1953 had the two as small-time vaudeville partners simultaneously hamming it up and trying to undercut each other.

Here's a feature story from *Silver Screen* magazine of July 1940. "Love Thy Neighbor" was still a few months away from theatres.

A FRIENDSHIP BUILT ON GAGS AND INSULTS

Although they've known each other for twenty years, Jack Benny and Fred Allen never really became friends until each started poking insults at the other on their radio programs
By Arthur Mason

OUT in Hollywood this summer, Jack Benny and Fred Allen are having the first chance of their lives to sit down together and get well acquainted. Working on their joint picture for Paramount, they will be around with their feet up on the same desk a few days every week and the talk in those sessions will be a caution. This feud on which their picture and so many radio jokes are based is a lot of window dressing, of course. They have a friendship dating back some twenty years. The way their lives went, however, they never had much chance to sit down and talk.

"When we were in vaudeville," Fred explains, "Jack and I both worked alone or had just one girl with us. To keep the bill balanced, only one comedian like that would be on a show. We never met one another."

Jack knew Freddy (still Freddy to Jack) by hearsay mostly, the way nearly everyone knew Freddy. Unlike most actors, Fred always carried a typewriter in his baggage and spent a lot of leisure writing crazy letters to his friends and to the vaudeville papers. Variety was always running a letter from Fred Allen and making him offers to do a weekly funny column. Comedians watched for those, because usually there was at least one joke worth stealing.

Jack was no stranger in vaudeville conversation those years. He was not considered any great shucks as a wit, but he was a lovely companion for an evening. Actors who fancied themselves as wits always seemed to sparkle more the nights Jack was around. He was willing to tackle any of them, no matter how overwhelming the odds that he would come off second best.

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Yowp



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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

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7 hours ago

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

There was a day when he played on a bill with Frank Fay, then considered the king of jokesmiths on the two-a-day time. Young Jack and young Bert Wheeler concocted a plan to make the big fellow quail.

In the middle of Fay's act, out came the two mischievous youngsters with their carefully planned interruption. "Beg pardon, Mr. Fay," Jack asked, "but do you memorize all those funny sayings before you come out or do you make them up as you go along?"

Fay turned around with a kindly smile and let the two stand through a weighty, majestic pause. He beamed and placed a kindly hand on Jack's head.

"Bless your little heart," he said. Jack tells that story on himself to this day.



The main significance of that story at the moment is the idea it offers on the sort of youngster Jack was in his pre-radio and movie years. He was playing jokes and relishing his fun; Fred was lugging the typewriter around the circuits. Each of them spoke of the other as a good friend though they seldom met.

The friendship between them that has ripened by remote control the past three seasons really springs entirely from a casual jibe Fred made about 9:42 the night of December 30, 1936. The Fred Allen program brought in a few amateurs every week and this night a ten-year-old, who played the violin, was included. Fred did not plan his conversation with those amateurs, relying mainly on extemporaneous inspiration. After some talk about the complex violin solo, "The Bee," that the little boy was to play, Fred remarked, "There's a comedian out in Hollywood who used to play the violin. He'll probably feel a little ashamed when he hears what you can do at your age."

The remark was forgotten until next Sunday night when Jack answered on his program, "I could play 'The Bee,' too, when I was ten years old. That's an age for it." The next Wednesday Fred

called for witnesses who had heard Jack Benny playing "The Bee" at the age of ten — and the Benny-Allen feud was on. Two casual acquaintances suddenly became dear and intimate friends, but still mostly by long distance.

Benny was busy with movies in Hollywood and Fred preferred to conduct his radio business from New York. Whenever Jack was in New York, he would drop in on a Fred Allen broadcast, but that was about as much as the two saw of one another. Fred lives the life of a hermit, working on a radio script until the small hours of every morning.

When Jack visited New York this past spring, he insisted that Fred should move right into the Benny home during the weeks they worked on their picture together. Fred was insisting violently that he would not. He would make a strange house guest.

About mealtime he probably would emerge from his room and then go back up to books and typewriter.

Meanwhile, the sort of a host Jack Benny is would be to sit around fretting about what could have happened to keep good old Freddy from having a good time.

Old friends in New York tell about the way Jack used to love to spend an evening when he lived there. After a show, he would stop in at Lindy's or one of the other actor hangouts and gather a gang of cronies to "come up to our place and sit around for some laughs."

On the way home, Jack would pick up the morning papers. While the conversation was getting under way, Jack would glance quickly through the columns where he might be mentioned and then slip off into a doze. The friends would have all those laughs that had been planned while Jack quietly and happily slept in a corner. When they woke him up around time to go home, he heartily thanked everyone for the swell evening the gang had given him.

Don Wilson tells about Jack in Hollywood.

"He's a great walker," Don says. "To get exercise, he goes out and walks through the hills and comes back to tell what a great day he had. But one side of his face will be all sunburned. He goes out and finds a nice grassy spot and goes to sleep."

Fred Allen's stays in Hollywood included a minor amount of social life with Jack Benny or anyone else. He has a strange phobia about burdening himself with possessions, so he refuses to have a car.

Distances between places are so great in Hollywood, Fred had to rent a car there. That entailed hiring a chauffeur to drive it, because Fred never has learned to drive himself. After a month of paying rent, Fred called the chauffeur aside.

"With what I'm paying in car rent," Fred offered, "you could be making payments on a car. Why don't I just give that money to you?"

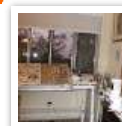
The colored chauffeur liked the arrangement. The only trouble was that Fred had not been specific about what sort of car he might like.

"The chauffeur got his own idea of a nice thing," Fred went on. "We spent the rest of our time in Hollywood running around in a little cream colored Ford. Rolls Royces and a lot of other big cars would be parked in front of a place and up would come the Allens in their queer looking jallopy."

Portland has her own complaints about Fred Allen in Hollywood.

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 Breaul!

***Lenny Breaul 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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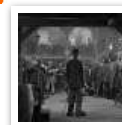
Termite Terrace headlines



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

"He spoils all the servants," she says. "He keeps asking them if they like the way things are going and if everything is all right in their treatment. After a while, they won't take orders."

No one knows how much of this strange background for a close friendship will get into the Benny-Allen picture. Most of the script probably will come from the preliminary conversations between the two comedians.

This much has been planned: the picture will present them as a pair of radio comedians who get into a feud. The background will not be primarily radio, however. It will be a musical picture with emphasis on comedy and a title will be selected sometime between now and the release date next fall.

There is comedy material in abundance in the occasional meetings of Allen and Benny in the past. On their broadcasts together, they usually have been funnier during preliminary chats to the studio audience than they were after the microphones actually had been turned on.

Jack was on the stage early one night and asked, "Where is Allen?"

"Here I am, Jack," Fred drawled as he walked up the center aisle. "I have been out there watching the door for you so your audience wouldn't get away."

That was a night when the Benny show had travelled from Hollywood for a brief New York visit. Fred began explaining things to the studio audience.

"Those people under glass," and he pointed to the glass panels of the control room, "are California people. They can't stand the climate here so you see how we put them under glass."

No matter who tackles Fred Allen, the exchanges usually are one-sided and Jack is no exception. "If I only had my writers here, I'd give you an answer, I tell you," Jack has said to Fred many a time.

Jack always warns his studio audience, "You'd better laugh if you ever expect to get in here again."

"You'd better laugh," Fred interrupted one night, "if HE ever expects to get in here again."

Fred told the studio audience another night, "Jack Benny is a very funny man. Five minutes with him and your sides ache. Every time he tells a joke, he punches you in the stomach."

Jack laughs helplessly when Fred cuts loose on him. His professional reputation cannot be helped by having a rival comedian outwit him all evening. But, as far as Benny is concerned, that has nothing to do with the situation. He tries to provoke Fred to retorts, because he loves hearing them.

In one of their first programs together, he came out of the studio red faced with laughter.

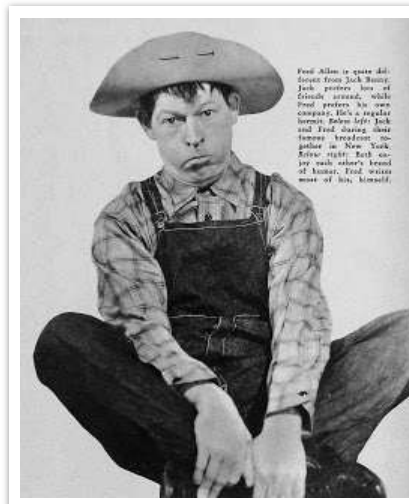
"I was afraid Freddy was going to just stick to the script," he said, "and I had to dig into him to get him started. Wasn't he wonderful?"

After Jack left, a few of the people around there had their own ideas of what was wonderful. With people as jealous and petty as they usually are in show business, it was wonderful to find two top men with that sort of an attitude toward one another. You don't often find it.

Jack loves to plan ideas where he figures Fred can't possibly find a topper for the gag. One night just before a broadcast, he walked into the Fred Allen studio and ostentatiously shook hands with everyone except Fred.

Fred watched that for a moment and came up:

"The man Jack just shook hands with is our tester. He shakes hands with visitors to see if they are fit to associate with the rest of us."



Their independent attitude toward the boss is one of the few things Jack and Fred have in common. Last fall, each of their radio sponsors had an elaborate luncheon at which the comedian was to explain his plans for the coming season. The newspapermen and a lot of vice presidents were there. Jack confined his remarks mainly to abuse of the sponsor for letting Kenny Baker go. Fred said his program probably would suffer greatly because of a lot of wild suggestions the sponsor was making. Neither one of them has the flossy air of hypocrisy that usually comes after a few years on the stage, or in pictures. There is the real foundation for the affection they feel toward one another. A good sample is Jack's remarks one year when he came home from a vacation in Europe. "Oh, great!" he was telling his friends about the time he had had. Then he paused to be more explicit.

"After you pack and unpack everywhere you go, you begin thinking you could have had just as much fun right

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ist@gmail.com for prices
etc... -
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.com/ Will update it like I do
on facebook.
4 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 forth...
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.
1 hour ago

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at home. With your wife along, there's no end to that packing." Jack had another picture coming up then.


"We were in some wonderful restaurants over there," he went on, "and I'm a guy who likes to eat. But I never can because it puts weight on me so fast. Isn't that awful?"

This Benny-Allen picture should be something worth seeing. But it's a shame to think of those preliminary conversations between that pair slipping off into thin air. Unless times are very tough this summer, Paramount ought to slip a stenographer into a corner and save those remarks. There has not been much talk as good as that going on in any age.

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

Labels: [Fred Allen](#), [Jack Benny](#)


1 comment:

 **TV Fan** 2 February 2019 at 20:08

Fred also made a memorable appearance on Jack's TV show about 1953. Story goes that Jack and Fred were coming out of NBC together when a man approached them and said that he played a bill with both of them in vaudeville. His act was imitating a dog. Neither remembered him, but to be nice, they pretended they did. After the guy left, Jack told Fred that he really did not remember this guy's act. Fred said that he did and then paused and said "but maybe I have him mixed up with Rin Tin Tin" which sent Jack into hysterics.

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