



Sunday, 26 November 2017

The Goose Grease Violinist

Concert-goers either enjoyed or tolerated Jack Benny's violin playing when he appeared at charity event. Musicians found interesting ways to find euphemisms for "he's not very good." But Benny raised great amounts of money and no doubt saved orchestras and concert halls from certain death.

Not many of Benny's non-televised performances warranted mention in the national press, but one in Los Angeles on April 23, 1957 did, likely because the city was filled with entertainment columnists for newspaper syndicates and wire services, and they needed to write something.

Here's an Associated Press story that appeared in papers the next day.

Jack Benny Plays Classics (They Lost)

By BOB THOMAS

LOS ANGELES (AP)— The Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra may never be the same.

Jack Benny, 39-year-old violinist of Waukegan, Ill., made a guest appearance last night at Philharmonic Auditorium. He played sections from Sarasate, Mendelssohn and Rimsky-Korsakoff. All three composers lost.

Such music lovers as Frank Sinatra, James Stewart, Claudette Colbert, Dana Wynter, Clifton Webb, Gregory Peck, Ann Miller and Sam Goldwyn paid \$100 a seat to hear Mr. Benny's West Coast debut as a concert artist. The event was for the benefit of Cedars of Lebanon Hospital.

Charity netted a reported \$100,000. What happened to music is another matter. Immaculate in white tie and tails, the violinist played vigorously while carrying on a running feud with the concertmaster. The latter interrupted with violin solos and was removed from the stage at the request of Mr. Benny.

The comedian's stares were more eloquent than his cadenzas. But here and there was evidence that he might have gone farther with the fiddle if he had applied himself more back in Waukegan.

Between numbers he confessed to the audience that he had the feeling of not being needed by the orchestra—"like being stranded on a desert isle with Jayne Mansfield—and her boy friend." Albert Goldberg, the Los Angeles Times music critic, had this to say about Benny's playing: "... As a violinist Mr. Benny has a small but offensive tone, and he apparently uses goose grease instead of resin on his bow."

What *did* the *Times* writer have to say? Glad you asked. Here's the answer:

Jack Benny Fiddles Around for Charity

BY ALBERT GOLDBERG

"The Jack Benny Show" was the legend on the marquee of Philharmonic Auditorium last night and it was indeed Mr. Benny's show, although Dorothy Kirsten, soprano, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra under Alfred Wallenstein's direction likewise contributed prominently to this \$100-a-seat benefit sponsored by the Women's Guild of Cedars of Lebanon Hospital for



Jack Benny with Dorothy Kirsten, who sings much better than he fiddles.

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

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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

the free bed program. The audience was large and a personnel list would read like a Who's Who in Hollywood.

Mr. Benny, in case you don't know, is a violinist—and it is one way to make a living. He confessed to being nervous: "It's like being on an island with Jayne Mansfield and her boy friend," he said. "You have a feeling you're not needed."

Critical Note

But nerves or not, Mr. Benny was undeterred in attacking several of the more difficult items of the virtuoso repertoire. Since this is supposed to be a critical review we might as well note now that as a violinist Mr. Benny has a small but offensive tone and that he apparently uses goose grease instead of resin on his bow.

He came on to play Sarasate's "Gypsy Airs" without his bow and had to send off for it. David Frisina, the orchestra's concertmaster, obligingly filled in with the first cadenza when things began to look bad for Mr. Benny, an assist that the soloist apparently did not appreciate, for, after a whispered conference with Mr. Wallenstein, the concertmaster was asked to leave the stage, shortly to be followed by an industrious cymbal player who had likewise cramped Mr. Benny's style. Mr. Benny celebrated his victory by adding "Love in Bloom" to the Sarasate piece without any great harm being done, and to everyone's surprise he and the orchestra ended together.

Twinges of Conscience

The first movement of Mendelssohn's E Minor Concerto was next served up for slaughter, but conscience first impelled Mr. Benny to send off for the music—"It's a little hazardous," he explained—and the stagehand who brought it also obligingly tuned Mr. Benny's violin for him. Aside from having to be reminded to come in with the second theme, Mr. Benny worked diligently with his task with what might be called an ocean wave technique, and when Heimann Weinstine, who had taken Mr. Frisina's place, volunteered to help with the cadenza, he met with the same ingratitude as his predecessor. But by skipping the cadenza altogether Mr. Benny made it, by golly.

Since there were no more concertmasters left to banish Mr. Benny took the first chair for the second section of Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Capriccio Espagnol." This also contains a violin cadenza that enabled Mr. Benny to demonstrate his technique with merciless clarity, and except for having to caution Mr. Wallenstein to go slower he again emerged victorious.

The more serious part of the program had Miss Kirsten singing "Un bel di" from "Madame Butterfly" and "Depuis le jour" from "Louise" with her usual grace and soaring voice, and Mr. Wallenstein conducted the overture to Smetana's "The Bartered Bride," the suite from Strauss' "Der Rosenkavalier" and the overture to Von Suppe's "Poet and Peasant" in brilliant fashion.

The wife of one of Jack's old friends, Mervyn LeRoy, organised the charity concert, while Mrs. David May II was in charge of a supper-dance that followed at the Beverly Hills Hotel (note to our younger readers that there was once a custom that, when formally referring to a wife, the husband's given name was used instead of the woman's).

The concert was a success, at least from a charitable standpoint. The *Times* reported in a sidebar story that \$100,000 was raised. Goose grease notwithstanding, Jack Benny had contributed to society yet again.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:59](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:



J Lee 26 November 2017 at 07:35

Since this was in Los Angeles, if they really wanted to play up the comedy aspect without having to import anyone very far to the venue, they could have had Mel as Professor Le Blanc make an embarrassed guest appearance on stage.

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between two boots." Jerry Reed* "Lenny was a comet passing through" Chet Atkins* "If you had dropped...

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Termite Terrace headlines



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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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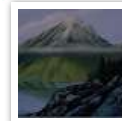


[Seeing The Gold Rush \(1925\) at the Old Town Music Hall](#) - Last night I had

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

Yowp



[The House of the Seven Gargoyles](#) - Dick Thomas

pulled a huge workload at the Hanna-Barbera studio. He arrived in 1959 from Walt Disney (after almost two decades at Warner Bros.) to work on t...

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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...

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too important a f...
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**Likely Looney, Mostly
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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...
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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**

[Les Contes de la nuit \(Tales
of the Night\)](#) - Les Contes
de la nuit' (Tales of the
Night) are three fairy tale
films French animation
master Michel Ocelot made
for television, not to be
confused with h...
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