



Sunday, 4 February 2018

## Big Time Vaudeville Nostalgia

Jack Benny and George Burns were friends virtually their whole adult lives, and it would appear Jack was close to, or at least friendly with, other ex-vaudevillians he knew back in New York in the 1920s. They appeared with him on his radio show — Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, Georgie Jessel and former headliner Benny Rubin. The last two were pall bearers at Jack's funeral in 1974 (the other two were dead long before then).

Raising money for the State of Israel was a cause for many show biz oldtimers in the 1950s. Benny emceed a testimonial dinner for Jessel in February 1959. Cantor and Burns were there; columnist

Army Archerd called Cantor's donation

"embarrassing." Roastmaster Benny remarked: "Cantor and Jessel have been friends ever since they learned to speak English. They went through show biz with the same disappointment — they both wanted to be Jolson." Jolson had been dead since 1950 but not forgotten.



Benny, Burns, Cantor and Jessel did a variety special together in late 1959; the *Life* magazine photo above came from it. It was sponsored by the Lincoln-Mercury division of Ford; Jack was no longer on *Shower of Stars* sponsored by Chrysler, so there was no conflict for him. Benny's usual staff wasn't involved at all. The special was produced and co-written by Hub Robinson, with Mac Benoff and directed by Dick Darley, with Jeff Alexander's orchestra. A selling point, besides a trip down Nostalgia Lane, was the fact the show was broadcast in colour.

Here's a United Press International story from November 3rd that year, two weeks before it aired.

### Elder Statesmen On Show Together

By VERNON SCOTT

UPI Hollywood Writer

HOLLYWOOD (UPI)—The four elder statesmen of show business, representing more than 200 years of movie, radio, television and vaudeville entertainment, band together for the first time Tuesday for a TV show.

George Burns, who has not not fully recovered from Gracie Allen's retirement, has taped his initial program of the year with Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor and George. Originally titled "A Night at the Palace," the show will appear as "the Big Time"—a flight to nostalgia and the old vaudeville days.

"All four of us have taken portions of our acts and revamped them," Burns said, pacing his office floor. He was rakishly attired in sports clothes, including a blue beret.

"It begins with Cantor and Jessel when they were breaking records at the Palace Theater in 1927. Then we move to Benny at the Poli Theater in Wilkes-Barre the first time he performed without his violin."

Modestly, George said he would sing some of the songs he made famous.

Then he had the gall to ask how anyone could forget such all time greats as "I'm Tying the Leaves So They Won't Fall Down," "Oh What a Wonderful Winter," "The Boys Are All Back Home" and "Tiger Girl."

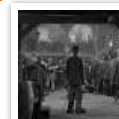
## About Me



[View my complete profile](#)

## Blogs to See

### Movies with Michael

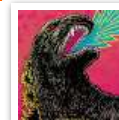


[Seeing The Gold Rush \(1925\) at the Old Town Music Hall - Last night I had](#)

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...

52 seconds ago

### Rip Jagger's Dojo



[Godzilla - The Criterion Era! - What a](#)

magnificent dilemma! In

a few months The Criterion Collection folks will be issuing the Showa Godzilla movies. When I first heard they were going ...

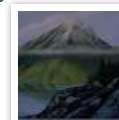
9 hours ago

### News From ME

[This Evening...](#) - I'm going to get away from the TV where people argue and shoot each other. Instead, I'm going to go see a 93-year-old man sing and dance and maybe even tri...

13 hours 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...

1 day ago

"When I get through with those numbers I sing some of the real old tunes," he beamed. George's three guests on the spectacular (Nov. 17, NBC-TV) all were famous before Burns himself hit the bigtime. He struggled along as a second-rater until he joined forces with Gracie.

"I knew Cantor all my life," he said. "But he didn't know me. He didn't want to know me. He only started talking to me when I was 27 years old — after I met Gracie. Jack Benny has been my closest friend for 36 years. Jessel and I have known one another lot about 35 years. "This is the first time the four of us have worked together. In the old days we couldn't have afforded to appear in a group."

Burns struck a pose as he explained that he was a cut above his pals.

"They are essentially comedians," he said. "I am a singer. No, no, don't laugh. When I went to parties in the past I'd jump up and sing for nothing. But now that I have a night club act and sing on records I wait to be asked to sing. Trouble is, nobody asks."

### Box Score

George Burns, Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor and George Jessel will be appearing together Tuesday for the first time, but they've been mightily close many times before:

- Each has been in show business for 50 years.
- Each started as a youngster.
- Each was a vaudeville headliner at the same theater.
- Each had his own radio network show.
- Each has starred in movies.
- Each has had his own TV show.
- Each lives in the same part of Los Angeles.
- Each has worked on stage with two of the other three.

Reviews were generally favourable, especially for Burns who, as one critic pointed out, needed to recover from a disastrous, Gracie-less sitcom from the previous season. *Variety* wasn't impressed with the writing, called a Jessel-Cantor-Benny dressing room sketch an "embarrassment," and felt Jack's turn "was something less than inspirational."

Here's a post mortem from one of the syndicated columnists.

## The Good Old Days—For a Night

By WALTER HAWVER

It was a great idea to have George Burns, Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor and George Jessel combine forces and relive the good old vaudeville days.

And while these venerable gentlemen of show business were on camera, last night's Startime presentation, "George Burns in The Big Time," was jolly good nostalgic fun.

Not the lump-in-the-throat kind of nostalgia, mind you. If there was a wet eye in the audience, it was from laughing too lustily.

Burns had top billing, and there was perhaps too much of Georgie and too little of the others. But the hardest thing to comprehend was the addition of The Kingston Trio and Bobby Darin. They are out of another era and about as incompatible with vaudeville and nostalgia as you can get.

Looking at the bright side of things, Jack Benny proved anew he is one of the funniest men alive, though he performed less than 10 minutes.

He recalled the night he stepped on the stage for the first time without his props, a violin or a bow. He didn't know what to do with his hands. And what he did with them was a riot, as he placed them behind his head, on his hips, tucked them into his belt, waved them aimlessly, cracked his knuckles; all the time doing a monologue nobody could hear for the merriment.

The biggest chuckle of the night also was Jack's doing. When Eddie Cantor asked him if he was getting paid for doing the show, Jack's



### Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons



Female Senate members still earning less than their male counterpart

s. - ©2019

fernandollercartoons.com

1 day ago

### Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Tomorrow Night in Astoria: That Slapstick Show -

\*Tomorrow

afternoon, That Slapstick Show celebrates its 5th anniversary show with a special screening of unseen American silent comedies from the Library...

1 day ago

### Cartoon Research

Danny Kaye's Weavies - Walt Disney was always looking for opportunities to find additional work for his artists. One solution was supplying short animated segments for features ...

2 days ago

### Termite Terrace headlines



Popeye Cans the Spinach (Commercial Corner) - Due to the Tom and

Jerry hiatus, the monthly commercials are returning. This month we'll look at Popeye canning the spinach and advertising with other a...

1 week ago

### The World of Knight



SATURDAY AFTERNOON - Nice view. I actually drew it into a panel

today.

2 weeks 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

indignant frown spoke comical volumes.

Cantor, who has been slowed down by illness, romped through a reprise of "Pals" with Jessel. This was a routine they did together in 1929 at the Palace Theater in New York. It is probably only coincidence, but the theater closed two weeks later, and vaudeville died.

And, of course, there was Burns, Gracie-less and still a bit lost as a single, but a good guy to have around for a show like this one. Nobody could believe a fellow who sings as badly as Burns actually ever made the big time as a singer. And George didn't. When Gracie was his partner, he never finished a number. Last night, he didn't finish many either, but he sang a lot of them—forgotten (and they deserve to be) melodies like "Red Rose Rag," "Don't Take Me Home" and "Tiger Girl."

George also did a sand dance (with Darin) and a bit of soft shoe with a bevy of chorus girls. In between, he reminisced. The jokes were older than he is, but they belonged in this hour and so did George.

The same can't be said for Darin or the Kingston Trio. Bobby mercifully didn't sing "Mack the Knife" again but his "Clementine" didn't sound much different. The trio, a competent group of clean-cut singers with clean-cut sounds, is welcome on most any show but one of this sort. Somebody evidently decided the good old days should be counterbalanced by good young talent. Television will never let well enough alone.

Jack Hellman's *Variety* column of November 30th had a post-script:

Howard Blake got off this howler. A table of Chasen regulars fell to discussing the recent George Burns special, which numbered among his guests Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor and George Jessel. One of them wanted to know "why no Jolson?" Replied another, "oh, we tried but he looked at the script and said, 'I'm not getting up for that one'."

There are a couple of murky kinescope snippets of this special on the internet. Here's the portion with Cantor (who was a lot slower due to illness), Jessel, Benny and a laugh track.

4 Pals 11 17 59



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:49](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#), [Vernon Scott](#)

## 1 comment:



**J Lee** 4 February 2018 at 08:36

Sounds as though the special suffered through the same problem as other attempts to assemble an 'All-Star Cast', in that the whole is never as good as the sum of the parts, because most of the parts fail to mesh together correctly (and the inclusion of Darrin and The Kingston Trio just screams out TV network executive demanding the younger demo be targeted in some manner).

[Reply](#)



**petergrayart**  
ist@gmail.com for prices etc..

<https://petergrayart.blog>

spot.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...](#)



1 month 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**

[Cool World](#) - Cool World' looks like a poor man's version of 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit'. Sure, the film boasts Brad Pitt and Kim Basinger as leading actors, and it even f...

4 days ago

Enter your comment...

 Comment as: Garth (Google) ▼

Sign out

Publish

Preview

☐ Notify me

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

Blog Archive

- [2019](#) (224)
- ▼ [2018](#) (379)
  - [December](#) (32)
  - [November](#) (32)
  - [October](#) (31)
  - [September](#) (34)
  - [August](#) (35)
  - [July](#) (32)
  - [June](#) (30)
  - [May](#) (31)
  - [April](#) (30)
  - [March](#) (31)
  - ▼ [February](#) (28)
    - [Human Misery is On The Air!](#)
    - [Wasting Wages](#)
    - [A Logical Question](#)
    - [The Life of Jack Benny](#)
    - [Doting on Disney, Waxing on Walt](#)
    - [Look Who's Driving](#)
    - [Multiple Brats](#)
    - [The Mad Russian](#)
    - [In Case You Missed the Name...](#)
    - [Cat Face](#)
    - [Fred Allen's Side of the Jack Benny Feud](#)
    - [Living With Mel Blanc](#)
    - [That New Car Smell](#)
    - [Chasing Lucky Ducky](#)
    - [Ruling Radio Roost](#)
    - [Phone-y Disguise](#)
    - [The Art of Bugs and Elmer](#)
    - [A Day in the Navy](#)
    - [Party With Jay Ward](#)
    - [Cow Puncher](#)
    - [Blunderland](#)
    - [Pantsless Pig 1, Unmighty Mouse 0](#)
    - [A Bone!](#)
    - [Holy Scrawny Guy, Batman!](#)
    - [Big Time Vaudeville Nostalgia](#)
    - [Cartoons of 1961, Part 2](#)
    - [Disney's Groundhog Day](#)
    - [Carissima Clobber](#)
  - [January](#) (33)

- [2017](#) (380)
- [2016](#) (396)
- [2015](#) (389)
- [2014](#) (390)
- [2013](#) (388)
- [2012](#) (397)
- [2011](#) (106)

Labels

<a href="#">Aline Mosby</a>	(16)
<a href="#">Art Davis</a>	(30)
<a href="#">Bad Luck Blackie</a>	(9)
<a href="#">Bob and Ray</a>	(9)
<a href="#">Bob Clampett</a>	(72)
<a href="#">Bob McKimson</a>	(51)
<a href="#">Bob Thomas</a>	(53)
<a href="#">Chuck Jones</a>	(134)
<a href="#">Columbia</a>	(25)
<a href="#">Cynthia Lowry</a>	(24)
<a href="#">Dick Thomas</a>	(12)
<a href="#">Don Patterson</a>	(16)
<a href="#">Earl Wilson</a>	(6)
<a href="#">Erskine Johnson</a>	(36)
<a href="#">Felix the Cat</a>	(24)
<a href="#">Film Daily</a>	(50)
<a href="#">Fleischer</a>	(137)
<a href="#">Frank Tashlin</a>	(21)
<a href="#">Fred Allen</a>	(37)
<a href="#">Fred Brunish</a>	(9)
<a href="#">Friz Freleng</a>	(126)
<a href="#">Gene Deitch</a>	(16)
<a href="#">George Pal</a>	(9)
<a href="#">Grant Simmons</a>	(3)
<a href="#">Hanna and Barbera unit</a>	(91)
<a href="#">Hanna-Barbera</a>	(2)
<a href="#">Harman-Ising</a>	(54)
<a href="#">Henry Morgan</a>	(13)
<a href="#">Irv Spence</a>	(8)
<a href="#">Jack Benny</a>	(402)
<a href="#">Jay Ward</a>	(30)
<a href="#">Jimmy Durante</a>	(16)
<a href="#">John Crosby</a>	(78)
<a href="#">John Sutherland</a>	(23)
<a href="#">Johnny Johnson</a>	(25)
<a href="#">Kenny Baker</a>	(6)
<a href="#">King-Size Canary</a>	(6)
<a href="#">Laugh-In</a>	(10)
<a href="#">Maurice Noble</a>	(12)
<a href="#">Mel-O-Toons</a>	(4)
<a href="#">MGM</a>	(499)
<a href="#">Norm McCabe</a>	(4)

Pat Matthews	(10)
Paul Julian	(13)
Sara Berner	(5)
Screwy Squirrel	(32)
Spider-Man	(1)
Terrytoons	(68)
Tex Avery	(413)
Tom and Jerry Human	(24)
Tralfaz Sunday Theatre	(14)
Ub Iwerks	(65)
UPA	(51)
Van Beuren	(80)
Vernon Scott	(40)
Virginia MacPherson	(14)
Walt Disney	(125)
Walter Lantz	(212)
Warner Bros.	(521)
Who Killed Who	(10)

Watermark theme. Powered by [Blogger](#).