



Sunday, 20 May 2018

## Dennis Saves The...

It's hard to believe there was a time that Dennis Day wasn't connected with Jack Benny, and that Day's hiring was a real gamble on Benny's part.

In 1939, Kenny Baker was the singer on the Benny show. Baker was also singing on another programme, *The Texaco Star Theatre* starring Ken Murray. Suddenly, almost at the end of the radio season, Baker decided to sign an exclusive, \$2000-a-week contract with Texaco. He was a no-show on the last Benny show.

Baker was a popular and valuable asset to the Benny show. Replacing him would be difficult. What if the public didn't accept the replacement?

As it turned out, it turned out for the better. Dennis Day grew into his role on the show and proved to be even more valuable and versatile than Baker, demonstrating that he was a fine comic actor and had a good ear for dialects and a few impressions.

Day's hiring was utterly improbable. He had a bit of radio experience—on a Thursday afternoon show on the CBS station in New York, then on a network show that was batted around the CBS schedule in 15 and 30-minute formats. He was not someone a lot of people would have known. Here's a story from the *Buffalo Evening News*, less than two months after Dennis arrived on the Benny show, to explain how he got there, with a bonus revelation about actress Verna Felton, who played his mother. And he stayed with Benny, military service excepted, until the radio show went off the air in 1955 and for more years in television after that.

By the way, Dennis's birthday is tomorrow. That makes this post (get ready, folks) a Day early!

### DENNIS DAY BEGAN CAREER IN RADIO FIVE MONTHS AGO

**BUFFALO EVENING NEWS, New York Bureau.**

NEW YORK, NOV. 11.—The big town boy who's making good in a great big way as Jack Benny's tenor discovery Sunday evenings on NBC-WBEN had never sung a note professionally five months ago. As recently as last November he hadn't even considered earning a living as a singer.

More than a few New Yorkers will remember Dennis Day as one Eugene Dennis McNulty, son of a city engineer, choir boy at St. Patrick's Cathedral, second ranking honor student at Manhattan College, president and soloist of that school's glee club, and winner of Mayor LaGuardia's vocational scholarship upon his graduation in 1938.

To most of the United States, however, he was an unknown until a few weeks ago.

"Mac," as he was better known in those days, chose to exercise the scholarship by accepting a job at WNYC in New York. His four amateur appearances with Larry Clinton's NBC Campus Club the previous Spring had whetted his appetite for radio.

...

But far from becoming an immediate tenor sensation, Mac put in his time at WNYC as a glorified office boy, saving every penny he could toward the day when he could afford to enter law school.

In October, an appendectomy upset his well-laid plans. When he was released from the hospital, his savings were gone and he was faced with the necessity of making money quickly to regain lost ground.

Spurred on by Rudolph Friml Jr., who recognized his vocal talent after hearing him at a party, McNulty took a more appealing professional name, Dennis Day—his own middle name plus his grandmother's maiden name.



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## Blogs to See

**Cartoon Research**  
[Silent Era Aesop's Fables](#) - This week, animator Mark Kausler posts a selection of silent Paul Terry Aesop Fables cartoons, from his collection of Commonwealth Home Movie prints.  
 5 hours ago

**Rip Jagger's Dojo**  
[Sanjulian's Demon Queen!](#) - She's one of those ladies you cannot forget. Manuel Sanjulian's "Demon Queen" from the cover "Eerie" magazine is at once an attractive and repulsive figure...  
 7 hours ago

**Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog**  
[And This Blog Loves George Burns & Gracie Allen](#) - \* On a Sunday in which temps hit 90 degrees Fahrenheit - rough on this weather wuss ...  
 12 hours ago

**News From ME**  
[Today's Video Link](#) - Oh, you'll like this. Boy, will you like this. For a number of years at Comic-Con, I had the honor/privilege/thrill (it was many other things, as well) of ...  
 16 hours ago

**Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons**  
[European Heat Wave expected to ease up as rain and](#)

Then began the heart-breaking routine of auditions. He was rewarded finally in June, when Del Peters of CBS signed him for the tenor spot on Ray Bloch's Musical Varieties.

He started at the stupendous salary of \$21 per week, of which an agent got 10 per cent.

...

A faux pas made during the second and last broadcast with Bloch made Dennis believe that he had snuffed out a promising career.

After singing one song, Dennis stepped out of the studio momentarily for a drink of water. Maestro Bloch, crossing him up, went immediately into the introduction of Day's next song instead of a band number.

Dennis reached the mike on cue, but his first note should have been put through a wringer.

The error wasn't as tragic as Dennis had assumed, however, for he next was given the vocal berth on Leith Stevens' series, Accent on Music, and was making his debut on this CBS series when Mary Livingstone heard him.

She located his manager, obtained a record of the broadcast, and flew with it to Jack, who was then in Chicago. After playing the record, Jack returned to New York to audition Day.

...

All in all, Jack listened to more than 100 of the nation's best tenors during the Summer, and his radio producer, Murray Bolen, heard that many more. But Dennis, a shy youngster who came along about number 50, had the inside track from the moment Jack heard him.

Funny thing, too. Last June, when Day heard that Kenny Baker wouldn't be with Jack this Fall, he stroked that piece of Blarney Stone without which he wouldn't feel completely dressed, and immediately was seized with the feeling that he was destined to be the next Jack Benny tenor.

Common sense told him that it was a crazy idea, since he had only one professional broadcast behind him at the time, but a few weeks later, when Jack Benny asked him to audition, Dennis felt as if he'd known about it and had worked toward it all along.

Jack spent the month of August auditioning more singers in Hollywood. Then he sent for Dennis, who arrived early in September and made an immediate hit with the rest of the gang.

But still no contracts were signed. On the spur of the moment Jack embarked for Treasure Island, at San Francisco, pushed on to New York, Detroit and Chicago, and headed home with his mind made up to send for Dennis and give him a trial.

But when Jack reached Hollywood, he found that Dennis was still in town. No one had told him to go home. Dennis, figuring that he ought to stay under cover lest the cat get out of the bag and spoil his chances, had been practically hiding out for four weeks—and was he homesick!

...

Homesick—mother—stage mother! Jack had an idea. Why not introduce Dennis by means of a hard-boiled, domineering stage mother who'd see to it not only that Dennis was protected from Hollywood but also that Jack's life was made characteristically [sic] miserable?

Benny, Harry Baldwin, his secretary; his writers, Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin; Mary Livingstone and Producer Murray Bolen began auditioning "stage mothers," with Dennis sitting in.

They finally eliminated all but two, voted, and wound up in a three-three, 'deadlock. "Dennis, it'll be your mother," said Jack. "You cast the deciding vote." Thus Dennis Day, probably the only lad on record who's had the privilege of choosing his own mother, said, "I like Miss Felton, Mr. Benny. She sounds like she'd be a world of protection to me."

So Verna Felton, who had been mother to Phil Harris, Don Wilson and "Tom Sawyer Benny," became the bass voiced maternal protector of Dennis Day.

...

Now that he's been made a regular member of the Jack Benny gang and is succeeding in one of the toughest spots so young a singer ever had to fill, there is just one question that's uppermost in Dennis Day's mind: "Mr. Benny, will we do a show or two from New York this year?"

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:09](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 2 comments:

**Lee** 20 May 2018 at 19:57

At the beginning of his tenure for Benny, Dennis benefitted enormously from the presence of Verna Felton, who often carried the comic bulk of the scenes Dennis had, leaving the young actor in a good position to learn and grow without being under too much pressure.

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**William Byron** 20 May 2018 at 22:08

[thunderstor](#)  
ms move in. - ©2019  
fernandollercartoons.com  
21 hours ago

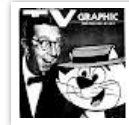
### Movies with Michael



**Cowboy Church #20**  
- Hello my friends and welcome back for another

Cowboy Church service. We begin our musical selection off with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans performing the Sout...  
22 hours ago

### Yowp



**Explaining Cats** - Hanna-Barbera made good copy in 1961. The

proof is in a search through newspapers as Arnie Carr's PR department successfully pushed the studio's newest se...  
1 day 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...  
6 days ago

### The World of Knight SATURDAY AFTERNOON



- Nice view. I actually drew it into a panel

today.  
1 week 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...  
1 week ago

### Peter Gray's Comics and Art



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

ist@gmail.com for prices etc...  
<https://petergrayart.blogspot>



Oh, I agree. And besides covering Dennis's relative inexperience on the radio, she was a great foil for Jack and the Gang. Love Verna Felton, especially as Mrs. Day.

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.com/ Will update it like I do on facebook.  
*3 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**

**FernGully: The Last Rain Forest** - Up until the rise of computer animation in the late 1990s, with powerful players entering the field (first Pixar, then Dreamworks, followed by BlueSky, Son...  
*2 days ago*

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