



Sunday, 9 September 2018

## Battling Benny Reviews

You're never going to please everyone. Even if you're one of the most popular comedians of the 20th Century.

Jack Benny dragged out George Burns and Bing Crosby to appear on his TV show on Sunday, March 21, 1954. Benny wasn't on every week in those days, and he was alternating between live and filmed shows. This one happened to be filmed like sitcoms, no different than, say, "Topper."

Critics weighed in after the show. Opinions were mixed. Here are a couple of duelling critics; the first from the *Boston Globe* (March 22, 1954), the second from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 23, 1954). I'll spare you *Variety's* review with an opinion which kind of falls between the two.



The show was on-line at one time; whether it still is, I haven't looked. Personally, it's not one of my favourites for some of the reasons outlined below. The fake laughter is annoying and overused, and some of the material was really contrived. Somehow, contrived worked better for Jack on radio.

### Benny and Rochester Again Prove They're Top Team

By Mary Cremen

After last night's show there should not be any doubt that Jack Benny and Rochester are the funniest team on television.

The opening scene, showing Jack in a hammock that Rochester kept in motion by operating the foot pump on an old-fashioned sewing machine, developed into the most original, entertaining visual comedy we have seen this year.

For the benefit of those who were watching "Mister Peepers," Rochester never raised his eyes from a mystery book as his feet pumped, his right hand churned butter and his left whipped ice cream.

After the telephone rang half a dozen times, Jack asked, "Why don't you answer that, Rochester?"

His man Friday: "It might be a quiz program and I'd have to leave all this for Honolulu."

Bing Crosby, as a guest star, generated a little more enthusiasm than he did when he was emcee on his own show. He seemed to enjoy the hoofing and singing routine with host Benny and George Burns in their parody of Ye Olde Vaudeville.

But Crosby looked and sounded most familiar when he stretched and strolled and lounged his way through a chorus of "It's the Gypsy in Me."

Actually the Benny show is so good that it does not need these expensive distractions.

No TV program ever had a funnier ending.

Benny, in order to put Crosby in a genial mood before talking about the price of his guest appearance, insisted that Bing stretch out in the hammock we saw at the start of the show. Jack took Rochester's place and pumped the swing into a gentle rock. But not for long.

After Benny told of the plan for his forthcoming show, Crosby named his price. Jack went into such a panic that his foot went like mad, the hammock went into a spin and Crosby, presumably, was catapulted onto the



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8 hours ago

 **Movies with Michael**  
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branch of the tree.

The came first showed an indignant Bing calling down to Benny. Then it switched to another tree where, to everyone's surprise, Bob Hope was balancing on a limb. He called over, "You better do what he says, Bing. I've been up here for months."

The only drawback to the whole show was the unnatural sounding laughter. Is it possible that the producers of this kind of top-flight entertainment resorted to "canned" applause?

## Benny Show on Film Adds Nothing to Video

By LEO MISHKIN

When I see an ad in the Sunday papers proclaiming that Bing Crosby and George Burns, are going to be the guests on the Jack Benny show, I want to see Bing Crosby and George Burns, and Jack Benny, too—and not a reasonable facsimile thereof.

I want to see them in person, right in front of me on my own TV screen, and not in a washed-out, edited, rerun and re-edited movie made perhaps three weeks ago.

And if I do get Bing Crosby, George Burns and Jack Benny on film, which is precisely what happened last Sunday evening, no matter what the three do, no matter what gimmicks and contrivances are thought up for their appearance, and no matter how funny they strive to be, I feel cheated.

### TRICK CAMERA SHOTS

If I want to see Crosby in the movies, I'd pay an admission price at the neighborhood movie box office, and get an hour and a half of Crosby, instead of just 29 minutes and 30 seconds, with time out for the commercials.

True enough, and I'll be the first to admit it, there were some things on the Benny show Sunday night that could not possibly have been done on live TV but on the other hand, there were some things on a Benny show done live that could not possibly have been done on film either.

The highly publicized father of the bride had business in this last appearance leaning heavily on trick camera shots, sight gags and quick cutting from one set to another that would have left him dizzy and breathless if he had tried to do it in person,

The opening of the program him swinging idly in a hammock on his front lawn, the swinging of the hammock being motivated by a Rube Goldberg contraption operated by Rochester. The device also churned butter and ran an ice cream freezer at the same time. When Rochester became too interested in a mystery story he was reading at the moment, and the tempo of the hammock swinging increased. there was Benny revolving in the thing like a pinwheel, around and around. Rochester put the brakes on the contraption, stopping it with a squeal and a flare of sparks and smoke; and the next shot had Benny up in the branches of a nearby tree telling his faithful manservant to be careful and next time don't jam on the brakes so suddenly.

### SOFT-SHOE SHUFFLES

The two guests, Crosby and Burns (the latter without Gracie, for once) turned up as Benny's golfing partners for the day, leading Benny into some reminiscences with Don Wilson about how long he's known them. Seems that years ago Benny, Crosby and Burns did a vaudeville act billed as "Goldie, Fields and Glide," three personable young men in straw hats, white flannel trousers and blue blazers, songs, dances and funny sayings. "I'll never forget," said Benny dreamily.

"I'll never forget one date we played in Scranton ..." and there, by golly, were "Goldie, Fields and Glide" playing that date in Scranton, harmonizing in "Put Them All Together and They Spell "M-O-T-H-E-R," doing a couple of soft-shoe shuffles, and looking for all the world like three old men in an amateur act on lodge night.

### CROSBY UP IN TREE

The Rube Goldberg device with the hammock came into the picture again when Benny tried to persuade Crosby to appear on his TV show. Benny put Crosby back into the hammock, started it swinging, at first easily and quietly, then faster and faster, until Crosby consented to appear. "How much do you want?" hollered Benny over the uproar. "Ten thousand dollars!" yelled Crosby.

Next shot, there was Crosby up in the tree. "Hey, get me down outa here!" he called again. "Not until you come down in your price!" replied Benny. "Better do what he says," came another voice. "I've been up here for four days." The other voice came from another tree, and the owner turned out to be Bob Hope. End of gag, and of gimmick, end of the Jack Benny program.

But I still felt cheated that the whole thing was on film. Is this the best that television can do?

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [11:24](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)



Grade: A- Review: An affectionate (though not exactly uncritical) love letter to 60's cinema that is irresistible. If I were to give you ...  
9 hours ago

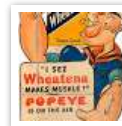
### Yowp



[Scooter Looter Cycle](#) - \*Scooter Looter\* is one of the Hanna-

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Jerry hiatus, the monthly commercials are returning. This month we'll look at Popeye canning the spinach and advertising with other a...  
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ON - Nice view. I actually drew it into a panel today.

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- 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...  
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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...  
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**Dr. Grob's Animation Review**  
**He Poses for his Portrait** - 'He Poses for his Portrait' is the second of only two surviving Newlyweds cartoons Émile Cohl made in the United States.  
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