



Sunday, 16 September 2018

Squared Circle Benny



There was a knock on Jack Benny when he started his career that his gags weren't "television". Some critics seemed to think verbal gags were bad because they were "radio" gags and that TV should be littered with sight gags to take advantage of the media.

Jack did have problems with making some of his familiar routines "television" gags. The start-up of the Maxwell and the trip to the Benny vault were far more effective on radio. The listener could imagine what was happening better than any set decorator could devise (even if money was no object).

Still, Jack's TV writers were his radio writers, so dialogue gags were natural—especially on those shows where they revamped old radio scripts.

An interesting example is a show late into the Benny TV run in 1962. The whole first half is, more or less, two scenes of dialogue. The second half has a good percentage of sight gags. As you can see in the newspaper story below, Jack was the one who came up with the visual routines, not his writers.

Jack and the writers also took a huge gamble. After the opening scene with Maudie Prickett doing a role that likely would have been played by Elvia Allman on the radio show, the rest of the show features (to the best of my knowledge) amateurs—four wives of celebrities and two wrestlers. Their performances could have easily come off as flat, but they're not bad. About the only other professional in the show is Roy Rowan, the radio announcer who plays a ring announcer. (Veteran Charlie Cantor is also credited. He's not in the version of the show on-line, so perhaps he used his punch-drunk voice in the deleted middle commercial).

Jack's stunt man should have got a credit of some kind. He takes a bunch of falls and does a nice nip-up in the wrestling scene.

I would like to have seen KTLA wrestling announcer Dick Lane hired to do something on the show; Lane had played Benny's publicity agent on the radio programme and was pretty funny. However, he may never have been considered by the writers or perhaps there was a TV conflict.

The TV Key column from King Features Syndicate talked about the making of the episode. This appeared in newspapers on December 3, 1962.

TV Keynotes

BennyLaughs It Up at Rehearsal; He'll Referee Wrestling Bout

By CHARLES WITBECK

HOLLYWOOD — When Jack Benny entered his Beverly Hills office for a morning reading of his Tuesday, Dec. 11 CBS show, he was neatly dressed. Normally for reading sessions Jack doesn't worry much about his appearance, but he walked in with a bouncy step and pretended surprise when he saw Mrs. Phil Silvers, Mrs. Kirk Douglas, Mrs. Groucho Marx and Mrs. Milton Berle sitting with scripts on their laps.

The ladies were to play themselves in a sketch about a charity function in which Benny is not invited to donate his services as a comedian. Benny is very upset at the omission and forces the girls to let him do something for their show — namely referee a wrestling match.

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17 minutes ago

Cartoon Research

[Pondering "Pocahontas"](#) - I think Disney's Pocahontas will seem better as time passes. While it is flawed, there is still much to recommend in it. Here's my opinion.

6 hours ago

News From ME

[Today's Video Link](#) - Part of the Tony Awards ceremony you never see at home is what goes on during the commercials. On the most recent telecast, host James Corden got Billy Por...

7 hours ago

Rip Jagger's Dojo



[Panther Girl Of The Kongo!](#) - I have one word for you in

regards the serial* Panther Girl of the Kongo *-- *Crawdads*! This movie purports to have monsters, but it turns out those cla...

8 hours ago

Movies with Michael



[Movie Review: Once Upon A Time ... In Hollywood](#) - Michael's Movie

After a little chit-chat with the ladies, a report on a dream he had about song writer Sammy Cahn and a few jokes with two bull-necked men sitting at the opposite end of the room—wrestlers Count Bill Varga and Gene Le Bell—Benny was ready to begin the reading. Count Billy had already memorized his lines and didn't have a script, but Jack gave him one anyway in case of changes. The reading went along smoothly with the ladies having an equal share of lines—no favorite in this script. The only interruptions either came from Jack laughing over a gag, or one of the writers chuckling. The four writers—George Baker, Sam Perrin, Hal Goldman and Al Gordon—seemed to take turns laughing, and it perked up the reading. Announcer Don Wilson's big bray also boomed and Count Billy needed his script after all.

Jack's Second Thoughts

At one point Benny read two lines, laughed, and then had second thoughts. "I don't think I can be that cheap," he said. "If you want laughs, you'd better be," countered writer George Balzer. Benny let it go and the reading continued. Thirty minutes was all it took, and the ladies, plus the wrestlers, read as well as the pros. The most talk centered around a change in a commercial involving a sight gag switch.

Then Benny stood up and walked about the room, pulling his ear occasionally. "Fellas," he said to the writers. "I think we ought to switch the ending." He outlined his idea of a windup with himself and the two wrestlers, and it sounded better than the original. The writers bought it.

Benny also wanted to add business in his role as a referee in the charity wrestling match. He saw laughs as he climbed through the ropes, stumbling into the ring, and he had visions of the two hulks tossing him out of the place. Jack wasn't going to let such golden opportunities pass by.

Jack seemed pleased with the whole show idea. He would have pretty wives of celebrities to insult him in the first part, and scenes with the wrestlers would bring the big boff laughs in the last half. The switch at the end gave it another boost.

Wives Not Nervous

None of the wives appeared to be nervous about doing the show. Mrs. Kirk Douglas comes from Denmark and was hesitant about her slight accent, but was assured it wouldn't matter a bit.

After the reading Benny spent 15 minutes posing for a still photographer with the four wives. "Normally," he said. "I don't go for the crazy ideas suggested for pictures. However, I like this one."

Then Jack sat down in front of rolls of green stamps and prepared to pay off the wives. Apparently ideas to show Jack's stinginess never run out.

Posing with the wrestlers was very simple. Count Billy merely grabbed Jack's coat lapels and the famous Benny pained expression appeared. Sold.

"All right," said Jack, winding up the business. "Everybody out."



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:03](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

2 comments:

 **J Lee** 16 September 2018 at 09:41

Following Jack's death this was one of the four episodes CBS chose to rerun in prime-time during the summer of 1976, as part of a tribute to Benny.

[Reply](#)

 **migma** 16 September 2018 at 18:48

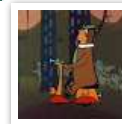
I had read that stuntman Eddie Parker died while working on a Jack Benny episode; could it have been this one?

[Reply](#)

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-

Barbera cartoons that's chock-full of short cuts and the kind of cartoon that never would have been made the following...

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...

3 days ago

 **The World of Knight** [SATURDAY AFTERNOON](#)



[ON](#) - Nice view. I actually drew it into a panel today.

5 days ago

 **Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog**



[The Classic Comedy Rorschach Test](#) - * In 1...

5 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...

6 days ago

 **Peter Gray's Comics and Art**




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2 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**

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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