Sunday, 7 October 2018

## **Directing Jack Benny**

If you mention Fred de Cordova's name, you'll probably think of Johnny Carson. After all, he called the shots on the *Tonight* show for 22 years. But before he did that, he was the producer/director of Jack Benny's TV show for seven years.

Fred talked about Jack in his book *Johnny Come Lately*, published in 1989. He said Benny "was in a class by himself" and talks about how he and his wife socialised with Jack and Mary. But he was interviewed about Jack much earlier. Here's a piece from the King Features Syndicate, published August 14, 1961. You kind of get the feeling the columnist would like to have some kind of dirt, any kind, and was annoyed he was getting anything but.

#### **TV Keynotes**

# **Jack Benny and Brook Go On Forever**By HAROLD STERN

Frederick de Cordova, the producer-director of CBS' perennial comedy hit "The Jack Benny Program," faces a problem almost unique in the quixotic world of television. He must at all times be certain that there is no major departure in what has been a successful format.

"People wouldn't stand for any changes in Jack," Fred told me, "so we find we must have a wide variety of shows carefully contained within certain basic limitations. Jack realizes that to stand still in this business is to go back. We have to be careful that he doesn't go too far forward too fast. We try to keep the show changing as much as possible within the framework of the character and it takes an enormous amount of work to make it look so easy and so casual that it seems as if the entire show were nothing but fun to do."

"I've been directing comedians since 1931," he continued, "and there's nobody who's quite the perfectionist that Jack is. Even after a show is finished, edited, dubbed and ready to go he'll insist on loking at it again and he'll find some way to improve it. No amount of work is too hard for him. He's a magnificent editor of written comedy as it appears on the screen and he's completely objective about himself as a performer.

#### 'A Real Champion'

"Jack's a real champion," De Cordova went on. "He's 67 now and he'll go on as long as there's a Jack Benny. I think we'll all give out long before he does. And do you know that if they approached me now and told me I could pick anywhere else to work, but not with Jack. I wouldn't know where to go.

"The technical end of the show gets easier from year to year," he added, "but the writing and directing get harder. We try to alter the method of telling the joke but basically we are still faced with the problem of remaining in the context of the character. Jack's philosophy is: if it begins to get easy, it isn't going to be funny.

"One interesting thing about Jack," De Cordova continued his hero worship, "is that he'll throw away a script that's been written for a guest and postpone the guest's appearance if the script doesn't come off the way he thinks it should. So far, we've got 12 of next season's shows in the can and among our guests are Ernie Ford, Jane Morgan, Shari Lewis and Dimitri Tiomkin. We have Raymond Burr in what I consider to be an outstanding comedy show.

"The opening show of the season will be taped in New York and will star Phil Silvers. The second show will come from Waukeegan, Ill., and will serve as the dedication show for the new Jack Benny High School. Then we'll start to use the shows we've finished.

#### **Trip to Australia**

"We'll also use the James Stewarts again," De Cordova added, "and we have a script ready for Roberta Peters. There's also the possibility of a combination business and pleasure trip to Australia for personal appearances and television. Jack likes to do four or five tape shows and spread them through the season so that he may get topical once in a while."

Fred was appalled at the low survival rate for stand up comics in television. Other than Benny, Skelton, possibly a few performances by Hope and maybe Bob Newhart, there are no comics left on the medium which

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### Blogs to See

## E Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons



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## 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 Tralfaz: Directing Jack Benny

once spawned them.

Aside from the Benny Show, Fred is happy at the lengthy association he had with another great comedy series, the Burns and Allen Show. He rates both George Burns and Jack Benny as giants in the comedy field. He also did December Bride for four years and was surprised it got that long a ride from what he termed an innocuous idea. During the coming season he'll slip away from Benny every once in a while to do a few shows for the new "Hazel" series and for the new "Hathaways" series.

"These are great days," he said with a smile, "for a fellow who's doing well in comedy. The creation of a brand new comedy idea that's good is a feat of some proportions and I've turned down a number of shows because I didn't feel there was anything I could contribute to them."

#### Likes TV Work

He also indicated that though he occasionally receives scripts, he has no desire to go back to Broadway, where he got his real start in show business. He also doesn't care to return to feature films ("I get more fun out of television.")

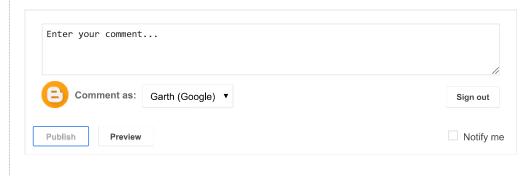
"I'm snobbish about television," he insisted, "but unlike most other snobs, I'm snobbish on the side of TV. I get first crack at the best guest stars in the business because we make our guests look good. We haven't changed our writing staff in 13 years.

"If you ask me, I have only one real problem with the show," he concluded. "Our guests are often required to insult Jack and some of them can't bring themselves to do it. Last year Joey Bishop couldn't go through with it and it sometimes takes brute force to get some guests to insult Jack. Say it as if you mean it, he'll snap at them and then he'll go into his long take and instead of insulting him, they'll break up and they're useless for hours."

Posted by Yowp at <u>07:00</u>
Labels: Jack Benny

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

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#### **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

## E Termite Terrace headlines



Popeye
Cans the
Spinach
(Commerci
al 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



AFTERNO 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



New blog on my Art work...Origi nal art...prints for sale

petergrayart ist@gmail.com for prices

etc.. https://petergrayart.blogspot

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

2 weeks ago

#### Supervised By Fred Avery: Tex Avery's Warner Brothers Cartoons



This Blog...

Coming

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. 1 day ago

### **Blog Archive**

- **2019** (214)
- **▼ 2018** (379)
  - ► December (32)
  - November (32)
  - ▼ October (31)

He Really is a Scre-am

A Witch's Tale to Tom

Tom's Haunted Mouse

Jack Benny, Tricker or Treater?

Boogie Woogie Calker

**Knitting Brows** 

Porky the Giant Killer Backgrounds

**Finding Harry Morton** 

Faster Than Boop

Red, Wolf, Doors

The Purveyor of Peace

How They Made Gulliver Travel

Iwerks' Horseman

Bugs Meets a Genius

Busy! Busy! Busy!

Cue the Old Jokes Again

**Shoeshop Celebrities** 

Commercials, Golf and Yet Another TV Special

Curious Puppies and Mind-Gaming Mice

The Almost Return of Miss X

Plane Dumb

Dances Better Than Sabu

Zcaring the Zebra

**Dad Gum Varmint** 

**Directing Jack Benny** 

The Battle For Cartoon Airtime

Wonderland in Kansas City

Jack Hannah as Tex Avery

Calliope Man Bernie Green

Vermin Time

Not Taking a Stab at it

- ► September (34)
- ► August (35)
- ▶ July (32)
- ▶ June (30)
- ► May (31)
- ► April (30)
- ► March (31)
- ► February (28)
- ► January (33)
- **2017** (380)
- **2016** (396)

- **2015** (389)
- **2014** (390)
- **2013** (388)
- **▶** 2012 (397)
- **2011** (106)

### Labels

Labels
Aline Mosby (16)
Art Davis (30)
Bad Luck Blackie (9)
Bob Clampett (72)
Bob McKimson (51)
Bob Thomas (53)
Chuck Jones (133)
Columbia (25)
Cynthia Lowry (24)
Dick Thomas (12)
Don Patterson (16)
Earl Wilson (6)
Erskine Johnson (36)
Felix the Cat (24)
Film Daily (50)
Fleischer (136)
Frank Tashlin (21)
Fred Allen (37)
Fred Brunish (9)
Friz Freleng (126)
Gene Deitch (16)
George Pal (9)
Grant Simmons (3)
Hanna and Barbera unit (91)
Hanna-Barbera (2)
Harman-Ising (54)
Henry Morgan (13)
Irv Spence (8)
Jack Benny (400)
Jay Ward (29)
Jimmy Durante (15)
John Crosby (78)
John Sutherland (23)
Johnny Johnsen (25)
Kenny Baker (6)
King-Size Canary (6)
Laugh-In (10)
Maurice Noble (12)
Mel-O-Toons (4)
MGM (498)
Norm McCabe (4)
Pat Matthews (10)
Paul Julian (13)
Sara Berner (5)
` '

Screwy Squirrel (32)
Spider-Man (1)
Terrytoons (67)
Tex Avery (412)
Tom and Jerry Human (24)
Tralfaz Sunday Theatre (14)
Ub Iwerks (64)
UPA (51)
Van Beuren (80)
Vernon Scott (40)
Virginia MacPherson (14)
Walt Disney (125)
Walter Lantz (212)
Warner Bros. (520)
Who Killed Who (10)

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