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Sunday, 6 January 2019

The No. 1 Foil

"Why spoil with success" must have been Jack Benny's motto.

He kept the same writers for years. They kept writing the same type of material for years. And audiences kept eating it up for years.

Jack let Bert Resnik of the *Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram* drop in as he was about to get ready for another television show. This short column was published on November 17, 1963. This was during Jack's final season for CBS, though it had already been announced he was leaving for NBC the following season. He was also about six weeks away from headlining a show at Harrah's in Lake Tahoe, with the Lettermen, Moro-Landis Dancers and Leighton Noble's orchestra. Unfortunately, the cover photo referred to in the story is unavailable.

As for retirement, Jack was true to his word. He worked until cancer stopped him in 1974.



Jack Benny Foil For Jokes

For 14 consecutive television seasons, Jack Benny has been the butt of endless jokes.

"It's better for my particular show if somebody else has the lines," said Jack.

"I never figured it out. I felt it."

The comedian had just come from a script-reading of one of his upcoming CBS-TV Tuesday night programs. I sat through that reading-rehearsal and became aware, again, that Jack was the No. 1 foil. Everyone else seemed to have the yaks.

* * *

ON THE AIR, you sometimes lose sight of the fact that Jack is the butt.

His facial expressions, his timing, his gesture reactions somehow are funnier than the spoken lines.

In rehearsal, Jack laughs more than anyone else, probably getting it out of his system so he can dead-pan it for the actual show.

Make no mistake. If Jack is the butt of all the jokes, it is his own doing.

"I think it's much funnier for Dennis Day to get funny lines off me than me off him," said Jack.

"I create a situation where I deserve what they give me.

"That's one of the reasons the South never resented Rochester—because I deserved the insults."

* * *

JACK PLANS ON continuing to deserve insults.

"I never want to retire," he said.

It would be too strenuous because, right now, Jack figures he has it made time-wise.

His writers have been with him so many years, they know what he'll accept. This minimizes rewriting and editing.

Rehearsals have an easy rhythm, no pressure, no tension, just fun.

Jack figure he actually works only works about 13 hours a week, which gives him time for golf, listening to good music and collecting paintings such as the Peckstein canvas on our cover.

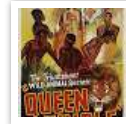
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Queen Of The Jungle! - "Queen of the Jungle" is a 1935 serial from Mascot

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11 hours ago

Cartoon Research

Disney Rareties - This week, two Disney oddities in Mark Kausler's film closet - one, a lost educational film from the 1940s, the other some rare behind the scenes footage ...

13 hours ago

News From ME

Sunday Evening - Convention's over. Now, we can concern ourselves with more important matters... like what kind of silly news stories is Trump going to create to divert attent...

14 hours ago

Fernando Llera Blog Cartoons



Longest living animals in Chapultepec's Zoo in need of special

care. - ©2019 fernandolleracartoons.com
1 day ago

Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #19 - Hello my friends and welcome to another addition of

Cowboy Church. We start

"I think George Burns has the perfect answer when someone asked him if he was going to retire," Jack said. "George answered, 'I'm too old to retire.'"

* * *

AT 69, JACK, ALSO, is too old to retire.

He's not worried about compensation.

In television, you're only in competition with yourself," said Jack. "If only every other show was good, that's what they'd expect. But if you have eight good shows in a row, people expect a ninth.

"Maybe you can call that being in a rut, but it's a good rut. Rut means groove."

Jack admits there have been a few "ninth" shows which he personally didn't like.

He hated one in particular, postponing and postponing the air date. It finally aired and "everyone raved" about it.

Benny, once again, was happy the joke was on him.



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:04](#) 3 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

our music selection off with
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1947 recording of the go...
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[SATURDAY AFTERNOON](#) - Nice view. I actually drew it into a panel

today.
1 day ago

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 Animation Websites in the Archive #1 - The newest series!

These are some of the best websites on animation that are either unsung or just have been wiped out from the internet. Some of these si...
1 day ago

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what it was 60 years ago. Today, "adult" humour brings to mind a lot of sexual references and crudity. In other words, the stuff...
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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 days 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.com/> Will update it like I do on facebook.
2 weeks ago

Sunday, 30 December 2018

Self-Effacing Benny And the "Old" Days



Did Jack Benny write some of his own guest columns in newspapers? Perhaps. But he had a highly-paid team of writers who he could draw on to do it for him.

I won't speculate whether Benny actually scribed this piece that appeared in the New York *Herald Tribune* (and elsewhere) on May 17, 1959. It has the gentle ribbing of television that you'd hear on Benny's radio show, not to mention Benny's own self-putdowns. I'm at a bit of a loss to understand why he calls his TV show the "Jack Benny Hour." I don't think it was ever named that during the '50s (I've been puzzled for many years why some shows are label themselves an "hour" when they are only a half-hour long. Billy Graham's "Hour of Decision" was one).

It may seem a little odd reminiscing about something that happened only nine years earlier but while television wasn't particularly new, real network TV had only existed for about two

years at that point, having ballooned from fewer than a dozen stations around 1948, all in the East, Chicago or Los Angeles.

Jack Benny Reminisces

(John Crosby is on vacation. While he is away his column will be written by guest columnists from the television trade).

By JACK BENNY

Some years ago, after I'd done my first television show, I was asked to write a guest column. I called it "Vaudio to Video Via Radio," and it dealt with my impressions of the then infant medium of television. Those were the days of TV-B.C.—that's Before Cowboys.

It's a little odd to read the words you wrote years ago in the light of what's happened since. A lot of the things I Was worried about then seem silly now, after I've been on television for so many seasons with my own half-hour show plus special shows like my May 23 Jack Benny Hour. You should see what I've got to worry about nowadays.

Anyhow, some of the remarks I made in my innocence and youth (I was only 30 at the time, nine years ago) gave me pause; others gave me a good laugh; and a few gave me chills. Before I had my secretary burn every copy, I jotted down a few of my statements in that column and offer them herewith.

"The day after my video show," I wrote, "I was walking down Broadway and I heard a woman say to her friend, "There's Jack Benny, that new comic I just saw on television . . ." (Now they say, "There's Jack Benny, that old comic I saw.")

In those days, of course, I was still on radio. I wrote, "It had always seemed to me that to go on television while continuing to do my radio show might be biting off more than I could chew." (The president of C.B.S. Radio agreed; he told me I should stick to television. The president of C.B.S. Television felt just the opposite.)

I was also worried in those days, about my format. To wit . . . "There was something about doing an hour show

that didn't feel right to me—an hour show without dancers, tumblers or other extraneous acts might be too long." (Today, a number of critics feel that my half hour show is too long.

"We rehearsed a scene in which I call Dinah Shore on the phone to ask her to appear on the show. She tells me her price is \$5000, and I practically faint from the shock." (I did the same gag with Gary Cooper this season, only his price was \$10,000 and I didn't bat an eye or move a muscle. I think the doctors called it temporary paralysis.)

"Experience and proper organization can and eventually will simplify the creation of TV programs." (I should have saved a copy and sent it to my producers.)

Then I wrote, "We had Mary talk about getting three stations at the same time. She said that all night I kept shooting it out with Hopalong Cassidy to see who would marry Gorgeous George . . . (Hopalong Cassidy won, and they've lived happily ever after.)

"The \$64,000 question," I continued, "which no one can really answer at this time, is whether television will wear out comedians?" (The answer to that one is simple . . . Television won't but the \$64,000 Question almost did.)

"When we got to the cab, Milton Berle was sitting there waiting for us. He said he'd left his rehearsal just to come down and give me some technical advice. And then...he briefed me on the art of how to close your eyes when you're getting hit in the face with a pie." (Today Milton is a very sophisticated comedian. He believes you should keep your eyes open when being hit by a pie.)

Jack Warner was on one of my early shows. "Speaking about 'The Horn Blows at Midnight,' Mr. Warner explained that if it were a little better, he might have gotten his money back from the theatres, and if it were a little worse, it would have been a natural for television." (Since then Jack Warner released "The Horn Blows at Midnight" to television. This was part of the motion picture industry's campaign to drive people back into movie theatres.)

Anyhow, these are some of the things I said nine years ago. And nine years from now, why, then I'll do a guest column making fun of this one.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:28](#) 2 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

 **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**

[Zozor ruine la réputation de sa famille \(Zozor Ruins the Reputation of His Family\)](#) - After his move to the United States in 1912 Émile Cohl starting experimenting with putting the idiom of comic strips to the animated screen, being the firs...

2 hours ago

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Sunday, 23 December 2018

Generous Jack

When you think of the generosity of Christmas-time, you naturally think of a guy who locked all his money in a steel box underground, guarded by an old man and alligators in a moat.

Mind you, the guy was really two guys. There was Jack Benny, the radio and TV character who wouldn't spend a dime if he could avoid it, and Jack Benny, the real life radio and TV star who was a pleasant and giving man.

Syndicated columnist Margaret McManus chatted with Jack and her column was published just days before Christmas 1960. The column has nothing to do with Christmas. McManus simply used the season of giving as a jumping off point, kind of like I've just done, talking about a variety of things, including money, comedy's new talents and his work on television.



Jack Benny, Gentle Man Of Kind, Generous Spirit

By **MARGARET McMANUS**

NEW YORK—The week before Christmas is the right time of year for a visit with Jack Benny. He is a kind man, and a gentle man, no matter whether you spell this as one word, or two.

He has had success beyond most men's dreams; he has had troubles, as do all men. From his vantage point at the top of the ladder, he has had a good look at the panorama of human weaknesses and human glory in the worldly battle, yet he has not lost his instinctive generosity of spirit and good will.

Jack Benny, who has made millions of dollars on his reputation as a penny-pinching skinflint, will actually not even discuss the subject of money, with either sponsors or networks.

As a matter of fact, he is almost the only one of the top echelon CBS television stars who, in the final stages of

contract negotiations, does not sit down with the lawyers and accountants and agents, and participate, at least in some degree, in the final bickerings.

Says He's Terrible Businessman

"I will not get into the money business," said Benny. "I never have and I never will. In the first place, I'd louse it up. I'm a terrible businessman. I have enough trouble with the jokes, without getting into the other side." However, there are stars who seem to enjoy the battle of the dollar. It is rumored, for instance, that Jackie Gleason is an artist in this aspect of his business. And a prominent newscaster once said to me: "I don't want an agent to negotiate for me. There's nothing I like better than sitting down with those guys and getting an extra buck out of them."

Jack Benny dislikes the very mention of negotiations.

"I hate business," he said. "I don't understand it. If you don't swim, you stay out of the water."

His Timing Slow and Easy

The comedian was in his suite at the Sherry Netherlands here. It was close to noon on this blustery winter's day and he was about to walk to the Lambs Club for lunch. But he seemed in no hurry. Although he is always in constant motion, he never appears frantic or breathless or pushed for time. In action, as in speech, his timing is slow and easy.

Perhaps this perspective, this sense of balance and timing, is somewhat responsible for the security which contributes to Benny's generosity of spirit. A frightened man is wary and suspicious. He dare not help a possible competitor.

Jack Benny not only laughs out loud and in public at other comedians. He praises them in print and helps them in many practical ways. Over and again, he has said he thinks Joey Bishop is the brightest of the newer-comers and Bishop, in turn, says nobody has helped him more in his career than Benny.

Benny is also a fan of Bob Newhart and of Nichols and May.

"If you can use the word 'genius' to apply to a performer, I think Nichols and May are geniuses," he said. "I've been to the theater three times since I've been in New York, twice to see Nichols and May. What a future they have."

Happy With New Schedule

Now on regularly every week, 9:30 P.M. Sundays, CBS-TV, Benny said he is satisfied and happy with his new schedule.

"Nobody likes to work as much as I do," he said. "I guess Bob Hope and I are the most complete hams of all time. Of course, I believe it's better to be on every week. If sometimes you have to do a fair show instead of a great show it's still better to be on every week. It cements the watching habit."

Benny said he could never dream of retiring, not even when he's 40, not even to have the time to spend playing his violin all day, every day. Anyway, he couldn't afford it.

"Mary and I spend too much money," he said. "We go overboard. If I retired, I'm sure we couldn't live on the scale we do now. I don't know which is worse, spending too much money, or spending too little. Of the two evils, I guess I'd rather spend too much."

On[e] Hour Special in February

He may as well keep on spending because obviously he is going to keep on working. Besides his weekly Sunday show, Benny will star as the host of a one-hour special on Thursday, February 9, NBC-TV.

It is a musical variety program called "Remember How Great," highlighting the all-time popular hit songs of the past few decades and featuring Juliet Prowse, Connie Francis, Andy Williams, and Harry James. The sponsor is the American Tobacco Company which was Benny's sponsor for so many years on the radio.

"I really didn't want to do this one," he said. "It's a lot to take on with the weekly show, but I couldn't refuse my old sponsor. It's the first time in all these years they ever asked me for a favor. Not that they aren't paying me a lot of money, but it's still a favor and I couldn't say no to them." Saying yes comes easier to the generous than saying no.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [08:45](#) 0 comments

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Sunday, 16 December 2018

He's Walking

It's a bit of an overstatement to say everything Jack Benny touched turned to ratings, but there was a time when he sure helped. And we're not talking about his own show.

Jack made guest appearances on a number of radio shows—Fred Allen's may be the most memorable—but his presence on one particular programme helped a widow and the American Heart Fund. That's when Jack was the Walking Man on *Truth or Consequences* (to the right you see host Ralph Edwards and Benny).

Benny was revealed as the Walking Man after a correct answer on the March 6, 1948 edition of Edwards'

stunt show. You can read [a very excellent time frame on Martin Grams' blog](#). Two days before a widow from Chicago named Florence Hubbard blurted out Benny's name to Edwards, speculation ran through a newspaper column in the United Press.

HEY, JACK BENNY! DON'T SAY YOU'RE THE WALKING MAN

By **ALINE MOSBY**

United Press Hollywood Correspondent

HOLLYWOOD, March 4. — The suspicion that he might be "the Walking Man" dawned upon Jack Benny today. It isn't anything definite... but, uh, he's been thinking about it and, well, there have been a few things.

Benny has something in common with 2,000,000 Americans.

They've been thinking "the Walking Man" over, too, since he began to clomp his feet and make noises on Ralph Edwards'

"Truth or Consequences?" NBC radio show. [Mr. Edwards' show

is heard at 8:30 P.M. Saturdays and Benny is heard on the same station at 7 P. M. Sunday.]

Guess who the feet belong to, and you collect \$22,000 worth of loot. This includes the usual car trailer,

houseful of furniture, trip to Sun Valley, diamond watch, coat, etc.

Every Saturday night Edwards phones three people who've written the best letters on why they sent in money for the American Heart Association.

Heifitz, Fidler or Devine

To date the show has collected than 2,000,000 letters and than a million bucks—an all-time radio record.

For seven weeks unhappy guessers have made wild stabs at names like Louis B. Mayer and President Truman.

Folks were in the lying-awake-nights stage—until last Saturday's noise clue. A squeaky violin.

We called up a guy who owns such a violin. Who, we inquired, did he figure 'the Walking Man' might be?

Bing Bong Bell

"It might be me," he reflected.

"No!" we said.

"Yeah," said Benny. "You know, people have been stopping me on the street and writing letters asking me if I'm the Walking Man. The boys on my show have mentioned it, too.

"Oh, and Mary said something about it. I suppose we should have put the clues together, but we never listen to the program. We're usually out on Saturday nights. We haven't paid much attention to it, frankly."

If Benny had, he might've figured out the riddle

Edwards repeats like this:

"Bing bong bell church bells (Benny's program is on Sunday).

"It's ten and only one can tell" (tenth alphabet letter J is for Jack).

"The master of the metropolis fits his name quite well" (Benny is the master of his radio-show valet, Rochester. That's the name of a metropolis in New York).

Are You Or Aren't You

Benny might also discover the horse-and-gunfire sounds on "the Walking Man" show could indicate his motto "Buck Benny Rides Again!" The Walking Man played Auld Lang Syne on the trumpet, too.

Jack's last movie, he might recall, was "The Horn Blows at Midnight."

The mysterious gent also whistled "Annie Laurie" which begins, "Maxwellton Braes Are Bonnie." Benny's jalopy is a Maxwell. And the cat's wail could signify what violin strings are made of.

"Come to think of it, I have been doing a lot of walking on my program lately. Mentioned 'The Horn Blows at Midnight,' too," said Benny.

We said: "Well, are you or aren't you the walking man?"

"HMMMMMMMM," said Benny.



Earl Wilson (6)

Erskine Johnson (36)

Felix the Cat (24)

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Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:09](#) 1 comments

Labels: [Aline Mosby](#), [Jack Benny](#)

The Secret of Jack Benny

This feature story on Jack Benny saw print on October 29, 1961. It doesn't need any introduction except perhaps to remark that some of the vignettes you'll read below you've likely read before. But like Jack's TV and radio show, with re-workings of gags and routines, they're old favourites that don't wear out when you read them again.

The photo accompanied the article in one paper.

Jack Benny's Life Keeps Beginning at 39 But Here's the Sneaky Lowdown—He's 67

How Showbiz Veteran Keeps Pulling Laughs

EDITOR'S NOTE: Few men of 39 are celebrating their 50th year in showbiz. But then few men are Jack Benny. Some say he's been using the same gags for half a century but to Benny every knock is a boost and he just keeps on fiddling while the world laughs.

By JAMES BACON

Associated Press Writer

HOLLYWOOD — Television is supposed to be sure death for comics. Excepting Jack Benny. He's just started his 12th year on home screens, his 30th in broadcasting, his 50th in showbiz.

His secret?

Says best friend George Burns: "Jack is such a nice guy that people tune him in each week hoping he'll get better."

Says violinist Isaac Stern: "When Jack walks out in tails in front of a symphony orchestra he looks like the greatest of soloists. What a shame he has to play!"

Said the late Fred Allen: "Benny couldn't ad lib a belch after a Hungarian dinner."

Says his wife, Mary Livingstone: "Jack stares audiences to death. He dares them not to laugh. Finally, the audience—never Jack—gets nervous and starts laughing hysterically."

For Benny, every knock is a boost—and no one knows it better than he. He is the all-time champion patsy, butt of all jokes—even in real life.

...

HE'LL BE 68 next Valentine's Day. He looks and acts 39. Well, almost.

"In fact," says Jack, "I wouldn't mind being 39 again if I felt as good as I do now."

For years Burns has played outlandish gags on Benny. No matter where Jack is playing, Burns will call him and hang up in the middle of a conversation.

"If I didn't keep up this ridiculous gag, his feelings would be hurt. He'd think I was mad at him," says Burns.

Almost anything Burns does, Jack thinks funny.

Once at a Hollywood party at producer Bill Goetz' house, entertainers like Danny Kaye and Judy Garland did impromptu bits for the guests.

...

BENNY, AT THEIR FINISH, asked Burns for a cigaret. Burns handed his old friend a smoke, lit it for him — and then signaled the orchestra for a fanfare.

"Ladies and gentleman," announced Burns. "Jack Benny will now do his famous cigaret bit."

Burns puffed his cigar and waited away. A perplexed Benny stood there with smoke in his face muttering:

"What cigaret bit?"

George says Jack got his revenge in the most tortuous of ways.

"Every time I go to his house," says George. "He plays me some new tune he's learned on his violin."

Benny and his violin is one of Hollywood's oddities. At 67, Jack still takes lessons and practices two hours a day.

Is he good? says Jascha Heifetz.

"Only a genius could make such sounds come out of a Stradivarius."

BENNY, SMART SHOWMAN, has let others argue about his playing. In a rare comment on his ability, he said:

"Heifetz, Leonard Bernstein, Mischa Elman all think that I'm pretty good on the violin but just play lousy for laughs. Isaac Stern knows me better. He knows I can't play any better. But I love the violin."

One thing that Jack can do well is play a jazz fiddle, but his practice sessions are always the difficult classics.

Benny's first radio appearance was on a variety show in the 1931-32 season.

In a medium where everybody talked a mile-a-minute so there wouldn't be dead air, Benny calmly said:

"Hello folks, this is Jack Benny." Then he stared at the microphone for what seemed an hour.

Next, he said "There will be a slight pause while everyone says: 'Who cares?'"



That appearance brought Benny a 13-week network offer. He has never been unemployed or unsponsored since.

Benny made the transition from radio to TV in 1950 with little effort.

"My gang just had to put on make-up and memorize lines instead of reading them," says Jack.

• • • •

FOR A WHILE, he was on TV every other week. At an age when most performers are slowing, Benny upped his schedule to one-a-week.

He added night club appearances and symphony benefits.

Benny is a show business paradox. He's a perfectionist in preparing his shows but he gives an almost lackadaisical impression while doing it — like Willie Mays snagging an outfield fly.

Some will say that he has used the same basic jokes for his 50 years of show business. Those who remember vaudeville in the twenties will recall one of Jack's routines about taking his girl out for dinner: He said something so funny she dropped her tray.

The 1961 Benny's using the same joke in another variation.

"It's not really the same joke," explains Jack. "It's a characterization."

A few years ago on one show, a gunman held up Benny with the usual threat: "Your money or your life."

All Benny had to do was ponder with that famous stare to get one of the biggest laughs of the season."

• • •

BURNS SAYS Benny's success lies in coming out like a mincing lightweight and then delivering a knockout performance.

An example of this was a recent affair in Beverly Hills when Frank Sinatra and friends—Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Joey Bishop—were on too long. Danny Thomas, the emcee, also played past the finish. (They) took three hours.

Came Benny. His quips were sharp, funny and brief. He did three minutes — and stole the whole show.

Enthusiasm is another Benny forte.

Burns recalls:

"Jack had just come from his lawyer's where he signed a contract worth a million. He joined me for lunch and was all excited.

" 'You know what, George? I just found out that if you drive 20 miles an hour up Wilshire, you can miss all the red lights.'"

A party he tossed a few years ago at a New York automat was front-paged because only Benny, in character, would host a black-tie party at the automat complete with dance band and big names. Jack, not denying the obvious publicity value, admits there was another motive.

"When I was in vaudeville I used to eat at the automat all the time. They have certain things there, coffee and pie for instance, that are great. I always wanted to sneak in for some but I was afraid that everybody would think that I really am a miser — so I had to content myself with inferior coffee at 65 cents a cup in some plush New York restaurant. With the party, I had my coffee and pie and ate it too."

Posted by Yowp at [07:02](#) 2 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 2 December 2018

The American Habit

Jack Benny's friends liked two Jack Bennys.

There was the one they saw and talked to in their daily lives. And there was the one they saw on television and had heard for years on the radio before that.

Jack found himself not only doing "cheap" jokes on the air and, occasionally, in interviews. At times, he was in character in front of his friends. They wanted to laugh at the tightwad, too.

Here's an example from a United Press International column of February 10, 1960. Jack also has time to tell the columnist why his character was so popular all those years, among other things. The quote attributed to Fred Allen, by the way, was actually made by Jack's former writer Harry Conn; Conn was basically saying his words made Benny. Jack's career lasted about 40 years after Conn stopped writing for him.

Jack Benny Is An American Habit After 28 Years On Radio, Television

By RICK DU BROW

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) — Jack Benny is an American habit.

For 28 years, it has been a Sunday night ritual in millions of homes to tune in the radio or TV set and listen to

him portray himself as a miser who tortures people with his violin - playing and won't admit he's over 39. There are those who believe that's the way Benny really is, with the result, says Benny, "that I have to overtip." Yet no penny-pincher was ever more popular. Why? The answer is the key to his show's continued success.

Underdog From Beginning

"From the beginning," he explains, "I was the underdog, the guy with all the human frailties."

How did he conceive the cheapskate character?

"Well," he recalled at lunch on the terrace of the CBS-TV studio, "it was, in a sense, an accident. Years ago, I did a couple of jokes about being cheap, and they got laughs. So I added a couple more and established the character."

"It's a lot easier to work now because I don't have to establish the character when I walk out on a stage. People are laughing in advance."

Several months ago, for instance, Benny addressed the Beverly Hills Bar Association, which includes many of his friends— but on-stage, even they expected him to be in character, and he was.

Lincoln His Favorite

"My favorite lawyer," he said, "was Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln once walked 12 miles barefoot to return a library book and save three cents. That's my kind of guy."

When the lawyers appointed him Chief Justice of the "Ancient and independent Province of Beverly Hills," he replied that he was "glad to know that the violin is no longer my only means of support."

"I don't deserve all these kind words," he added, "but as a friend of mine said. 'I've got arthritis and I don't deserve that either'."

Off-stage, however, no actor could be more different from his role. Benny is serious, generous, an accomplished violinist, and freely admits to being 65.

His seriousness highlights his one flaw as a comedian. He is no ad-libber. His old feuding partner on radio, the late Fred Allen, once told him: "You couldn't ad lib a belch after a Hungarian dinner."

Needles Himself

Benny needles himself. Once, when Allen was heckling him, he said: "If I had my writers here, you wouldn't talk to me like that and get away with it."

Benny's generosity is best-known to the musicians of many of the nation's symphony orchestras. For the last three and a half years; he has played violin concert dates in such cities as St. Louis, Detroit and Rochester, N.Y., for the benefit of the musicians themselves.

He refuses to accept pay for the concerts, which have poured about \$1,700,000 into the treasuries of non-profit symphony associations to further the cause of good music.

"I used to be a musician," said Benny, "and I know classical music is a losing business. I admire and love people who devote their lives to it. I fool around a little, of course, during the concerts but it's worth it to make it a success."

The concerts have been such a success that last November, in Washington, D.C., he was awarded the Laurel Leaf Award of the American Composers Alliance for his distinguished contributions to music.

Music Above Politics

A guest at the affair, Vice President Richard M. Nixon, joined Benny at the piano for an impromptu duet. Benny, who claims his music is above politics, also is a bosom friend of another sometime accompanist, former President Harry S. Truman, who appeared on his TV show last October.

"He was the easiest guest I ever got," said the comedian. "Our friendship started when he was Vice President and I went to Washington to make an appearance for Franklin D. Roosevelt."

"I met Harry at dinner, and we became quite friendly. We always exchange things on our birthdays. It's not political at all."

"A funny thing happened once when I tried to call him on his birthday, which I do every year. I was in Palm Springs, and I called my secretary in Hollywood six times to make the call — but he didn't answer."

"So I called Harry direct and got him in about one second, right on the dias where he was sitting in Kansas City. I wished him a happy birthday. Then I called my secretary again and still couldn't get him."

What does Benny think of Nixon, and Truman as pianists?

"Well," he said with his classic pained look, "they play a little in one key."



Posted by Yowp at [07:14](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 25 November 2018

Playing With a President

Former U.S. President Harry Truman appeared on the Jack Benny show on October 18, 1959, but that's not the whole story.

A future president wanted some publicity thanks to Benny, too.

Before the Truman show even aired, Vice-President Richard Nixon "demanded" equal time. And Jack gave him time. It wasn't quite equal, but it gave the Republican good publicity.

First came this story in the Associated Press on October 14, 1959.

TRUMAN ON BENNY'S SHOW; NIXON WANTS EQUAL TIME

By JAMES BACON

(AP Movie-TV Writer)

HOLLYWOOD (AP) — Ex-President Harry S. Truman turns up in an unlikely place next Sunday: guest star on a comedy show.

Jack Benny, his host, says he has a demand for equal time from Vice President Richard M. Nixon.

"I wrote him back that he's not eligible for my show until he makes president," Benny quipped. Benny and Nixon have been friends for years.

FRIENDLY WITH BOTH

"I'm neither a Republican nor a Democrat," said Jack in explaining why he is so friendly with leaders of both parties. He said Nixon had written him congratulating him on the show business coup of snagging the former President of the United States as a guest star. "Some of my friends have advised me that I should demand equal time," Nixon wrote Benny.

"I think he was kidding," said Jack.

A reporter asked Benny how he managed to get Truman to appear with him.

"Actually," replied Benny, "I didn't ask him. He asked me."

Some months ago a columnist asked Benny if he intended to use the same old guest stars seen on most of the big TV shows.

OFFBEAT STARS

"My answer was that I was seeking offbeat guest stars such as Mrs. Jimmy Stewart and I might try for Harry S. Truman. The story got printed but I really had no intention of asking the former President of the United States to appear on a comedy show.

"One day Mr. Truman called me and asked: 'What's this I read about my appearing on your show? I'm ready anytime you ask me.' " Benny and the former President once did a benefit violin-piano duet for the Kansas City Symphony.

"He was so grateful to me for helping out those musicians that he was eager to do something for me. I told him that I do benefit concerts all the time, I love to do them. He owed me nothing." But when Truman agreed to be on the show, Jack suggested that the Truman portion be taped in the Truman Library at Independence, Mo.

Benny said he and the former President had only one disagreement during the taping.

"I wanted to keep it dignified and Mr. Truman is worried about my getting laughs," Benny laughed.

Benny agreed. Nixon didn't appear on his TV show, though. This United Press International story of November 21, 1959 fills us in:

Benny Plays Fiddle, Nixon Accompanies

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21 (UPI)—Vice President Nixon ended a politically significant week tonight by playing a duet with Jack Benny—sometime music partner of former President Truman.

Nixon supplied piano accompaniment for Benny's violin before an audience composed of many of the nation's political writers at the National Press Club. The tune was one of Mr. Truman's specialties—the "Missouri Waltz."

Benny, a featured entertainer at the press club's President's Black Tie Ball, explained that he had written Nixon to congratulate the Vice President on a "wonderful job" on his trip to Russia. In reply, Benny said, he received from Nixon a note saying "After your program with Truman, I demand equal time."

Benny gave Nixon his chance, and then breezed through a



speeded-up version of the "Missouri Waltz." Nixon's judgement on the performance, as pronounced to the other guests, was: "All of us should stay in our own rackets."

The AP version of the story adds:

The occasion for the performance was the annual president's ball of the club, honoring William H. Lawrence, a correspondent for the New York Times.

Benny also played the violin with the noted violinist Isaac Stern on a program which included metropolitan opera stars Dolores Wilson and Robert Merrill. Benny was presented with the Laurel Leaf Award of the American Composers' Alliance for promotion of symphonic music.

Benny had emceed the D.C. radio correspondents dinner in 1953, at which Nixon was present.

Nixon and Benny met again, notably in 1961 where the ex vice-president handed Benny a plaque at an American Israeli Foundation dinner to mark the creation of a violin scholarship in Benny's name. And in 1969, Jack greeted the now-president at Andrews Air Force base after Nixon's eight-day tour of Europe.

As far as we know, Harry Truman didn't ask Benny for a response in rebuttal, but you can read about his musical escapades with Jack [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:00](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 18 November 2018

Benny at the Crossroads

Was Jack Benny's weekly TV show shoved off the air by NBC or did he quit?

We may never really know the answer to that question.

We do know a couple of things because they played out in the media at the time. Jack was not happy that CBS's Jim Aubrey changed his lead-in show in the 1963-64 season to *Petticoat Junction*. Soon after the season started, it was announced Benny had signed a one-year contract with NBC for the following year. It would appear Aubrey didn't "fire" Jack Benny, as some fans (and authors) claim. He told CBS to stick it.

Also known is Aubrey put *Gomer Pyle* up against Benny when the 1964-65 season started and more people tuned into hear "Goooooolly, Sergeant Carter!" than "Well!" *Pyle* ended up as the third most-watched show that season. Not to Jack Benny, though. Whenever a TV show beat him in the ratings, he sniffed that the ratings weren't accurate.



Stories bubbled up very early in the season that Benny was done for or, at best, his future was uncertain. Finally, news came out in early April 1965—there doesn't appear to have been an official announcement by anyone—that Jack would continue on NBC but not on a series; he would do specials.

Whose decision was it? Again, we may never know. But something else we know is Jack was just past 70 years of age and leaning toward the idea of only being seen periodically (though whether that was brought on by a case of Gomer-itis is a matter of speculation).

Here's a feature story from the January 17, 1965 edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* Jack talks about how his script is put together—even Jeanette Eymann had a role—and what the future may have in store for him.

NBC's Jack Benny Still Has Schedule Trouble

By HARRY HARRIS

Of The Inquirer Staff

ONE consequence of Jack Benny's shift to NBC this season after 15 years at CBS is that he can team with NBC-"owned" Milton Berle.

In the "Jack Benny Program episode Friday at 9:30 P. M. (Channel 3) Benny-Berle boffolas stem from Jack's adoption of a "very large little boy" Milton, eager to inherit Jack's jack.

Benny's hopeful that the half hour will lure laughs, although he concedes, "It isn't always easy for a comedy show to do a great show with another comedian. It's the toughest writing job.

"When you have a dramatic actor as a guest, it becomes a real scene, and if it's essentially a funny situation, even an amateur, given the right lines, can get laughs."

He feels that this week's show is "different," but then, he notes, "no two of our shows are alike. There's no way to 'change our format,' because actually there is no format!

"Sometimes our show is like situation comedy, and sometimes I do a whole show in 'one' (on the portion of a stage closest to the audience). One of my best shows, a New Year's Eve show, I did all by myself.

"We use Dennis Day and Rochester about 12 times a season, but we never write shows for them. We just fit them in. This season we've added a new character, Jane Dulo, who plays a cook, someone new to heckle me in the house. I'm trying to keep up with the times with an 'integrated' house staff.

"We don't knock our brains out working in guest stars. When an idea looks pretty good, then we approach a guest. We've never had any trouble getting the people we want. The best way to handle a guest star is to treat him right, and no one has ever suffered on my shows, radio or TV.

"Sometimes we do make an all-out effort to come up with the right idea when we want a guest for young people, like a 'hot' singer.

"Everybody in my organization has been with me a thousand years. I sold my company to Revue, but I have my own offices and my own people, and they let me do what I want to do as long as I'm reasonable.

"They let me spend a lot of money, but if I wanted to hire Maurice Chevalier because I had one good line in French, they might say, 'Come on, Jack, \$8000 to say '*Voulez vous* something?'

"My writers work differently from others. They go home and make notes, and then I edit with them, twice.

There's more time spent editing than writing. "Do I know what gets laughs? Yes, but I can be fooled. I can be fooled easier than the writers.

"Sometimes they bring in a script and I say, 'I don't think that's funny.' If they don't agree, we discuss it a long time. As a rule, I have four writers, and if two agree with me and two do not, I lean my way.

"If there's no decision, I call the script girl and ask, 'Jeanette, how do you feel about this?' and then I sort of go that way.

"Once I was adamant. I was sure I was right. I didn't want a particular gag. The writers thought it was OK, and they said, 'The four of us could be wrong!'

"They're always insulting me, but I'm always apologizing to them. I'll apologize 28 weeks a year, as long as the show comes off. I don't want to have a lousy show just so I can say, 'See, fellows, I was right!'

"I've got to keep up the standard. More than that I can't do. We all do the kind of show we know how to do.

"Eventually I'm going to have to go off, though I'd like to get out before I'm *thrown* out. I'd prefer to have good shows and not be thrown out, but if I *am* thrown out, I'd rather it was with good shows."

Benny's present pact with NBC is for a single year, and whether he'll return next season is still moot. Although his time spot between Bob Hope, one of his best friends, and Jack Paar, whose radio career he once gave a tremendous boost seemed a promising one, his ratings have plummeted.

Previously, he says, he was out of TV's "top 20" only once when scheduled against the potent "Bonanza."

"I knew I was in trouble," he recalls, "when one night Bill Paley (chairman of the CBS board) called from New York, where programs are on three hours earlier, to say, 'I saw the show you're doing tonight and it's wonderful, so be sure to look at it.'

"I thought I'd watch the first half of 'Bonanza' and then switch, and you know what happened? I got so interested, I wouldn't go to my own show. If wouldn't, how could I expect others to?

"That was a very tough spot; you can't get a tougher one than being against the middle of a good hour show."

This season, however, apparently has posed a tougher one he's pitted against one of the most popular of the new entries, a consistent Nielsen "top 5" contender, "Gomer Pyle, USMC."

"I don't believe in ratings," Benny quips. "I put 90 phones in my house and I didn't get one call, not even from friends!

"I can't believe they're authentic when I find that one phone call can make a difference of thousands of watchers. And I don't see how a show can be a half point before or behind another show.

"I don't put much stock in them, but it's very difficult for me to say that *now*. When I was No. 1 in radio, that was the time to say I didn't believe in ratings!

"I guess they have to go by something, but I'd prefer they went by the quality of the show and how the sponsors are doing with the sale of their products." Although he'll be 71 on Feb. 14, St. Valentine's Day, "39-year-old" Jack has no intention of retiring.

"As George Burns says," he notes, "I'm too old to retire and too old to be thrown out. Besides, I have nothing to retire to.

"Force a man to retire and you've got an old man. I have fun working all the time. It doesn't make so much difference what I do, as long as I do *something*.

"I'd be satisfied to do a few TV shows each year and a lot of concerts.

"I hope I'll be around for a long time, and not only on NBC. I have a schedule that's so well organized that Irving Fein, my executive producer, can tell me what I'll be doing four months from Thursday at 3 o'clock.

"For me it's very, very easy. Editing takes far less time than it used to. My boys know what I'll take out or add

to.

"I work about 12 or 13 hours a week. Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, I have nothing to do if I don't want to. I don't have to be back until Wednesday, and Thursdays everybody works but me, blocking out the cameras. I show up if I feel like it.

"So I'm past 70, but I don't look it and I don't feel it. I agree with Chevalier. When he was asked how it felt to be 75, he said, 'When I think of the alternative, I like it.'

"How would I like, by some miracle, to go back to really being 39 again? I'd want to do it only if I felt as good as I feel now!"

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:20](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 11 November 2018

Trouper for the Troops



It's doubtful few people think that living in the jungles of Melanesia is the way to spend a summer. But some fighting forces during World War Two didn't have much of a choice. That's where the enemy was, and that's where the military brass told them to go.

There were a few who did make the choice to go there, and into other danger spots around the world. They were entertainers, doing their part to help the morale, and maybe sanity, of the people in uniform.

Among them was Jack Benny, who arrived in New Guinea on July 14, 1944 with Carol Landis, Martha Tilton, Larry Adler and June Brunner. They were greeted on their arrival by Special Service Officer Captain Lanny Ross.

Jack was no slacker during the war. He also toured Africa, Europe and the Middle East with a unit while the Allies' battled together.

There were reporters as well. George Lait of the International News Service caught one of the Benny shows in New Guinea. He wrote in the August 2, 1944 edition of *Variety*, in part:

Benny is making all the jungle camps where it stops raining long enough for his hour-and-a-half show. Hospitals, outdoor stages, and the rear end of trucks serve the troupe, and each performance has been seen by audiences so huge and so enthusiastic that even the Shuberts would be satisfied.

Benny opens the rapid-fire vaudeville-type revue as m.c., and never was funnier, even when he had Rochester at his side instead of a couple of bushy-haired Papuan natives...

Then comes Landis—gorgeous in a revealing costume—and the GIs soon. She sings, tells gags alone and with Benny, and kids the boys who shout wisecracks from the audience. Her smash bit is a love scene with Benny, whose kiss is apparently so hot Carole faints, and is carried off-stage by a burly MP (his is the best job in the Army). There's talk around, though, that Miss Landis swooned for an entirely different reason. Benny, it's said, just loves onions... The flash finale is a rendition by the whole troupe (even Benny) singing Harold Rome's "Hup Hup," from "Stars & Gipes," with scattered audience participation. It leaves the crowd satisfied and happy.

Benny's comedy holds the show together and gives it a speedy pace which the old Palace could well envy. His monologs are filled with local gags, and uses bits of pidgin (native manner of speaking English) and draws howls with pitch-and-toss banter to the audience.

More touching, perhaps, is Robbin Coons' Associated Press press column on the show. He published highlights of a letter from an American soldier who caught the Benny show. More on the letter in a moment. The earliest I can find this version is in one small paper's editorial section of September 13, 1944. (The photo below came from the INS and is cropped).

Jack Benny Plays, Gags For Troops In Pacific

By Robbin Coons

HOLLYWOOD—Pvt. Woodrow Boone writes from the Pacific:

"Grabbed a chance to make one of Jack Benny's New Guinea appearances at the base hospital

this afternoon. . . . We got there by 1:30 on a dusty truck. The hospital is a series of long sheds on a hilltop. There are very tall, slender trees on and beside the hill, reaching above the level of the outdoor theater. The walking and wheelchair cases were already there. . . . Jungle fighters, anxious for a two-hour furlough with folks from home. . . . A blue-and-gold streamlined bird flitted high in the branches and a white parrot flew by. . . . Our own brigade "swingphibian" orchestra marked time in prelude. . . . Three poker games were under way. We made conversation, admired the nurses, and waited. . . .

"Presently two jeeps and a command car drive up behind the theater. The crowd rises, sees no one, settles back. From the right side front row, I see behind the stage a heavy-set, grey-haired, brown-faced civilian in gunmetal tweeds, polo shirt, and red-striped necktie, and I know there'll be a show. Jack disappears into the special service shed for a few minutes; the band continues; we wait.

"Then very casually, swinging a curled swagger stick . . . walks out the greatest trouper of them all, Jack Benny. "Hi ya, fellas!" he says, and all, who can, rise and give

him a loud welcome. We gather 'round. One hand reaches out to remember how a red necktie feels. Jack pulls out his shirttail zoot-fashion to let 'em see what that looks like too. One of my buddies from Ohio had said, 'I don't give a damn about seeing Jack Benny I just wanna see a civilian suit!'

"Jack ad libs, autographs my hat, tries it on and mugs for the audience . . . jokes with the orchestra members. . . . By that time the mike is fixed, and Jack takes the stage, more at home than ever. . . . "All the lusty GI jokes. . . . Then he introduces Martha Tilton. She sings; the crowd goes wild. She sings again and again. Blonde Carole Landis comes on in a summer frock that fits like it should in the right places. . . . There are Fred Allen jokes, Errol Flynn jokes, and Roosevelt jokes. . . . Carole asks Jack to pretend he's Robert Taylor, and they do a love scene.

"Jack wants to accompany Martha on his violin, but she won't let him. Larry Adler plays a dream of a Beethoven number on his harmonica. . . . More jokes, more songs. Jack begs to accompany Larry on his violin no soap. . . . I see appendectomy cases in the audience holding their sides and trying hard not to laugh. Pretty, petite pianist Jane Bruner almost steals the show with an ad lib about Jack's violin. Jack and Larry drift into a duet. . . .

"Then comes the finale. Five hard-working American artists together on the stage, bringing a touch of the good old U.S.A. to those of us who are far enough away to see what we're really fighting for the right to laugh, the right to enjoy life."



Reporter Coons wasn't the first to publish this. It comes from *A Private's Journal*, published in full in *Billboard* on August 26, 1944, with a dateline of Sunday, July 30th. Coons simply edited it for public use; after all, who outside the industry ever read *Billboard* then?

Some of the stuff Coons left out is worth quoting.

Pvt. "Hepcat" Swartz, the drummer, wears a perennial shaved-headed, cue-ball hair-do, and Jack wants to know what kind of hair tonic he uses. The piano-player, named Nolan, is from Waukegan, and Jack says "I went to school with your father—or was it your grandfather?" We ask about Rochester. "He had to take a summer job to pay expenses." Dennis Day? "He left me to join the navy. "For 50 bucks a month?" some O.I. Joe asks. "That's a damn sight more than I paid him." ...

All the lusty G.I. jokes that start getting hairy-chested at the point of embarkation, and reach full-blown maturity in direct proportion to their nearness to the front line. . . . "I was surprised to find that very few of the South Pacific islands look like they did in the movies; I haven't seen a single one that looked like I thought it would. In fact, there's not a goddamn island in the Pacific that even slightly resembles a Hollywood set. The crowd roars.—"I had a slight touch of dysentery while we were in North Africa. I think you-all call it the G.I.S."

Coons left off the end of Boone's story, with its tribute to Jack Benny, who gave selflessly of himself to entertain the troops.

Some G.I.'s who came to New Guinea didn't get a chance to see you, Jack; some others who did may never go back to tell the folks at home about it, but none of us will ever forget you, trouper. You're Will Rogers without his cowboy hat; you're Mark Twain without his cynicism; in fact, if you'll excuse the pun, Jack, you're the 20th Century "Twain"—Unlimited! Keep pitchin', soldier!

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:50](#) 0 commentsLabels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 4 November 2018

What? No Ad-libs?

Radio grabbed the big vaudeville stars and then the movie industry grabbed the big radio stars and transported a fair percentage of them from New York City to Hollywood.

Among them was Jack Benny. For all intents and purposes, his New York radio career ended in 1935. He returned east for about 3½ months in 1936 but, realistically, the only time he went back to New York was for personal appearances, a film premiere or, later, to do his first television shows (there was no cable from Hollywood to send them to the network at the time).

Benny's film mix-it-up with Fred Allen, *Love Thy Neighbor*, premiered in New York in 1940, so Benny and his cast went back for a week. He had spent three weeks in the city earlier in the year when *Buck Benny Rides Again* debuted in Harlem.

One New York columnist complained Benny didn't say anything amusing after getting off the train at Grand Central Station. His comments are on an earlier post on the blog. The reporter for *PM* said basically the same in his story of December 14, 1940, but explains why he's not bothered about it. And he gives you an indication how incredibly popular Jack was then.



Benny Can't Ad Lib ... Not Even a Burp

Jack Benny *et cie.* (Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Don Wilson and Rochester) arrived here the other day from Hollywood for tomorrow night's premiere of the Benny-Fred Allen picture, *Love Thy Neighbor*, at the Paramount. Last night, an hour before Benny was scheduled to broadcast for Jello from NBC's Ritz Theater (WEAF 7), West 18th St., outside, was jammed with humanity.

For this lone New York broadcast some 10,000 persons had asked to sit in a theater which seats only 700. For this one broadcast an estimated 34,000,000 persons throughout the U. S. A. were sitting at their radio sets. There is no doubt about it. The nation's choice as the funniest man in the land is Jack Benny, a silver-gray, fattening, 46-year-old ex-vaudeville violinist and patter man from Waukegan, Ill., who now collects about \$12,500 a week from the radio.

The funniest thing about all this is that Jack Benny (born Benny Kubelsky), a big, fingernail-biting fellow who also chews two-for-a-quarter cigars (Santa Fe's), is not a funny man at all.

One night, when Fred Allen was ribbing him unmercifully in a joint broadcast, Benny came through with perhaps the only good *ad lib* he ever got off. And that was born of despair. "If I had my writers here," Jack moaned, you wouldn't talk that way to me."

"Benny," concluded one Harry Conn, who used to write gags for Jack, "couldn't *ad lib* a belch after a Hungarian dinner."

But despite Benny's lack of humorous spontaneity, one fact should be noted here. There is nobody in the whole, wide variety world who can time a gag or two-time a double take the way Jack Benny can.

The formula for the Benny show has seldom varied in the six years it has been on the air for Jello. Phil Harris poaches on Jack's romantic preserves, Rochester loses the house money in a crap game, the quaking old Maxwell collapses whenever the drive it into the script, and when Jack's ego reaches a zenith, Mary Livingstone, Jack's wife (nee Sadye Marks) punctures it.

That's the way Harry Conn devised it nine years ago, when Jack first took to the air for Canada Dry. And that's the way Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin, present senior and junior writers of the Benny entourage, have kept it.

In real life, Benny, who probably retains about \$7000 a week after paying the cast, is the same sort of fretful, unsatisfied guy he is on the air.

He plays no sports, but when he is home in Beverly Hills he goes for walks with his trainer. His major delight is his six-year-old adopted daughter, Naomi Joan.

Naomi Joan calls him Old Daddy Jack.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:07](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 28 October 2018

Jack Benny, Tricker or Treater?

This is a Hallowe'en tale about Jack Benny that isn't.

Erskine Johnson put together a syndicated column in 1959 with the idea of crafting a story either about Jeanne Crain or trick-or-treating. It's mostly about Crain but Benny ended up being the point of it all. It appeared in papers starting around November 2nd.

I must admit, when transcribing this, I was surprised by Johnson's use of an uncomplimentary term referring to illegal Mexican immigrants.

The Night Jack Benny Gave Money Away

By **Erskine Johnson**

NEA Staff Correspondent

HOLLYWOOD — (NEA) — The guide book to Halloween fun doesn't mention it, but we can report today that Jennne Crain lives in the Mother Lode country of trick or treat. You just wouldn't believe what goes on along Jeanne's block in Beverly Hills.

"Last year I kept count," she told me, "and 602 kids rang our bell."

It all started, you see, on "The Night Jack Benny gave Half Dollars Away."

That's right, Jack Benny!

He's one of Jeanne's neighbors along with Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, Thomas Mitchell, Rosemary Clooney and Jose Ferrer, Ira Gershwin, Diana Lynn and, the last time Jeanne counted them — "a total of 27 children."

Five of them are Jeanne's and next year she and hubby Paul Brinkman will have six.

Well, anyway, Jack probably told Mary, "No kid is going to call ME a cheapskate."

So every Halloween night since Jack unlocked his basement vault and handed out those half dollars there has been a kiddie rush to Jeanne's neighborhood, where the treats, she says, seem to get "bigger and better every year."

Like wetbacks sneaking across the Mexican border, kids pile into the land of plenty from all over town, brought by parents in autos and station wagons.

"Last year," Jeanne said, "someone had a jar full of pennies — and they let the kids take home as many as they could grab in one hand."

There's no official record of Jack repeating his half dollar treats but if he does the kids and the neighbors, well-stocked with generous treat gifts, will be ready for him. Keeping up with the Beverly Hills Joneses named Jack and Desi and Ira isn't like Peoria, you know.

Keeping up with the stork, her big family and her career is much simpler, Jeanne indicated, except, of course, for such minor things like her nine-year-old Tim occasionally upsetting the household ("He's a character — he thinks he's Jerry Lewis") and a movie director telling Jeanne:

"I want you to give me a sexy, boyish walk."

"Now, really," the gorgeous red head laughed.

But the director had a point, she admitted. It was for her early scenes with Alan Ladd in the film, "Guns of the Timberland," in which she plays a western ranch boss. For the first 15 minutes of the film, Ladd and the audience aren't supposed to know whether she's a boy or a girl when she's seen in cowboy duds, breaking a bronco.

Playing a murderess in her first telefilm, "Riverboat," was something else again. Jeanne said the frantic pace just couldn't compare with live shows she has done in New York.

"The live shows were easy in comparison," she said, recalling the hours until 1 a.m. and struggling through a muddy swamp. "And when I climbed out of the swamp, the assistant director said: 'And now Miss Crane, we will go to the dinner scene. Have your hair fixed and change into that fancy dress QUICKLY.'"

"Give me the live shows," Jeanne pleaded. Then she took off for the Farmer's Market, still obviously haunted by "The Night Jack Benny Gave Half Dollars Away."

"I'm thinking," she winced as she left, "of individual five-pound candy boxes this year. Paul suggested individual, gift wrapped speedboats," but I talked him out of it."



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:52](#) 1 comments

Labels: [Erskine Johnson](#), [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 21 October 2018

The Purveyor of Peace

For a period of time, Jack Benny had time reserved near the end of his programme for a public service announcement. It would get chopped if the show was running late.

There were some about preventing fires, another about the Big Brothers organisation, but the most interesting ones were pleas for tolerance. If I recall, two similar ones were aired, one read by Jack and another by Don Wilson.

I doubt Jack wrote them—he had professional writers, after all—but I'm the sure the sentiments were his.

Jack was honoured for his promotion of brotherhood in 1955 at the 18th annual dinner of the Massachusetts Committee of Catholics, Protestants and Jews. His goodwill award described him, in part, as "An admirable and lovable humorist whose humor has always been friendly, kindly and humane, never marred by ridicule of race, creed or class...A generous giver of his resources and talents in the entertainment of our Armed Forces in distant lands and in the promotion of diverse good causes in our own land." The *Boston Globe* of May 6, 1955 reported "Benny's witty opening remarks delighted the audience and then he turned serious."



Among the media covering the event was *The Daily Worker*. You know, the organ of the subversive people that would bring down America. Anyway, the paper published a larger part of his acceptance speech than I've found elsewhere. It gives a nice insight into the beliefs of the off-air Benny. It was published on May 10, 1955.

Jack Benny Pleads for Peace, Brotherhood

BOSTON.—Jack Benny, radio and TV star, received a citation at a brotherhood dinner of the Massachusetts Committee of Catholics, Protestants and Jews the other night at the Hotel Statler in Boston. The dinner was attended by 1,400 religious, educational, business and political leaders of Massachusetts.

In his address to the organization, Benny made a plea for the furtherance of efforts to foster goodwill and brotherhood in this country and abroad.

"While your organization has been pounding away at discrimination since 1936, ironically, your cause was give[n] its greatest impetus during the last war. When men are fighting and dying together, color and creed become relegated to their proper place of importance. A soldier lying on a battlefield does not care whether the hands that lift him onto the stretcher and carry him to safety are white or black. Nor in the hospital does he ask whether the life-saving blood he is getting came from a Catholic, a Protestant or a Jew. A bullet has no name on it—it merely says, 'to whom it may concern.'"

"These lessons that our millions of servicemen learned during the last war they brought borne with them. And they have become ambassadors in your cause. But I think we and they should redouble our efforts at this time, because there may not be anyone left to profit from the lessons of the next war.

"We are all proud of the great strides that have been made in this direction in this country of ours. Much remains to be done. But the seed is planted, and the tree is growing. And I feel that care and attention will bring it to its ultimate flower.

"Therefore, I would like to suggest that we look beyond the oceans that border our land. We're living in a world in which tension and the threat of war seem to be the order of the day. And yet we all know that the vast majority of the people in the world do not want this, do not like this, and that they, like us, long for the peaceful pursuit of happiness.

What a day it will be when brotherhood encompasses the world, when nations look upon each other with a friendship and understanding that we are now attending among our people in this country, when greed, distrust and suspicion are eradicated, when this organization of yours is disbanded because it has no further work to do. What a day it will be when people of all nations, as well as colors and creeds, grasp hands and walk forward together in happiness, security and dignity. That day, we are hoping, will come."

Posted by Yowp at [07:00](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 14 October 2018

Commercials, Golf and Yet Another TV Special

Gaggles of reporters—or whatever a plurality of reporters is—tended to descend on Jack Benny around St. Valentine's Day every year to chat with him about his birthday, which fell on the same day. In 1969, it coincidentally fell around the time of one of his TV specials, giving another reason to do a column on him.

Here's what the Associated Press' Cynthia Lowry had to say about him in her daily piece on February 13, 1969. It's another example of Jack talking to the media while wearing a bathrobe. There are no real surprises here, other than some comments about the Texaco spots he (and his Maxwell) did. Incidentally, none of the specials he did after this fell near his birthday.



Jack Benny to Note 39th Birthday Again

By CYNTHIA LOWRY

NEW YORK (AP) — By mid-afternoon Thursday, the world's youngest 39-year-old violinist had been so busy answering telephone calls and being interviewed by relays of journalists that he was still in pajamas and dressing gown. The debris of a late breakfast still occupied a table in the living room of his hotel suite.

Jack Benny, born in Waukegan, Ill., on Feb. 14, 1894, will be celebrating his 39th birthday again on Friday. The birthday is a milestone but since Jack has an NBC special coming up Monday, it seemed less important than making sure Benny fans would tune in.

"When you do a few specials as I do—like one a year," explained Jack, with his own brand of earnest, blue-eyed salesmanship, "you've got to make sure that they—the audience—remember when you are on. It's different, of course, when you have a weekly or even a monthly show."

Frets About Appearance

The comedian, after 75 years mostly spent in show business, still frets about his appearances on television as much as a kid with his first booking. "What are you doing in all those gasoline commercials?" was a question asked by several interviewers.

"When it comes that way I know they are after something," said Benny with utter seriousness. "I just ask them why they don't ask me what Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and I are doing in all those commercials. I'll tell you this: It was a fabulous offer and the company was interested in a lot of things. I wouldn't have touched them unless the company had been interested in sponsoring my special. Besides, I love doing them—they relate to me and they make people laugh. So?"

Looks About 50

Benny looks like a man in his 50s. He works, he estimates, about six months out of the year on TV shows, charity concerts, club dates, and even an occasional tour. The rest of the time he spends playing what he calls "dreadful golf" in Los Angeles or Palm Springs. His wife, Mary, accompanies her husband on his many trips only when he expects to be away from home for a prolonged period. They moved into an apartment several years ago but "Mary felt cooped up," and they expect to move back into a Beverly Hills house again soon, they also have a home in Palm Springs. His health is excellent.

Jack will fly back to Los Angeles today for a small birthday gathering at home, followed on Saturday by a bash thrown by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences—not for his birthday but for his 20th anniversary in TV.

Posted by Yowp at [07:02](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Cynthia Lowry](#), [Jack Benny](#)

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 looking 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 Waukegan, 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 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 [07:00](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 30 September 2018

Peroxide That Polar Bear!

How does a movie studio publicise its latest blockbuster, other than buying advertising and supplying theatres with one-sheets and maybe a promotional kit?

Let's find out.

I'm not so sure this United Press story from 1939 about ideas to push a Jack Benny movie is tongue-in-cheek. Maybe this really happened as reported. You never know in Hollywood. Certainly all the Paramount publicity people mentioned in it were real. For the record, they were Terry DeLapp (department head), Ed Churchill, Jean Bosquet, Don Ashbaugh, Kathleen Coghlan (fan magazine publicist), Don Chatfield, Bert Holloway, Don King, Steve Brooks, Ralph Hustin, Gretchen Messer (fashion editor) and Edward Mills.



IDEA PARLEY IS HELD FOR BENNY FILM

How Press Agent and His Aides Map Attack Is Disclosed.

By Frederick C. Othman

United Press Hollywood Correspondent.

HOLLYWOOD, Oct. 20.

We were in the conference room at Paramount today where the publicists were deciding how to make America conscious of a motion picture entitled "Buck Benny Rides Again."

This film will feature a radio star named Jack Benny, a polar bear called Carmichael, and a dusky comic named Rochester.

Boss Press Agent De Lapp and a dozen helpers were mapping their attack upon the public.

Mr. De Lapp: "We don't want to overlook this Mr. Rochester. And we might even go to Reno for the premiere to cash in on the dude ranch stuff."

Mr. Churchill: "We can't find us a Carmichael. Polar bears are hard to tame."

Mr. Ashbaugh: "I know a trained brown bear named 'Big Boy.' Couldn't we peroxide him?"

Mr. Bosquet: "They whitened two tigers for the last Anna Mae Wong picture."

Mr. Churchill: "It's dangerous to paint a bear."

Mr. Holloway: "Are any of the girls set yet?"

Mr. De Lapp: "Not yet, but there'll be four of 'em. And the Abbott Dancers. They ought to be swell for roto leg art."

Miss Messer: "They'll be wearing summer clothes. We've already got a tieup with a manufacturer."

Mr. De Lapp (in an aside): "Where's Johnny Engsted?"

Mr. Brooks: "He's out looking for a stained glass window."

Mr. De Lapp: "Oh."

Miss Coghlan: "The fan magazines should go for some Easter art."

Mr. De Lapp: "Let's get Benny in a jackrabbit roundup."

Mr. King: "Maybe we can have a picture of a jackrabbit pulling Benny out of a hat."

Mr. De Lapp: "Well if we can't get a live Carmichael, we'll have to have a stuffed bear for the stills."

Mr. Brooks: "There isn't a stuffed bear in Hollywood. We've looked."

Miss Coghlan: "I understand Benny is afraid of horses."

Mr. Brooks: "Anyhow he has agreed to sit on a horse, if we can find one that can rear safely."

Mr. De Lapp: "What about Benny's Maxwell auto?"

Mr. Huston: "Maybe we can find a guy named Maxwell who will sue Benny for defaming the family name."

Mr. Mills: "Let's get Benny to write a magazine story on how to tame a polar bear."
 Mr. Holloway: "What we need is a good layout of Pratt Falls."
 Mr. Del Valle: "Can't we get a by-line story by the bear on how he became a star?"
 Mr. Ashbaugh: Let's send Frank Buck out to get us a bear. He oughtn't to charge too much."
 Mr. Del Valle: "A picture showing Benny being thrown off a mechanical horse should be funny."
 Mr. Mills: "If we can't get a bear, we ought to have a bear rug anyway."
 Miss Coghlan: "We must start a nation-wide search for the oldest Maxwell."
 Mr. Holloway: "Then we can get Benny to speed in it down Hollywood boulevard and have him arrested."
 Mr. Chatfield: "I've got an idea for a giveaway, aluminum coins that say 'one buck.'"
 Mr. King: "I believe we should get a double for Benny to be bucked off a horse for the Paramount newsreel. They ought to go for that."
 Mr. Bosquet: "If there's anybody in the cast about to get a divorce, they ought to have him do it in Reno, "while the picture is in production."
 Mr. De Lapp: "Unless we can talk him out of it, altogether."
 The boys went on from there, far into the night. They hold these idea meetings at the start of every picture and a stenographer takes down each word they say. Then the hair begins to fly. Woe is the actor who balks at co-operating.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:01](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

Sunday, 23 September 2018

He Might As Well Be 39

We all know Jack Benny wasn't really 39 all the years that he claimed to be. And while it was a gag, it did serve a real-life purpose. It made him think young, and that kept him healthy.

At least, that's what he claimed. There are all kinds of stories that Jack was an intense worrier and had a night-stand filled with medicines (though he doesn't appear to have used them).

I'd love to find his full interview in *Today's Health*, but you can get the gist of what he said in this column by Ida Jean Kain in the *Rockland County Journal-News* Sept. 22, 1961. It's good advice for us all.

Good Recipe for Staying Young

Middle age is not the same time of life for everyone, birthdays notwithstanding.

Take Jack Benny, for good example. He's been 39 now for going on 29 years. That's really an excellent record, and even better psychology.

In the spring, a story in "Today's Health" about this durable comedian is certainly well worth quoting.

"That 'only 39' gag my writers came up with was just about the best thing that ever happened to me," Jack Benny reports. "The cliché, 'You're only as old as you feel,' happens to be true. I feel young and as far as I can find out, I'm healthy."

What, in this comedian's opinion, is most important to keeping young . . . diet, exercise, or mental attitude? It's the latter. "To stay young in heart, think as young people do. Look forward, never backward. Work instead of worrying," he summed up.

This actor does minimize the physical aspects of keeping young and vigorous. "To stay young-looking and keep healthy, you have to give some thought to it and work at it," he added. Mr. Benny gets regular outdoor exercise. And he watches his food intake. "This is important and it's not likely that you can keep your weight where it belongs without counting calories. You can't have three chins and look young." So he controls starches, sugar, and fats. He uses sugar substitutes and drinks skim milk. He keeps his weight controlled even though he has stopped smoking.

It's well known that this veteran comedian has more energy, vitality, and bounce than performers half his age. We all need to think young and banish our phobias about aging. Then the extra years added to our life span can be added to the best years of living. We often think we might like to be younger if we could know all we know now. Well, in a wonder way science has made this miracle come true. So let us think of 50 as the high noon of life. Actually middle age can be an elastic period from 40 to 70.



When we lose our enthusiasm, we begin to grow old. When we stop learning, we start aging. When we stop using our bodies, the aging process catches up with us fast. Since there is no physiological age at which we must stop all activity, there is no age at which we “must” grow old. This is by no means the same as hanging on to youth for dear life, but rather to keep our zest for living fully.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:08](#) 0 comments

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

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

Benny Laughs 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.

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](#) [2 comments](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

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 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?



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