



Sunday, 2 June 2019

## Benny and Conn

Jack Benny didn't start out on radio as a 39-year-old cheapskate who drove a Maxwell. Benny's character was built, block by block, over a period of years.

Benny started out in 1932 as a standard-issue master of ceremonies. If you've heard his first show, available in sundry spots on the internet, you won't recognise it. Slowly, the comedy came to dominate and Benny and his writer Harry Conn began morphing Benny into a "character" version of Benny, having him become the fall guy from the underlings on his show.

The Benny show, despite some sponsorship turmoil, was a hit with viewers. And someone came to resent that.

Harry Conn.

Conn came to believe if it weren't for him, Benny wouldn't be a star, though Jack had been quite successful in vaudeville in the later half of the '20s and into the '30s. Conn wanted more money. Conn wanted more credit. And finally, he walked out on the show in March 1936 and Benny let him go. Conn wrote for a couple of other shows, and then tried to prove to everyone he was the power behind the throne by starring in his own stooge-filled programme. It quickly died, and Conn's writing career petered out.

It wasn't like Conn was completely anonymous. Benny mentioned him (and thanked him) on occasion on his show, and there were items in the trade and popular press referring to him (Conn liked generating his own publicity). Here's a piece from Reeve Morrow's radio column in *Red Book* of April 1935, when Benny and Conn were still getting along, and the show was still based in New York City.

### MAN BITES DOG

SIT around any of the Broadway cafés some night around two A.M. and listen to the boys talk—the comedians and the gag-men—and you will realize what news this is. Beside it, the old classic "Man bites dog" is about as newsy as a gangster getting nailed on an income tax evasion.

Here is a real, live, breathing example of a comedian giving a writer some credit for the success of a program. And a writer giving the credit right back to the comedian. In public, and in print! Jack Benny declares the chief reason he has clicked so sensationally in radio is because he has a good writer.

And the writer, Harry Conn, declares: "Some of the best things I turn out don't read funny—it's the way Jack delivers them. Benny is a master of inflection, and he has the uncanny ability of making thie most commonplace things sound amusing."

What can you do with people like that? It defies all the conventions.

But they do succeed in turning out one of the top shows on the air.

They start it each week on Thursday, with a session in Benny's apartment. Conn outlines his ideas. Benny paces the floor, chewing and puffing on an oversize cigar, emitting smoke and "gags" in a constant stream. Some are good; some are bad: but the average is amazing. His secretary, Harry Baldwin, by some mysterious sixth sense, knows what to take down and what to leave out.

The show goes into rehearsal—but never in the presence of the orchestra. Benny figures that a spontaneous audience reaction is vital to his type of comedy, and he times himself according to the way the people in the studio behave. If the orchestra had heard the comedy before the broadcast, they would know just when to laugh—which would be forced, and fatal to spontaneity.

Jack Benny depends only upon the comedy material itself for laughs. He never wears costumes, never indulges in visual "business" for the sake of the few hundred people in the studio forsaking

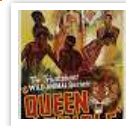
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## Blogs to See

### Rip Jagger's Dojo



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

which takes footage from an even earlier silent film and tries to bond some new scenes. It's not reall...

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 fernandollera.com  
23 hours ago

### Movies with Michael



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

Cowboy Church. We start

the millions of listeners outside.

Benny, along with such masters of comedy as Chaplin and Butterworth, never forgets that popular sympathy goes to the underdog. He always gets the worst of the deal, the "dirty end of the stick"—until the last moment, when he comes out on top.

His method of presentation is unique, suave and subtle. And to Jack Benny, along with Ben Bernie, go the honors for making the commercial announcements a pleasure. Benny kids his sponsor and the product, and makes you like it. His programs carefully avoid the long-winded commercial "plugs," uttered with a ponderous solemnity, so that the world may be saved for better mileage, better digestion, or better marks in school for little Junior. Commercially, he proves that the touch can carry a heavy sock!

Tune in on him Sunday night at seven over the Blue network. He is more than ably assisted by his wife Mary Livingston as his chief stooge; Frank Parker, whose tenor voice has never gone off the gold standard; and Don Bestor and his orchestra.



As you have read, there was no Phil Harris, no Dennis Day, no Rochester, let alone an underground vault, anything or anyone played by Mel Blanc, no feud with Fred Allen, no Frank Nelson shouting "Yehhhhhhhhhhs?" All this was developed by other writers (and Benny) after Conn was gone. Conn can certainly be credited with helping to develop the Benny show, but it really didn't become what we remember it to be until he left.

Academic Kathy Fuller-Seeley has expertly and contentiously researched and documented Conn's role on the Benny show and how they broke new ground together in a very excellent historical treatise [which I urge you to read here](#).

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:12](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 1 comment:

 **J Lee** 2 June 2019 at 09:18

I'd say Edgar Kennedy's RKO two-reel series that began about the same time as Jack's show was the other nexus of the sitcom formula as we know it today, as it ran for about 15 years using the same set of characters and premise during that period (as for Morrow's article, the part on Jack's desire to avoid forced laughter kind of meshes with the story that he was unhappy with how high up the laugh-track was turned on his first single-camera filmed shows and wanted the artificial effect toned down after that).

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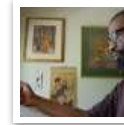
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our music selection off with The Sons of the Pioneers' 1947 recording of the go...  
1 day ago



**The World of Knight**



**SATURDAY AFTERNOON** - Nice view. I actually drew it into a panel

today.  
1 day ago



**Termite Terrace headlines**



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



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



The Classic Comedy Rorschach Test - \* In 13 years and 1072 posts, onl...

2 days ago



**Yowp**



Fewer Drawings, More Gimmicks - Adult humour today isn't

what it was 60 years ago. Today, "adult" humour brings to mind a lot of sexual references and crudity. In other words, the stuff...

2 days ago

**Mark Kausler's CatBlog**  
**Rocketty Ann's Mystery Flight!**

Here are pages 5 through eight of "Rocketty Ann and the Lost World". There's delightful fantasy here as Rocketty 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

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**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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