



Sunday, 8 August 2021

Leftover Aspirin Available

Some stars know the value of good publicity. That means being organised and not being a jerk.

A lot goes on behind the scenes to make a publicity tour a success. A good example can be found in an interesting story in the January 30, 1950 edition of *Broadcasting* magazine.

Jack Benny was appearing in Houston at a charity football game on December 17th staged by Glenn McCarthy, oilman and owner of the Shamrock Hotel. He was on CBS radio at the time and the local affiliate wanted to take advantage of the visit. It involved an awful lot of coordination. In fact, an advance party of Benny people showed up two days beforehand to work out the logistics.

Because Jack was not one to lord over everyone—nor tolerate it in his staff, it would seem—things went off incredibly well, culminating in a special broadcast for CBS stations in Texas that could clear the air time.

Something the story doesn't mention is that writer John Tackaberry was a Texan and that's likely why he was picked to be part of the entourage. And also along for the trip was Phil's guitarist Frank Remley.

WHEN MR. STAR Comes to Town

By MONTE KLEBAN

EXECUTIVE STAFF, KTRH HOUSTON

WHEN an affiliate station executive is notified that a network star is coming to his town, his first thought is to double the supply of aspirin in his desk drawer. Too often, Mr. Big Name turns out to be Mr. Little Man, bringing with him assorted cases of jitters, recriminations and other troubles.

So, when the perfect guest-star comes to your city he deserves not only a tribute, but for the good of the industry, his methods of operation should be explained to other travelling celebrities.

Jack Benny and his first-team were in Houston, to entertain at the Charity Bowl football game, Dec. 17. Although my years of hinterland-radio have brought me into contact with most of the network big names, I had never worked a show with the laugh-master before. When I learned he was coming I doubled my aspirin supply.

Anybody want to buy some aspirin cheap? My supply is still intact.

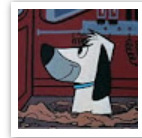
Let's take a look at the visit, from its inception, and point out the results of the expert handling of his appearance. First, an affiliate is usually notified by his network stations relations that such and such a star will be in his city on such and such a date and will the affiliate please contact him upon arrival. This, of course, gives the station-executive no time to plan anything until he has consulted with the Great Man, after his arrival.

In the case of Jack Benny's appearance in Houston to take part in the charity show, this first station hardship was adequately avoided. Several weeks before his arrival I received a letter from Irving Fein, promotion manager of Amusement Enterprises, Mr. Benny's holding company. Irving invited suggestions as to what we would like to do with and for Jack Benny, to promote attendance at his appearance and to help promote his regular Sunday night programs, while he was in our city.

We were able to rig two local broadcasts by letter in advance, giving us time to allocate our engineering and announcing personnel, to publicize the coming broadcasts and to start our actual planning.

Point number one: Of the dozens of stars whose public-appearance I have handled, this was the first time anyone with savvy and authority took the trouble to set-up firm dates for local broadcasts in advance. In practically all the other cases, they had been last-minute, catch-as-catch-can, mumbly, trite interviews. Point number two: Irving Fein arrived in Houston two days before Jack Benny and his troupe. We got together immediately and were able to crystallize our planning and to release more and better news stories and pictures to build up the appearances and our own planned programs. Sitting in Mr. Fein's hotel room, calmly setting

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JESSE JONES (l), owner of KTRH, welcomes Jack Benny to Houston. At the close of his network broadcast, Mr. Benny quipped, "Mr. Jones appeared through the courtesy of the National Bank of Commerce."

is calm, affable, friendly and a reliable ad lib artist. Then with him, Phil Harris who, in spite of his standing, seems as appreciative as a puppy for any attention paid him. Mr. Harris is, as an old shoe, easy to work with as Jack Benny himself and gives you a show every time he hits the mike and the same goes for Artie Auerbach, Benny's Mr. Kitzel.

Pleasing Cooperation

John Tackeberry, the writer who came along with Mr. Benny, could have proven the weak-point from our experience with other stars who brought writers along. Instead, he worked with us as smoothly and easily as though he were a writer on our own staff, turning out material for our local shows as good as any Sunday night's show script.

Then, Hilliard Marks, producer of the Jack Benny show. Here, too, we were wary. We had had producers come down on us like trip-hammers, trying to do everything but tell us how to tie our shoe laces. Not so Mr. Marks. With quiet, unobtrusive control he handled himself and cast, including some of our own people, with absolute efficiency.

And so with the rest of the Benny party. The point here is, of course, that too many visiting stars bring hectic Hollywood characters with them, who manage to antagonize everyone on the affiliate-station staff, create utter confusion and wreck what might have been a good-will tour.

Point number five: Because of the ease with which everything was working, we were able to expand our plans. Instead of a local show we cleared time on other CBS stations in Texas for a nighttime half hour show. We were able to give them the booking in time for publicizing in their own cities. Score another point on the Hooper-upping card. We were able to arrange a cocktail party and dinner, from which the broadcast originated, inviting the city's V. I. P. top-layer. Through this, we secured still wider publicity and build up. Point number six: Jack Benny, John Tackeberry, Hilliard Marks, Phil Harris, Artie Auerbach and the entire cast of our now-regional show, put as much time and effort into the writing, rehearsing and producing of the program as though it were a TC origination. When the show hit the air, it was network calibre, the kind of program the several million listeners in Texas expect to hear from a man named Benny. This is probably the most important point of all.

Most of the stars who come our way should have stayed home in the first place, as far as helping themselves, their shows and their sponsors are concerned. Nothing will lose ratings faster for a performer than to hit a town and disappoint the local and regional listeners with a careless, loose, dull show. I have seen Hoopers fall after appearances by stars in local markets. Jack Benny is due for a rise in Texas.

Point number seven: Too few stars realize that the affiliate station which carries their program is composed of people. If these people are well-disposed toward them, their programs surely have a better chance than if they aren't. The Benny troupe made friends of every one on the staff. I have seen other stars convert former friends into detractors. Even though we are local radio people, we are human and have our weaknesses.

In a Nutshell

Here, then, is the net result of the Benny visit to Houston from the affiliate-station personnel standpoint. Our promotion people, when they allocate spot announcements, newspaper ads and stories promoting our shows, will hit the Benny show more often than they did. Our commercial and public-service departments will somehow find ways to keep demands for time by politics and other events away from the Benny show time. (I know of one specific case where a so-called star appeared in a city where he antagonized the staff of a station. It was odd, during the next political campaign, how many candidates demanded and got the time at

up the schedule, I remembered too well the other stars, the last minute hectic arrangements, the program log changes, the lack of advance notice, the engineering failures because of lack of time for lines and facilities, the nerve-racking rush and bustle.

Point number three: No network star can be expected to remember the call letters of every affiliate in every city. Very often, in the past, stars from our network have come to town and have done shows on other stations under the delusion that they were building ratings on their own network station. In this case, Mr. Benny and his people were told to look for our special-events man, Lee Fallon, who was at the station at dawn to meet them, along with mike-men from other stations in town. Result, we got a fine beat interview on their arrival.

Point number four: The travelling team itself usually has at least one officious, bossy individual who tells you what, where, when and how Mr. Big will be seen and interviewed. There were none of these in the Benny entourage.

First, Jack Benny himself is one of the few really important radio people who

PRE-BROADCAST dinner is held to put the audience in a quick-laughing mood. At the head table are (l to r): Ray Herndon, KTRH assistant manager; Glenn McCarthy, owner of KXYZ Houston; Jack Benny; Jesse Jones, KTRH owner and former Secretary of Commerce; Mrs. Jones; Phil Harris. In the foreground at right are Lee Fallon, KTRH special events director, and Polly Beelow, local belle.



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which that star's show should have been broadcast. He never recovered his ratings in that market.) Our engineers will remember the pats on the back, instead of the usual carping and complaining and will ride the show, each week, more carefully than any other on the schedule. Our merchandising man will go a little further helping to sell Benny's sponsor's products in our market. And so on down the line. Finally, comes the question: Is it wise for network stars to make appearances in local markets? As a gray-beard of local radio who has handled these people and seen the tangible results over a period of years I'd say that the best insurance a radio-star can have for lasting popularity and high ratings is to get out and around the country, especially for charity purposes as Jack Benny does. The top names, Hope, Crosby, Benny, seem always on the move. They go where the people are, the people who are called for ratings and who buy the products they advertise.


For a concrete example of appearance-importance, look at the life span of the *Dr. I. Q.* show against the hundreds of other static quiz-hows which have come and gone. There is nothing a listener likes more than to have his star visit his town.

But, and this is a very big but, these appearances can do more harm than good if not handled properly. Everyone can't be a Jack Benny or a Phil Harris, with their charm, modesty and ability. But every network "name" can work carefully to make his appearance smooth and successful. Instead of taking in laundry to supplement his income, Jack Benny might well give a course of instruction to radio celebrities on how to get along with the public on tours.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:33](#) 



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 **Patte** 8 August 2021 at 16:20
I wonder who the "so-called star who antagonized the staff at a local station" was. Perhaps Danny Kaye?

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 **Yowp**  8 August 2021 at 16:45
I never thought of Kaye. I don't know what radio work he was doing in the late '40s. I can picture him being difficult.

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► [February](#) (29)
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- [Hanna-Barbera](#) (4)
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- [Henry Morgan](#) (14)
- [Irv Spence](#) (12)
- [Jack Benny](#) (561)
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- [John Crosby](#) (99)
- [John Sutherland](#) (37)
- [Johnny Johnsen](#) (37)
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- [UPA](#) (69)
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