



Sunday, 8 May 2022

## Sex, Shoes, Benny, Burns

Jack Benny talking about s-e-x?

Well, not quite.

After Jack got out of the weekly TV business, he produced and starred in a number of TV specials; he was working on one at the time of his death in 1974. One was named after Dr. David Reuben's famous book "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex But Were Afraid to Ask" (substitute "Jack Benny" for "sex"). Reuben even appeared on the special (picture to the right).



The sketches didn't really rise above the tepid kind that filled variety shows of the era. The highlight may have been Phil Harris barging in like he used to do in the radio days (in fact, they repeated a routine about Doo Wah Ditty from a radio show).

Yes, the special skirted around the sex subject (or, more accurately, Reuben's book), but it came up in promotional interviews, too. Here's one from February 22, 1971 (the special aired March 10th).

### Jack Benny Says Nude Scene in 'The Graduate' Was Sensational

By MARILYN BECK

When I visited the NBC rehearsal of "Timex Presents Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Jack Benny—But Were Afraid to Ask" I never expected Jack and I would end up in the network commissary talking about sex. Somehow it just didn't fit the Benny image.

One of the guests on Jack's March 10 NBC special is Dr. David Reuben, author of the best-selling "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex—But Were Afraid to Ask." Which just naturally led Jack into easy discussion of the universally popular subject, although he did allow, "I don't know why everyone's so preoccupied about it. Most everything you need is common sense."

It's rather a gas to hear the 77-year-old comic, who's so famous for his prim and proper "W-e-e-l-l!" stage line, says he thought the nude scene between Anne Bancroft and Dustin Hoffman in the "Graduate" was a classic, "Absolutely sensational!"

Not only does he keep up with today's films, but he's pretty darn hip when it comes to the best-selling sex manuals. His thoughts on "The Sensuous Woman": "Awful! Simply a waste of time! I think it's a hoax, secretly written by a man for gullible women."

Jack was getting so warmed up to his subject that when I reminded him, after an hour, that the crew was expecting him back at rehearsal, he joked, "Oh, let them wait a while and if they complain I'll have two choice words for them, both of which can be found in Sensuous Woman."

W-e-e-l-l! For goodness sake, Jack, you'll, shatter all the myths!

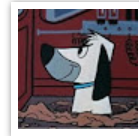
Actually, the idea of the NBC special was to unveil the man behind that famous myth. From what I could catch at rehearsal, you end up with some awfully funny moments, including Lucille Ball playing a Goldwyn Girl and Jack a lecher in one skit, but at fade-out the real Jack Benny still stays pretty well hidden.

"We even had to cut the skit that shows I'm not a cheapskate," he said. "I guess we'll have to save that for another show."

Jack's not the typical star who knows little about his projects until rehearsal time. He takes active part in the



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writing, the casting, the final editing.



Those who know the Bennys know at least part of the reason for their happiness. He's a very real, very warm, very nice man.

I suspect what you'll read below was originally contemplated as George Burns promoting the Benny special. But Burns is always full of stories, and they're far more readable than pushing a TV show, so the column only has a brief mention of the special. This appeared in papers February 19th.

## Burns Talks About Benny

By TOM GREEN

*Gannett News Service*

HOLLYWOOD — George Burns sat in his office with a cup of coffee and the inevitable cigar and talked about the miserly concert violinist.

"Jack Benny," said George Burns, "is working more now than he did last year. The older he gets, the more he works. He's two years older than I am and I wouldn't do it."

Burns, who is 75 and seems to be enjoying the luxury of semi-retirement, had just completed a guest appearance on 77-year-old Benny's second television special of the Season for NBC, "Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know About Jack Benny, But Were Afraid to Ask." It airs Wednesday, 9-10 p.m.

"I don't know why he does it," says Burns. "He just loves the business."

There's nothing offhand that Burns can think of that he'd like to know about Benny that he doesn't already know. The two have been friends for well over 40 years.

"There's some things I'd like to forget," he smiles.

He met Benny while he was dating Gracie Allen, his late wife and show business partner for more than three decades. Benny started dating a girl who was rooming with Gracie. That was before he met Mary Livingston.

"He was doing a good single then. He was making \$400 a week, which was a good salary. He was doing stingy jokes even then. When Jack was young, stingy jokes were fun. They came from Scotland. Jack made being stingy a national institution. Now the Scots make jokes about Jack Benny.

"The first time I met him, actually, was on the phone and we were disconnected. That made him laugh. Up until then. I didn't know I was a comedian."

Burns has done his share of having fun on stage with Benny's well-known eccentricities, but he is obviously very fond of the man.

"Just before we taped this show, Jack had two wisdom teeth taken out. He felt bad. He came in with an overcoat on. But as soon as he got to the script he forgot about it. There was that vitality. When they called off the rehearsal at 1 p.m., he said if that was all he was going to take a violin lesson. And he did."

Benny's enchantment with the violin makes Burns smile, too.

"He's mad about it. The other things he does are just a sideline.

His big therapy is the violin. There's nothing that Heifetz has that Jack doesn't have, but when they play it's an entirely different thing. If Jack didn't play, he'd be just like Heifetz.

"When he bought his Stradivarius. I was there and Isaac Stern came over. It didn't sound like they were playing the same fiddle. Jack knows how good he is. He plays fast numbers so if he misses a few notes, no one knows."

Burns doesn't even try to keep up with Benny's work pace.

"Why should I?"

He maintains an office and he comes in at 10:30 in the morning and is gone by noon.

"I do about six shows a year, a few talk shows and a few commercials for a bank. You couldn't pay me to get back into weekly TV. I'd like to play Las Vegas four weeks every two years."

Besides Burns, the television show guest stars John Wayne, Lucille Ball, Phil Harris and Dionne Warwick, along with Dr. David Reuben, author of "Everything . . . About Sex." Bob Hope makes a surprise appearance. Burns likes to tell this story to illustrate what makes Jack Benny laugh:

In the early days when he was working with Gracie, the two of them and Jack had the same agent, Tom

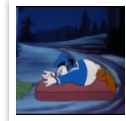
"Usually I can tell at first draft if it's going to be a good show. But this one was different. I didn't feel really confident until Lucy, George Burns, Phil Harris, Dr. Reuben all came into rehearsal raving about their bits."

Jack went into rigorous preparation for the show the day after returning from a 12-day ocean cruise to Acapulco. His wife, Mary, didn't accompany him on the trip, "Because she hates that sort of thing, all that lying around in the sun."

About his marriage to Mary Livingston, his one-time professional partner, he says, "We've been together 44 years now, and each year keeps getting better, happier for us."



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Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick was a very religious man, one who didn't have the heart to tell an act that it had been laid off. Instead, he would start shuffling in his desk drawers. It happened to Burns and Allen one day. "The minute he did that, you knew you were fired."

Burns ran into Benny out on the street right after getting the news.

"Are you working?" Benny asked.

"No," said Burns. "He looked in his drawers."

The line wiped Benny out and he stood there and laughed while a crowd of 30 or 40 people stopped to see what was going on.

"He finally went into a shoe store and bought a pair of shoes he didn't need."

Burns, of course, is keeping up with his singing.

"I'm a natural-born singer. I enjoy my singing. I've never walked out on myself."

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Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:32](#)



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