



Sunday, 24 July 2022

## Five Years of Benny

It's remarkable that Jack Benny hit the five-year mark of his radio show and he didn't even have two of the people which we all think of today when Benny comes to mind.

Rochester didn't become part of the cast until later in the year. Dennis Day followed in 1939.

Even more, there was no "age 39," Maxwell car, "Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga," no Frank Nelson going "Yeeeeees?"

The Benny show was popular without them and became a radio institution with them.

How?

The answer is outlined in this brief column in the *Syracuse American*, May 2, 1937.

Before then, Jack had a pretty good cast on his show. In some cases, they were replaced along the way with better people, though that's highly subjective. One could argue Dennis Day was better than Kenny Baker or Frank Parker. However, all brought something different and funny to the show. Day had the advantage of being given a chance to develop because he was on the show longer than any of them. Johnny Green was a fine musician and composer (and later an Oscar winner) but Phil Harris became a one-of-a-kind personality.

Harry Conn was an important cog for reasons explained below but his ego caused a self-implosion and Benny hired new writers who expanded upon the groundwork that had been laid. And Sam Hearn ended up coming back to Benny in the 1950s with a different character after a failed attempt to go elsewhere and be something other than a Jewish dialectician.

Other than Conn, the others left voluntarily. In some cases it was because Jack moved his show to the West Coast from New York permanently. Don Wilson joined the show in 1934 solely because Jack changed sponsors and a replacement announcer was required.

This may be the only post-1936 article about Benny I've seen where Fred Allen's name is mentioned, but their feud isn't.

### DIALING WITH DOYLE

By J. E. (Dinty) Boyle

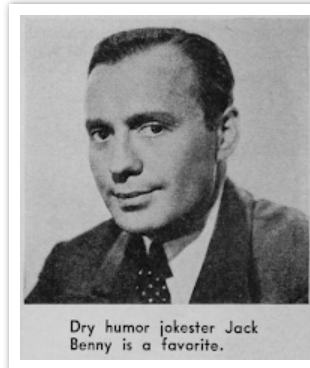
#### The Rambles of a Newsman:

FIVE years ago today Jack Benny stepped before microphones for the first time as a regular performer after years in vaudeville, a couple of Broadway productions, and a none-too-happy fling at the movies.

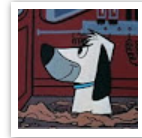
Today Mr. Benny can stretch out on the front porch, take a puff or two at the cigar he always has in his kisser and give a pretty fair representation of a guy who has done all right.

He admits that everything he has he owes to good old Mother Radio. She took him out of mediocrity and made his name a family byword. She made it possible for Benny to get the folks back home for Sunday dinner. She gave him money and fame.

Five years ago he was buying an upper for Albany, perhaps, and today he's talking to travel agents about an all-embracing trip to Europe.



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None will be angry at Benny's success. He's a good guy, and he had the sense to adapt himself to the new medium of expression, and to surround himself by a competent supporting cast.

He and Fred Allen boast experts as aids.

Such procedure brought security for both. Benny has in his safety deposit vault a three-year, non-cancellable contract for air programs. Allen can write his own ticket. If he doesn't sign again with his present sponsor there are at least three who are ready to open negotiations for the ex-juggler, who also found fortune in the mikes.

George Burns interested Benny in radio, introduced him to Writer Harry Conn, who had written some material for Burns and Allen. Benny hired Conn, and they were together up to a year ago. Benny has done some pioneering in his five years of radio.

#### Situation Humor

He was the first to introduce the "kidding" type of commercial announcement and he did it neatly. He didn't razz the product. He made fun of the stodgy, stilted, over-worded blurbs which are still bringing curses on numerous programs.

Benny was probably the first to develop situation humor and his success has resulted in others adapting the idea. For which Benny be praised. The day of the "gag" and the "pun" passed long ago, although some big-name comedians haven't yet learned about that.

And Benny has been smart enough through the five years to let the other fellow win the laugh. Mary Livingston has a notable personality because she had her share of the toppers. Frank Parker became a star. So did Kenny Baker. Johnny Green was lime-lighted into another commercial.

Phil Harris' sensational comeback is due to Benny, and Andy Devine's worth in pictures should be doubled as a result of the Sunday night display of his gravelled larynx. Sam Hearn, who was Schlepperman so long, was another to win plaudits, and will always be "Schlepperman" despite the efforts of producers to dim his identity on another program.

The amazing side of Benny is that in ordinary conversation he is not a sparkling wit. As a matter of fact, he is sometimes very dull indeed. He isn't to be compared to Fred Allen, for, example, as Allen is a scintillating humorist, ever ready with the smartest of smart wise cracks.

Benny is funny in the loudspeaker, however, is an artist at adapting material to the particular needs of his own program. He radiates friendliness in person. He projects it in the loud speaker. He excites affection—and loyalty.

Long may he air!



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:19](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

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**M. Mitchell Marmel** 24 July 2022 at 10:17

No e in "Livingston". (takes a drink of Orange Crush) ;)

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