



Sunday, 26 February 2023

## Johnny Green

The start of the 1935-36 radio season brought some changes to the Jack Benny show and, as it turned out, they weren't permanent.

The programme was now all but officially based in California. Orchestra leader Don Bestor wanted to continue working in the east, so he was replaced by pianist and composer Johnny Green, already known for writing "Body and Soul." And popular vocalist Frank Parker left as well, moving to CBS and starring on a programme for Atlantic Refining. His replacement, Michael Bartlett, either quit or was fired, depending on the version you read, after five shows. Hired to handle the songs was California radio novice Kenny Baker.

Green stayed with the Benny show for one season, electing to take a job leading the orchestra on Fred Astaire's series for Packard. There were no hard feelings about the split. Years later, Jack hosted a party honouring Green for the release of a new album. Green appeared on the *Shower of Stars* show in 1958 when Benny celebrated his 40th birthday, and wrote a special song for it. They evidently stayed friends.

Here are a couple of newspaper stories about Jack's show during Green's time. The first one is from the Washington *Evening Star* of March 15, 1936. Interestingly, Don Wilson is still considered a sports announcer; his play-by-play of the Rose Bowl is why NBC brought him to New York. Even more interesting is the reference to writer Harry Conn. The Washington show was the last one Conn wrote for Benny. The relationship between the two was poisoned by Conn's demands for more money and more credit. Reading this, you'd never known anything was amiss.

The story about "Emergency Mary" is pure fiction. The script for the first Mary show exists. It's clear Mary was intended to a part of the show.

### BENNY RADIO PROGRAM TO ORIGINATE IN WASHINGTON

Comedian Is Surrounded By Distinguished Personnel Broadcast From National Press Club Includes Mary Livingstone, Kenny Baker, Johnny Green and Don Wilson.

By the Radio Editor.

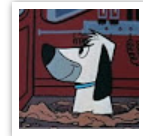
THE Jack Benny program, which the Nation's radio critics have chosen as the outstanding air attraction for the past two years, and whose star they have elected as their favorite microphone comedian three years running, will originate tonight in Washington. The broadcast will be staged in the National Press Club Auditorium at 7 p.m.

Along with Benny will be heard that modern poetess, Mary Livingstone, whose ode to "Labor Day" will go down in literary history as a twentieth century classic; Kenny Baker, the timid tenor from California; Johnny Green, composer-conductor-pianist, leading a local orchestra, and Don Wilson, the sports announcer, who turns in a pretty good acting job every now and then.

WHAT is the formula for the success of the Benny programs? Why is it that his suave, easy-going humor seems to be making a consistently bigger hit with listeners throughout the country than that of his comic colleagues? To start out finding the answers to these questions one might visit a small room in New York's Park Central Hotel any Wednesday morning. A knock on the door of Room 1510 about 9 o'clock will bring a hearty "Come in" from a fellow named Harry Conn. As you walk in, you see a solidly-built man—you'd guess he's in his late thirties—seated in front of a portable typewriter.



## About Me



[View my complete profile](#)

## Blogs to See



### News From ME

[The Lazarus Effect](#) - If we're going to mention newspaper strip guys who drew a lot of strips, it's only fair to mention Mell Lazarus, a very funny man who had two long-running

...  
3 hours ago



### Cartoon Research

[Famous Studios:](#)

[Noveltoons 1948-50](#) - And in general, the studio inched closer to launching its own stable of original characters to compete with the Looney Tunes and Tom and Jerry.

5 hours ago



### Movies with Michael



[Movie Review: What's Love Got to Do With It](#) - Michael's

Movie Grade: D- A bland and overly familiar romantic comedy. The idea of a romantic comedy that takes a look at Arranged (or assisted mar...

6 hours ago



### Fernando Liera Cartoons

[Mother's Day will bring big business for services, restaurants and commerce.](#)

- ©2023

[fernandollercartoons.com](#)

19 hours ago

Conn is Benny's collaborator. He never starts working on the Sunday broadcast until the preceding Wednesday. "What are you going to have Sunday?" you ask Harry. He doesn't know, will be the reply. "Well, isn't it about time you get to thinking about it?" you continue. "You're telling me. And what do you suppose this typewriter is for?" he comes back—and then, "The first thing I have to do this morning is work out a situation that will make a good vehicle for Jack and his cast. We always try to get something topical—a current screen or stage success, a public event about which there is a lot of discussion or an episode which has been planted on a previous program. Illustrative of the latter is the famous 'feud' between Jack and Don Bestor last year. This grew out of the very simple notion of having Jack not give Don a Christmas present. When this structure has been carefully planned, I begin thinking about gags."

UNDERLYING all of Benny's thinking in building a show are two principles which have governed his comedy ever since he first faced the microphone. Although he is the comedy star, the majority of the laughs must go to the other members of the cast; there must be good-natured kidding of the typical method of commercial announcing. In every script Jack Benny is the Underdog. Johnny Green comes on and flips a few wisecracks at him. Mary deflates him further with a couple of well-aimed darts. Even Kenny Baker and Wilson take him down a few pegs. With the result that the sympathy of the listeners is with Benny from the start. The heckling of the star by his supporters is a sound comedy formula, but it brings even more laughs in the Benny show, because, no matter how many times they have heard them before, members of the audience never expect tenors, band leaders and announcers to say anything funny. Neither Baker, Wilson nor Green are trained actors, and yet under Benny's watchful eye they have become first-rate comedy players.

MARY LIVINGSTONE, who is Mrs. Benny outside of the studios, rates a paragraph by herself. She was not in the first Benny series. One night Jack found his script running short, and he signaled Mary, who was in the audience, to step over to the mike and ad-lib with him for a minute or two in order to fill out the remaining time. She made such a hit on this impromptu occasion that Jack has kept her in the show as one of his foils ever since.

In the matter of kidding the announcements, Jack Benny is considered a past master. There is too much pompous commercial splicing on the air, he feels. As a result, the product he represents finds its way into Benny comedy sequence at the most unexpected moments. The "plugs" are effective because they are genuinely funny and because they are brief.

As mentioned in the story above, Johnny Green wasn't a trained actor. But that's now what Jack expected out of the main players on his show. How did Green view this? Here's his perspective in a column in the *Cincinnati Post*, April 25, 1936.

## Comedy Yen Grows in Baton Wielders Ambition Involving Gag Lines and Laugh Situations Was Instilled in Maestros When Jack Benny Gave George Olsen a Funny Line BY JOHNNY GREEN

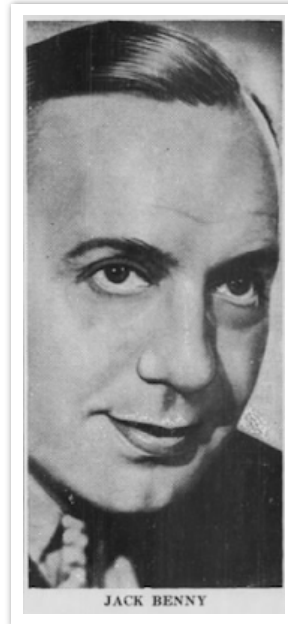
TURNING reporter for a day gives me an opportunity to reveal that many radio orchestra leaders are currently nursing secret ambitions of an unusual variety. These ambitions, strangely, are not concerned with becoming the foremost dispensers of dance music. It seems, rather that their neuroses and complexes involve gag lines and comedy situations. Ever since that eventful evening four years ago when Jack Benny gave George Olsen his first funny line, a new field was opened for heretofore sane maestri.

Before that the only baton-saver who essayed a comedy style was Ben Bernie. But Ben was formerly associated with Phil Baker in vaudeville, so he knows the ropes. When Benny took the serious, though always affable, Frank Black and made a funny fellow of Frank, the panic was on. All the musical boys got out their editions of Joe Miller and made applications to be funny men.

What the maestri didn't realize however was that the comics use them as foils or wrap them in character parts for farcical skits. They seem to have gotten the idea that they can carry on a comedy show by themselves. Some of the boys are due for a rude awakening. They have assumed the theory that all a radio comedian needs is a talented straight man and a good gag writer.

### Groundwork Is Overlooked

WHAT these bandsmen forget is the long period of training which comics like Benny, Cantor, Baker and Fred Allen have undergone. Endles[s] trooping around the country, contact with unruly audiences — all have given these comedians a razor-edge sense of humor and a happy faculty f[or] coining flip retorts.



### AFRTS Archive

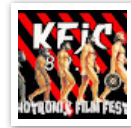


Chris Noel  
1967 -  
Chris Noel  
is back with  
a 1967 visit.  
It's a Date

With Chris. \*Date With  
Chris - 1967\* More Chris  
Noel

21 hours ago

### Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog

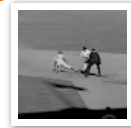


Coronation  
and The  
Return Of  
The KFJC  
Psychotronic  
Film

Festival - \*Can't say I'm  
exactly nutty about the  
royals and would not want  
to be in King Charles' spats,  
but am positive...

2 days ago

### Old TV History



September  
1947 Part 2  
- Maybe  
Happy  
wasn't  
happy, but

baseball fans in the east  
were. A last-minute deal  
was signed at the end of  
September 1947 to put the  
World Series on televi...

2 days ago

### Buddy's Cartoons

"Mice, Ducks, and Rabbits"

- Chapter Two is officially  
done! Chapter Three is  
about the explicit copy-  
Disney era, such as  
Warners' Buddy, Iwerks'  
Flip, and the post-Code  
Betty Boop. ...

2 days ago

### Termite Terrace headlines

Soaky Toy Commercials -  
Superman and Tennessee  
Tuxedo! Musky the Muskrat  
and Dick Tracy! These rule!  
These Soaky commercials  
are incredible. According to  
Darrel Van Citters there...

6 days ago

### Yowp

Tally Ho Ho Ho  
Backgrounds - Fernando  
Montealegre was among  
the first staffers at Hanna-  
Barbera, jumping over from  
MGM where he started as  
an assistant animator and  
became a background...

1 week ago

Show All

## Why Not Read...

Cartoonerific

Dr Grob's Animation Review

Then, too, these comics know how to phase and time a line. Ever since Jack gave me lines to deliver on our Sunday night show I've been discovering how important timing is.

I MAY be painting a rather dismal picture. I do not mean that orchestra leaders should not go into the comedy field. Of course, they should, but don't misunderstand. Handling comedy lines is great for a bandsman. It gives him a new perspective, opens up new vistas and is a lot of fun. Lots of maestri enter the field because it presents a challenge. Can he become proficient in the handling of comedy lines. It is essential that a bandsman should retain his sense of proportion. His business is primarily to furnish good music. Once he forsakes this realization and thinks he can be a good comic on his own, that's the beginning of the end. I'm grateful to Jack Benny for thinking me capable enough to handle comedy lines, but I'm not going to let it throw me.



It'd be interesting to hear which bandleaders Green had in mind. There's one performance of Bestor's that's so bad, everyone starts laughing at his line-reading. Before him was Frank Black, whose delivery comes across as a cross between a drone and a sneer. The best acting bandleader on Benny's show was the one who followed Green. Phil Harris was hired for the 1936-37 season. Once the writers developed a character for him, he became larger than life—and stayed that way the rest of his career, including his cartoon career with Walt Disney.

It turned out one of the best things that could happen to Jack Benny's show was Johnny Green's departure.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:23](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 2 comments:



**Paul Groh** 26 February 2023 at 23:15

Eddie Cantor's orchestra leader, David Rubinoff, suffered too terribly from mike fright to engage in banter with the star; so his speaking voice on the show was provided by young Teddy Bergman, later known to the world as Alan Reed. It was Bergman's first successful regular role on a radio program, and he would get a lot of mileage out of his Russian accent over the years, for example as the wolfhound in "Lady and the Tramp".

I'm reminded of Branford Marsalis's comment following his brief tenure as leader of the Tonight Show Band: "The job of musical director I found out later was just to kiss the ass of the host, and I ain't no ass kisser." Well, he certainly wasn't the right person for the job.

[Reply](#)



**migma** 28 February 2023 at 16:12

Green composed some fine scores for "The Man Called X" during its CBS run, which starred Herbert Marshall as secret agent Ken Thurston.

[Reply](#)



Enter comment

[Tex Avery at Warner Bros](#)  
[Format Films Roadrunners](#)

## Blog Archive

- ▼ 2023 (132)
    - [May](#) (8)
    - [April](#) (31)
    - [March](#) (31)
    - ▼ [February](#) (29)
      - [Fox Fails](#)
      - [Flea Bones](#)
      - [Johnny Green](#)
      - [I Created a Wabbit](#)
      - [The Lion Has a Ball](#)
      - [This Is The City](#)
      - [Before Endora](#)
      - [Rubber Hose Waitress](#)
      - [Corny Old Gag](#)
      - [The Young, Mean Benny](#)
      - [Gagging the Hugh Harman Way](#)
      - [Oproar Clobbering](#)
      - [Does Anyone Like This Cartoon?](#)
      - [Marian Richman](#)
      - [Today's Hidden Gag](#)
      - [It's Just a Jokio](#)
      - [Tralfaz Sunday Theatre: Printed Poison](#)
      - [Benny at 39 for the 30th Time](#)
      - [Commercials By Ernie Pintoff](#)
      - [Around the Tree With Woody](#)
      - [Can't See the Characters For the Trees](#)
      - [Come and Knock On Her Door.](#)
      - [Calling Tom and Jerry](#)
      - [Coyly Hidden Gags](#)
      - [I Never Ate Jell-O](#)
      - [The Pride of Portis](#)
      - [Mommy, Where Does Jippo Come From?](#)
      - [Buddies Thicker Than Water](#)
      - [The Long-Time Residents of Wistful Vista](#)
  - [January](#) (33)
- 2022 (382)
  - 2021 (380)

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

- [2020](#) (389)
- [2019](#) (376)
- [2018](#) (379)
- [2017](#) (380)
- [2016](#) (396)
- [2015](#) (389)
- [2014](#) (390)
- [2013](#) (388)
- [2012](#) (397)
- [2011](#) (106)

## Labels

[Aline Mosby](#) (18)

[Art Davis](#) (42)

[Bad Luck Blackie](#) (12)

[Bob and Ray](#) (16)

[Bob Clampett](#) (113)

[Bob McKimson](#) (78)

[Bob Thomas](#) (65)

[Chuck Jones](#) (178)

[Columbia](#) (64)

[Counterfeit Cat](#) (10)

[Cynthia Lowry](#) (35)

[Dick Thomas](#) (18)

[Don Patterson](#) (23)

[Drag-a-Long Droopy](#) (14)

[Earl Wilson](#) (18)

[Erskine Johnson](#) (43)

[Felix the Cat](#) (36)

[Film Daily](#) (50)

[Fleischer](#) (201)

[Frank Tashlin](#) (39)

[Fred Allen](#) (55)

[Fred Brunish](#) (11)

[Friz Freleng](#) (188)

[Gene Deitch](#) (23)

[George Pal](#) (11)

[Grant Simmons](#) (10)

[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (127)

[Hanna-Barbera](#) (6)

[Hans Conried](#) (5)

[Hardaway-Dalton unit](#) (7)

[Harman-Ising](#) (94)

[Henry Morgan](#) (14)

[Irv Spence](#) (12)

[Jack Benny](#) (594)

[Jay Ward](#) (35)

[Jimmy Durante](#) (21)

[John Crosby](#) (104)

[John Sutherland](#) (39)

-----  
[Johnny Johnsen](#) (39)  
-----  
[Johnny Olson](#) (5)  
-----  
[Kenny Baker](#) (6)  
-----  
[King-Size Canary](#) (9)  
-----  
[Laugh-In](#) (16)  
-----  
[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (6)  
-----  
[Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)  
-----  
[Magical Maestro](#) (10)  
-----  
[Maurice Noble](#) (12)  
-----  
[Mel-O-Toons](#) (5)  
-----  
[MGM](#) (716)  
-----  
[Norm McCabe](#) (9)  
-----  
[Pat Matthews](#) (13)  
-----  
[Paul Julian](#) (16)  
-----  
[Sara Berner](#) (5)  
-----  
[Screwy Squirrel](#) (40)  
-----  
[Spider-Man](#) (2)  
-----  
[Terrytoons](#) (110)  
-----  
[Tex Avery](#) (625)  
-----  
[The Cat That Hated People](#)  
(10)  
-----  
[Toby the Pup](#) (4)  
-----  
[Tom and Jerry Human](#) (46)  
-----  
[Traifaz Sunday Theatre](#) (20)  
-----  
[Ub Iwerks](#) (119)  
-----  
[UPA](#) (76)  
-----  
[Van Beuren](#) (131)  
-----  
[Vernon Scott](#) (52)  
-----  
[Virginia MacPherson](#) (14)  
-----  
[Walt Disney](#) (195)  
-----  
[Walter Lantz](#) (313)  
-----  
[Warner Bros.](#) (827)  
-----  
[Who Killed Who](#) (10)