



Sunday, 30 April 2023

The Real Jack Benny

It's a tribute to Jack Benny's acting skill that people actually believed what they heard on his radio programme.

Granted, housewives got lured into the winding tales of daily soap operas, treating them as documentaries and writing warning letters to the characters, c/o the radio station. But others actually thought Jack was such a cheapskate, he'd drive a broken-down car, take in people's laundry and find ways to avoid giving a raise to his household aide.

Jack griped in numerous interviews over the years that he felt he had to over-tip to erase the stigma caused by the radio show. He was amazed extremely intelligent people believed every word they heard.



Here's one of a number of stories designed to set the record straight. It was published November 2, 1947.

Jack Benny Is Not Bald, and He Is Not Stingy, Reporter Finds Comedian May Change Act That Has Made Him a Fortune

BY RALPH DIGHTON

HOLLYWOOD, Nov. 1.—(AP)—Jack Benny is not bald.

Jack Benny is not stingy.

Jack Benny does not make Dennis Day mow his lawn.

That is, Jack is not completely bald, he is not as stingy as he pretends on his radio program, and he doesn't exactly make Dennis Day mow his lawn.

With age and dignity creeping up on him, radio's gift to Waukegan (Benny actually was born in Chicago) currently is torn between two desires. He sometimes gets a little annoyed with the fiction he has created in the minds of America's listeners, but he hate to toss aside a formula that has made him a fortune.

Benny has just signed a three-year contract, after 15 consecutive years on the radio. During: that time, Jack Benny, Mary Livingston (his wife, Sadie Marks), Dennis Day, Phil Harris and Rochester have become household words. In all those years, the program has followed a standard pattern. You knew what you would hear when you turned on Jack Benny.



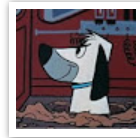
Same Pattern Likely

But now, what the program will be like at the end of the contract, no one knows. Benny himself doesn't know, today what he'll say on next week's broadcast. Best guess (Benny's) is that it will go on with "the same pattern and the same cast unless we find something that's really good." When Benny finds a gag that is good, he strings it out to the last gasp. The myth about his toupee started when he had to wear one for a movie. "But that's nothing," Jack says. "Practically every male star in Hollywood has to wear a hair piece of some sort—except Lassie."

Easy to Get Laughs

The fabled miserliness had no such timely peg. It was first used, says Benny, "simply because it was a trait that any listener could recognize. It

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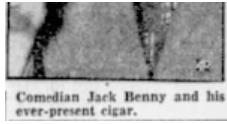
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ighs— every family has somebody who is pretty cheap. "The trouble," Benny
ave made it so convincing that I get from 300 to 500 letters a week berating
s and Rochester."

ny's little boy's success, Jack believes, is two-fold.

First, ne "gives 'em lots of variety." Unlike many other comedians, Jack likes to build up his supporting
cast. "A show with five stars in it is worth more than a show with one star," he says. "And I don't have to
work so hard. That way, people never get tired of any one character."

The second reason for Benny's professional longevity is that he does not regard his audience as bunch
of morons.

"Give 'em a chance to play along .with you," he says. "They like it. There's something in everybody that
makes them love to play theater with you. They'll believe you while you're on the air—just for the fun
they get out of it."

Tries New Twist

Jack was following this theory when he tried a new twist in a phone conversation with his "sponsor"
last year. The "sponsor" supposedly was bawling him out for firing a singing-commercial quartet.

The script went something like this:

(Silence while sponsor is talking.)

Benny: But—

(15 seconds silence while sponsor is talking.)

Benny: But—

(15 seconds silence.)

Benny: But—

(15 seconds silence.)

Benny: But—

Then the band blared, ending the program, and Benny had kept an audience of supposedly several
millions supposedly laughing for a full minute without saying anything.

We suspect General Foods and American Tobacco both hoped the listeners believed the commercials as
much as everything else they heard on the show.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:54](#)



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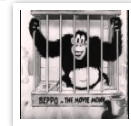
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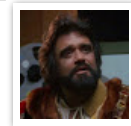
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