



Sunday, 25 June 2023

## Pre-Broadcast Clowning

There was a fascination, it seems, among radio fans about watching their favourite show in person as it was being broadcast. Fred Allen dismissed a studio audience as almost a lower class of people, content with watching people on a stage read a script aloud. But certainly the laughter enhanced every comedy/variety show aired in the Golden Days, and probably influenced not only the stars' timing, but ad-libs as well.

We've put up several posts of reviews of the Benny show from someone either watching a show or a rehearsal. Here's another one. It comes from the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* of Sunday, January 16, 1938.



### Pre-Broadcast Period Found To Be Occasion For Good Acts Missed By Dialers Many Laughs Escape Mike

*Local Radio Man Relates NBC Studio Notations*

By Robert Grey

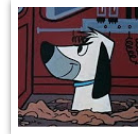
REPORTS have been drifting in for several moons about what goes on in a broadcasting studio during that anxious period just before "on the air" signs go up. Many of the notations relate unusual behind-the-scenes incidents, such as a prima donna being too nervous to apply an even line of lip rouge before facing the studio audience or mike, or a screen idol being too upset to hold a cigaret.

A number of the stories concerned activities of program casts as they made final preparations to broadcast their wares to the country at large. Indications were that some of the best entertainment produced by radio artists occurred before the studio audience just before the program went on the air. This was said to be true especially with comedy programs.

While other detailed reports have been second-hand, we have just come into possession of a first-hand version in the observations of Milton Simon, local radio program producer and actor who recently returned from a visit to Hollywood. An experienced and capable radio performer in his own right, Mr. Simon was surprisingly enthusiastic over his good fortune in watching a broadcast of the Jack Benny program and getting to observe what happened during that period. Just before broadcast time. His impressions of Benny before the mike as well as behind the mike are such as to leave no doubt why listeners have been naming the comedian and his wife high among their favorite performers. After waxing warmer and warmer in his admirations of Mr. Benny, Simon gave the following first-hand account of the period he witnessed just before watching the comedian lead his cast through one of their recent Sunday night broadcasts:

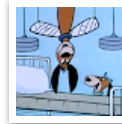
It's eight o'clock, Pacific Coast Time. The scene, NBC's Hollywood Studios on Melrose, the setting for many a star-swept broadcast these days. On the stage is Phil Harris and his orchestra putting Kenny Baker through the final paces of the rehearsal. Front center are two microphones. Onto the stage strides a business-like individual in brown coat, brown hat, and a very brown cigar. With his back to the audience he views these last bits of rehearsals, munching in pre-occupied manner, on the cigar. Finally, after several minutes of recognition by the audience crowding the studio, he turns, removes the cigar, and stares with mock disdainful look, and says simply, laconically, and disinterestedly— "Hello." It's Jack Benny, and on all sides people begin to rock with laughter. Why? It's hard to tell. This man, as one woman puts it, is funny if he says nothing. He gives you the impression of a lightning quick mind about to seize upon anything at all and make it funny. He's fascinating, really, as he stands there, surveying the house, with cigar held between his fingers, saying nothing— just appearing.

## About Me



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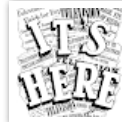
## My Blog List



**Explaining Doggie Daddy** - Of the three cartoon series that

made up "The Quick Draw McGraw Show", Augie Doggie was the last, even though, in a way, it was first. Bill Hanna and Joe ...

2 days ago



**June 1939** - Despite some iffy reviews for its variety shows,

W2XBS decided to add a third night of television from studio 3-H at Radio City in June 1939. Among the p...

2 days ago

## Blogs to See



**Biden says US played no role in Russia's Wagner mutiny: 'We were not involved'.** - ©2023 fernandollercartoons.com

1 hour ago



**Jim Korkis Needs Our Help!** - The internationally-respected Disney historian has had a series of major medical issues and is in need of financial help to pay his bills.

10 hours ago

Finally, and with the orchestra and Kenny going full blast in the background, he speaks after several minutes of silence.

"Still got a hang-over?"

The audience laughs good and solidly at this.

The brown eyes rove again, and he says with the Benny emphasis: "I still got mine from last year." Everybody laughs.



Phil Harris is spotted, speeding around the edge of the stage getting [sic] the last of the music in order.

"Say, Phil," cries this demon tease, "show 'em that tie. C'mon, Phil, show the folks that tie." And Phil Harris, handsome and ruddy faced, comes forth with the most gosh awful tie that ever went back the day after Christmas. Jack Benny continues to alternate his gaze between the tie and the audience with that contemptuous, knowing nod of his.

"Did you ever see such an outfit as that?" he goes on, calling attention to Phil's rich, plaid coat, the loud shirt, off-color trousers, and socks. It's the conventional Hollywood attire.

"Honestly," Benny asserts, "there must be some plane in town where you can buy a complete suit." And the crowd howls.

The last minute rehearsals go on as Benny continues to stand in the wings and survey the house. Finally, the cigar comes forth and he says eagerly: "Would anybody like to buy my Maxwell?" No takers,

but plenty of laughers.

"Honestly, I could let you have it at a bargain figure. I've bought a race horse." More laughter.

"Yeah, I bought a rare horse. I got to be in style with all the other boys. Only my horse always runs last. I dunno. But I finally decided how I could get my money's worth out of him. I painted a big sign on his back that says 'Tune in the Jello Program' and he comes down the stretch— talk about advertising!" The house "comes down" at this.

"And say," he continues with a coy roll of his eyes, "since this Mae West business, have you noticed how clean our broadcasts are!"

It's now about 8:25. Kenny is going through the last few bars of his song. "Look at him," says Jack in mock jealousy, "always rehearsing. Everybody gets attention on this program but me. You haven't seen anybody worry about me yet, have you? Everybody is important here but me."

At this point Don Wilson comes onto the stage and gets a big applause. With an outstretched hand, he bids the audience welcome, tells them to laugh in a natural sort of way, and then introduces the cast. Jack Benny, of course, is introduced last and with least gusto. After the introduction Don begins to give a really heartfelt talk on the feeling of allegiance the cast feels toward Benny; how they appreciate the wholesome helpfulness and genuine friendship of the man—a speech that Don clearly feels. Slowly over the house rolls a ripple of laughter that grows into a gale and drowns out the far-launched Wilson. Over in the corner, in mock-feminine modesty, with much eye rolling and coyness, Jack Benny is drawing down the house.

Wilson retreats, shamefaced and red. This is obviously not an act. It's Benny-clowning, always clowning. He is the funniest, most sophisticated showman before the public today.

And at 8:30, Pacific Coast time, is that audience ready to laugh with the show or is it? It is.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:02](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

No comments:

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#### News From ME

[Today's Video Link](#) - As you may know, before David Letterman started his late night show (called Late Night) on NBC, he briefly had a daily morning show on that network. It wen...  
11 hours ago

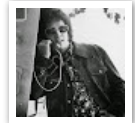
#### Movies with Michael



[Challenge of the Super Friends: Revenge on Gorilla City](#)

(1978) - A very fun episode. In this episode Gorilla Grodd intends to take over Gorilla City with the help of the rest of the Legion of Doom. However the lea...  
16 hours ago

#### AFRTS Archive



[Kris Erik Stevens 1983](#) - Kris Erik Stevens made a lot

of great radio, taking Chicago then Los Angeles by storm. Over the last few years, Kris has been the voice of the pre-...  
1 day ago

#### The Exposure Sheet

[Jettisoned Jetsons Projects Part Two: Canceled 1990s Revivals](#) - The last few days on this blog have been focused on the 1990 Jetsons animated film, so we should move forward and look at the rest of the Jetsons productio...  
3 days ago

#### Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog

[The Silk Hat Comedian](#) - \*For diehard classic movie fans, the love of comedy films produced in the silent era remains steadfast, no matt...  
3 days ago

#### [Mark Kausler's CatBlog Mabel Listens Again](#)

- In the words of Bill Hay, "Here they ah!" The "Now Listen Mabel" dailies from 11-8 to 11-22-1919. In the 11-8 there are human figures in the first two pane...  
2 weeks ago

#### Pete Hale Blog

[New Blog!](#) - I now have a new blog, called The Golden Age of Animation, which I hope to be a Cartoon Research-like place for a bunch of writers, mainly me, the head w...  
2 weeks ago

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 **Termite Terrace**

**headlines**

Mr. Jinks and Boo Boo?  
Sure Why Not! - Now these  
two characters were paired  
together in this record and  
this coloring book but their  
connection pretty much  
stops at the cover. Why  
they were pair...

*4 weeks ago*

Show All

Why Not Read...

- Cartoonerific
- Dr Grob's Animation Review
- Tex Avery at Warner Bros
- Format Films Roadrunners

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Cheers For Chubby

Not Tonight Jack

A Wolf, a Pincushion and  
a Keystone Kop

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