



Sunday, 2 July 2023

Life Begins at 39

Here's yet another of seemingly-countless biographies of Jack Benny that appeared in feature sections of newspapers over the years. This one comes from the Long Beach *Independent* of Dec. 11, 1955.

It's very accurate, though you could quibble on some minor points. The photos accompanied the story.

FOR JACK BENNY

Life Begins at 39

By Terry Vernon

Independent TV-Radio Columnist

THERE IS ONLY one man in show business who is 39 years old yet was born in 1894. He is, of course, Jack Benny. He has been riding on that 39-years-of-age gag for so long that most people have forgotten how many years have gone by since that Feb. 14 in Chicago when Benny Kubelsky was born. Benny has won every signal honor that entertainment can bestow . . . except one. That one is the golden statuette of "Oscar," symbol of supremacy in the world of motion pictures. This despite the fact that he has done scores of films in Hollywood and also made "The Horn Blows at Midnight." He still hopes to capture an "Oscar" some day on his own merits.

Waukegan, Illinois, is duly recognized as Jack Benny's home town, but he actually resided there a comparatively few years. When Benny was 16, he and Cora Salisbury, pianist at the Barrison Theater where Jack worked after school, teamed and went on the road playing vaudeville dates in adjacent towns and cities. Later he teamed with a Chicago pianist, Lyman Woods, and this pair began to gain fame. They toured as far West as Seattle and even played an engagement at the famed London Palladium. But Benny, as such, was still just a fiddle player.

WORLD WAR I interrupted his theatrical career, so he made the most of it and joined the Navy. Stationed at Great Lakes Naval Training Station, he took part in the famed Great Lakes Revue to raise money for Navy relief. This was the birthplace of the man who has become a legend in comedy on the vaudeville and Broadway stages, radio, movies and television. It was during one of the productions that Benny tucked his faithful fiddle under his arm and, began to talk. This unusual procedure wowed the sailors and before long his talk was more important than his fiddling.



A famous pair of vaudeville acts: Jack Benny and Eddie (Shulman) at the time Benny was a member of the Navy and stayed on.

"It was actually Ben Bernie who caused me to change my theatrical name," says Jack. "I used Ben K. Benny as my stage name until Bernie became quite popular. Feeling there was too much similarity and anyway (with a sly look and twinkle of the baby blue eyes) I didn't wish to, you know, make Ben look bad by overshadowing him . . . you know . . . I changed my name to Jack Benny."

THERE IS LITTLE doubt but that Ben K. Benny, Benny Kubelsky or Jack Benny would have overshadowed anyone regardless of name. He has no peers in his chosen field of comedy and because he keeps his shows flexible insofar as format is concerned, no other comic can copy him for any length of time.

After getting out of the Navy and starting out on his own in the vaudeville theaters he played a little fiddle, told some jokes and acted as emcee for the stage shows in whatever

theater he was playing. This work gave him that wonderful sense of timing that no other comic possesses to such a degree. He learned that the spoken word can be important but that the unspoken word oftentimes carries more punch.

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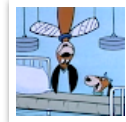


July 1939 - First, NBC cut its on-location TV broadcasts.

Then, it cut its studio broadcasts. What replaces that to fill the air-time? Well, W2XBS had a problem the...

22 hours ago

Yowp



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 ...

1 week ago

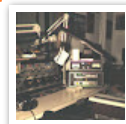
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Fernando Llera Cartoons

Protesters gather at Florida's State Capitol as anti-illegal immigration law takes effect. - ©2023 fernandollercartoons.com

1 hour ago

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Roger Carroll 1976 - This is from the Torrejon airchecks.

Wolfman finishes a show, station break and then Roger Carroll with the happy hour. Were Roger and the Wolf sch...

3 hours ago

He headed for New York and wound up doing musicals for the Schuberts and Earl Carroll. This was his stepping-stone to Hollywood and a movie career that is remembered chiefly for his work in "The Hollywood Revue" for MGM.

BUT IN BETWEEN pictures he had nothing to do except draw a salary and Benny is not noted for inactivity.

This might account for the fact that he wandered around town and met Mary, who was Sadye Marks, salesgirl at The May Co. He and Sadye hit it off and in January 1927 were married in Waukegan at the apartment of an old friend of Jack.

Then back to Broadway and a role in an Earl Carroll musical where he was doing very well. Fact is, he turned down \$1,500 per week (big money in those days) in the road show company in order to enter radio. In the early 30s, some may recall, radio was coming into its own. Amos n' Andy were household words and movie houses stopped the film so patrons could hear the latest in the life-story of the two favorites; Stoopnagle and Bud [sic] were big-time comics; Eddie Cantor had taken the plunge and Burns and Allen, Fibber McGee and Molly and many other old vaudeville teams had turned to this new medium.

"If they can do it, I can," thought Benny, so in early 1932 he agreed to take a guest spot on "The Ed Sullivan Show." He had bumped into columnist Sullivan in a Broadway restaurant and Ed asked him to do the job.

"But I don't know about radio," stated Jack.

"Nobody does," said Ed.

BENNY DECIDED to take the flyer, and that next night walked up to the microphone, and said: "This is Jack Benny talking. Now there will be a brief pause for everyone to say 'Who cares?'"

Apparently a lot of people cared when he got through for shortly thereafter he was on the air with a sponsor and began to grow into the biggest comedian the world has ever known. His first bankroller was Canada Dry Ginger Ale but through the years he has been identified with many another sponsor. Probably his most famous sponsor was General Foods and Jack altered his usual opening by saying, "Jell-o again, this is Jack Benny talking" and to this day, twelve years later, many people still believe he is sponsored by Jell-o.

Benny developed his own material for those early shows, worked out the gags and gradually drifted into the format he now uses consistently. It is one that makes him the hapless boob, the man with human frailties who has the same faults shared by many others . . . and also the money lover and penny pincher.

IN ONE OF HIS EARLY shows he had Mary come on as a girl from Plainfield, N. J., who'd read poems and make wise-cracks. This was to be a one-time shot but the public clamored for more and Mary Livingstone became a regular part of his shows.

When Jack gained popularity in radio it was natural that movies would beckon him and he signed a contract. This meant moving his radio show to California so he planned to make the transition on the air. In one of these shows the Benny gang were aboard a train and the Pullman porter was portrayed by Eddie Anderson. This, too, was a one-time only shot but the public so loved "Rochester" that Benny hired him and made him a star in his own right. Don Wilson joined the Benny gang in 1934 as announcer and became so much a part of the show that he has been under contract to Benny ever since.

IN THE YEARS that have passed Benny has started many others out on careers. Frank Parker, who has reappeared on the air with Arthur Godfrey, was one of the first of a series of tenors who were an integral part of the Benny format. Others have been Kenny Baker, Dennis Day, and, while Dennis was in the service, Larry Stevens.

Benny always has music on his shows, and the orchestra leader becomes a part of the act. This technique is now being copied by other comics and most noticeable is John Scott Trotter on the "George Gobel Show." The men who had led the bands on Benny's shows include Ted Weems, Frank Black, Don Bestor, Johnny Green, Bob Crosby and probably the most famous, Phil Harris, who had bigger parts in the show than did the others and made more out of his roles.

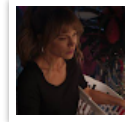
Looking back through the years Benny still gets the biggest kick out of the "feud" he had with his good friend Fred Allen. There was a time when every set in the nation was tuned to Benny's show one night and then to Allen's to hear the interchanged of insults between the two comics.

The feud started out when Fred Allen did a takeoff on an amateur show. He hired an eight-year-old violinist and the boy played "The Bee." Allen quipped, "Only eight years old and you can play 'The Bee,' why Jack Benny ought to be ashamed of himself."



THE NEXT WEEK Benny came back on his own show to disclose indignantly that he could produce six persons who would verify that he could play "The Bee" at the age of four. This feud gained

Movies with Michael



Movie
Review:
Prisoner's
Daughter -
Michael's
Movie

Grade: B- A very familiar, but well-made family drama. This movie's story is nothing we haven't seen before. It revolves around a mo...

15 hours ago

News From ME

Saturday Afternoon - As I should have expected, I have e-mails asking me why I haven't posted some remembrance of the fine actor, Alan Arkin. Answer: Because everyone else has ...

18 hours ago

Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog

Happy Birthday, Dan Aykroyd! - *Today this blogger's fancy and short attention span turns from silent movies (and the great...

1 day ago

The Exposure Sheet

Jettisoned Jetsons Projects Part Three: The Long and Complicated History of the Unmade Live-Action Jetsons Film - What do Joe Dante, Robert Rodriguez, James Gunn, and Kanye West all have in common? At one point or another, all of them were in the mix to write or direc...

2 days ago

Cartoon Research

Love Stinks: Celebrating Pepe Le Pew - When it comes to a list of the most romantic leading men in film history, only one name stands out so pungently.

2 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...

3 weeks ago



ages of newspapers, and other comics even joined the act. ing movies again and included in this group were such releases as "Jack Benny Rides Again," "Man About Town," "To Be or not to Be" on television. "The Jack Benny Television Show" was seen Saturday, and was a CBS affiliate. He was a sensation from the start and has pardizing his popularity. in Beverly Hills with Mary, and all he has to do is work out his and occasionally play some golf. His adopted daughter, Joan, and possible and then 39-year-old Jack Benny becomes 61-year-old

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:09](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

1 comment:



Paul Penna 2 July 2023 at 08:16

1936 Jack & Mary photo in the archive of the Washington DC Harris & Ewing studio now held by the Library of Congress. Wouldn't be found via a search, since the LOC staff member who catalogued didn't recognize them and merely tagged it, "Man and woman disembarking from train." But the Shorpy blog knew who they were. <https://www.shorpy.com/node/27145>

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Blog Archive

▼ [2023](#) (190)

▼ [July](#) (2)

[Life Begins at 39](#)

[Animating the Beatles In Vancouver](#)

► [June](#) (32)

► [May](#) (32)

► [April](#) (31)

► [March](#) (31)

► [February](#) (29)

► [January](#) (33)

► [2022](#) (382)

► [2021](#) (380)

► [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](#) (43)

[Bad Luck Blackie](#) (12)

[Bob and Ray](#) (16)

[Bob Clampett](#) (113)

[Bob McKimson](#) (80)

[Bob Thomas](#) (65)

[Chuck Jones](#) (181)

[Columbia](#) (65)

[Counterfeit Cat](#) (10)

[Cynthia Lowry](#) (35)

[Dick Thomas](#) (18)

[Don Patterson](#) (24)

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

[Earl Wilson](#) (18)

[Erskine Johnson](#) (43)

[Felix the Cat](#) (36)

[Film Daily](#) (50)

[Fleischer](#) (204)

[Frank Tashlin](#) (40)

[Fred Allen](#) (56)

[Fred Brunish](#) (12)

[Friz Freleng](#) (189)

[Gene Deitch](#) (23)

[George Pal](#) (11)

[Grant Simmons](#) (10)

[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (128)

[Hanna-Barbera](#) (8)

[Hans Conried](#) (5)

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

[Harman-Ising](#) (97)

[Henry Morgan](#) (14)

[Irv Spence](#) (12)

[Jack Benny](#) (604)

[Jay Ward](#) (35)

[Jimmy Durante](#) (21)

[John Crosby](#) (106)

[John Sutherland](#) (39)

[Johnny Johnsen](#) (41)

[Johnny Olson](#) (5)

[Kenny Baker](#) (6)

[King-Size Canary](#) (9)

[Laugh-In](#) (17)

[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (6)

[Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)

[Magical Maestro](#) (10)

[Maurice Noble](#) (12)

[Mel-O-Toons](#) (5)

[MGM](#) (726)

[Norm McCabe](#) (10)

[Pat Matthews](#) (13)

[Paul Julian](#) (16)

[Sara Berner](#) (5)

[Screwy Squirrel](#) (41)

[Spider-Man](#) (2)

[Terrytoons](#) (114)

[Tex Avery](#) (633)

[The Cat That Hated People](#)

- (10)
- Toby the Pup (4)
- Tom and Jerry Human (46)
- Tralfaz Sunday Theatre (20)
- Ub Iwerks (122)
- UPA (76)
- Van Beuren (136)
- Vernon Scott (52)
- Virginia MacPherson (14)
- Walt Disney (201)
- Walter Lantz (317)
- Warner Bros. (840)
- Who Killed Who (10)