



Sunday, 22 October 2023

Jack Doesn't Do Dallas

It was the show Jack Benny never gave.

Jack had signed to perform in Dallas on October 19, 1974 to raise money for the Southwestern Medical School at the University of Texas. Instead, his only appearance was in a hospital.

Nostalgia and fun memories always seemed to be stirred up in the press whenever Benny was coming to town. The Dallas show was no different. The *Star-Telegram* of Fort "We're Not Dallas" Worth had this reminiscence in Elston Brooks' column of August 30, 1974.

JACK BENNY'S RETURN TRIGGERS OLD TALES

Jack Benny has been signed to return to Dallas Oct. 19 as the star of Neiman-Marcus' Japanese Fortnight in the Fairmont Hotel.

And since Gisele MacKenzie, his co-star on a celebrated 1954 show over there, is currently in town, and so is Charlie Meeker, who produced that Dallas show 20 years ago, this seems like a good time to relate a funny story that concerned all three of them. Meeker, who now runs Fort Worth's Charlie's Place, recalls he was producing the State Fair Musicals more than 20 years ago when he suddenly got the idea to star Benny in "The Seven Year Itch" over there.

"I phoned Jack and almost sold him on the idea of the role being a departure from the Benny image," Meeker said, "but Jack had misgivings about playing a show like that in the cavernous Music Hall. "I'd phone him continually, thinking I was about to convince him but then he'd back away again. Finally, his agent phoned me one day and said, 'Jack wants you to quit calling him. He just doesn't know how to tell you no.' "

FERRER'S AID DOESN'T HELP

Meeker had one more inspiration. He phoned Benny again, saying, "Look, I know Jose Ferrer lives a couple of doors from you. Jose just finished playing the Hall. Phone him, and get his opinion." Charlie phoned Ferrer and asked what he had told Benny. Ferrer reported he told Jack that the first time you step on that sprawling stage you're scared to death, really frightened. But, after 24 hours, you get used to it and things are fine.

It didn't work. Benny didn't sign. But, flashing forward, Meeker was able to entice Benny to the same hall in 1954 to do the show with Gisele and the Will Mastin Trio, which was Sammy Davis, Jr., his father and his uncle.

"I flew out to Jack's home to sign the contract," Meeker continued. "We were having breakfast in his Beverly Hills house, and I was prompted to ask him why he hadn't signed for that first show."

Meeker went into his Jack Benny voice to give Benny's reply:

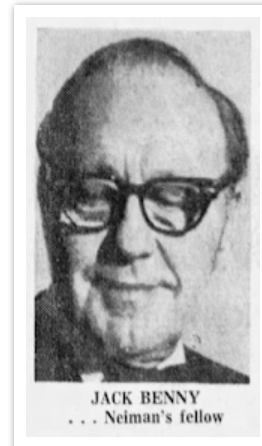
"WELL it's this way, Charlie. I called Joe Ferrer and he said it was a frightening place, but you got used to it after 24 hours. But the more I thought about it, Charlie. I figured, why, with my money and at MY AGE, why should I be FRIGHTened for 24 hours?"

AND NOW ONE FROM THE 'BENNY-FIT'

Gisele laughed when she heard the story. "It's so like him," she said. "He's such a wonderful man."

"I've got a story that goes along with it," I volunteered.

Mine occurred in 1966 when Benny had come to Fort Worth as guest violinist with the Fort Worth Symphony. It was called a "Benny-Fit," and the \$100 tickets were marked down to \$99.95 The \$3 seats were going for \$2.99. Riding in with him from the airport, we talked about that 1954 show he had done in Dallas with Gisele and Sammy Davis Jr.



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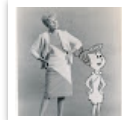
Old TV History



December 1931 - The West Coast finally got a permanent television station at the end of 1931. W6XAO is known today as KCBS-TV. During the war, W6XAO downsized its progra...

19 hours ago

Yowp



Wilma - Jean Vander Pyl didn't have a big name on

television when she was cast to play Wilma Flintstone in 1960. The others were a bit different. Bea Benaderet ap...

1 week ago

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What's New Scooby-Doo!: It's Mean, It's Green, It's the Mystery

Machine (2002) - A very fun episode. In this episode the Mystery Machine seems to be running on its own and Scooby and Shaggy start to believe that it is haunted. T...

7 hours ago

"You know what?" Benny asked me. "As big as he is now, Sam said he'd play the show again with me for the same dough."

"What did you tell him?" I asked.

"I said it wasn't quite fair. The last time I got his father and uncle, too!"

This column is about all the comedy from Benny the locals got. The Associated Press sent out a story on Oct. 19 saying "Benny was in his dressing room at the Fairmont Hotel when a hotel employee found him 'in extreme pain.' Three doctors from the audience advised him not to perform." Because he was at a benefit for a medical school, the audience was filled with doctors.

A later dispatch from the wire service reported Jack was in his stateroom off the main stage at the hotel "complaining of numbness in his arms and hands," and that an employee "gave him some ice and took him to his room. Thirty minutes later he was rushed to the hospital."

The AP quoted someone at the hospital saying Jack was supposed to remain for a few days to determine what was wrong, but was instead flown to Los Angeles and admitted to Cedars of Lebanon Hospital that day.

United Press International noted conflicting opinions in one of its stories. "Benny was examined by two doctors at his hotel room and ordered hospitalized over his protests," it reported. "They said he had suffered a mild stroke. However, doctors at Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas, where Benny was taken in a private car, said Benny was suffering from an unconfirmed illness, 'definitely not a stroke.'"

Hundreds of newspapers in the U.S. picked up the story, some putting it on their front page. It wasn't relegated to the entertainment section.

Jack walked out hospital on Thursday, and was greeted by reporters. He said he had spent Saturday in Dallas walking and felt fine, then had "a terrible stomach ache" before the show. He went on that he told doctors he "could talk and play the fiddle," but they insisted he go to the emergency ward. He joked he hadn't seen the hospital bill "but when I do, I'll then ache."

The AP quoted him that doctors kept examining him and couldn't find anything wrong. He wrote it off as stomach trouble.

But it wasn't. He had cancer of the pancreas. Doctors couldn't find it. The pains came back. Almost two months later, Jack Benny was dead.



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:08](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

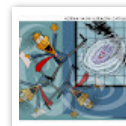
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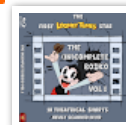
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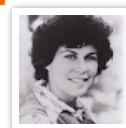
[The \(In\)Complete Bosko Vol. 1 is Coming Soon -](#)

Apparently, Not an Animation Historian! has restored 10 Bosko cartoons from both Warner Brothers and MGM and has a Blu-Ray set for release soon. A lot of...
17 hours ago

[News From ME](#)

[Today's Video Link](#) - I saw Don Rickles perform live twice in Las Vegas. Once was in the early eighties when my friends Len Wein, Marv Wolfman and I went there to vacation a bit...
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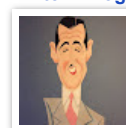
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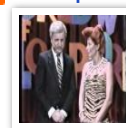
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[Video of the Week: Hanna-Barbera "Bloopers"](#) - Here's a fun

video I found a couple months ago. This is a segment from an NBC sketch comedy series titled The New Show, featuring "bloopers" from both The...
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Cartoon Research

Hidden Haunts #2: More Seldom Seen Halloween Specials - A rotation of Halloween specials can go on repeat so quickly that it's almost, well, scary.

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Mark Kausler's CatBlog

Mabel Doesn't Care -

Here's "Now Listen, Mabel" from 19191208 to 19191220. Mabel is quite the cold fish in this one, not caring if her devoted suitors Jimmie Doozinberry or "Sa...

1 week ago



Prydain on Film



1972 Interview with Chronicles of Prydain author

Lloyd Alexander, Illustrator Evaline Ness and Ann Durell - from the Free Library Rare Book Department YouTube channel,

3 months ago

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▼ 2023 (306)

▼ October (23)

[Jack Doesn't Do Dallas](#)

[Plugging Cartoons](#)

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- ▶ [September](#) (32)
 - ▶ [August](#) (31)
 - ▶ [July](#) (32)
 - ▶ [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](#) (19)

[Art Davis](#) (46)

[Bad Luck Blackie](#) (12)

[Bob and Ray](#) (17)

[Bob Clampett](#) (116)

[Bob McKimson](#) (82)

[Bob Thomas](#) (66)

[Chuck Jones](#) (185)

[Columbia](#) (68)

[Counterfeit Cat](#) (10)

[Cynthia Lowry](#) (36)

[Dick Thomas](#) (18)

[Don Patterson](#) (24)

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

[Earl Wilson](#) (19)

[Erskine Johnson](#) (43)

[Felix the Cat](#) (37)

[Film Daily](#) (50)

[Fleischer](#) (211)

[Frank Tashlin](#) (42)

[Fred Allen](#) (57)

[Fred Brunish](#) (13)

[Friz Freleng](#) (193)

[Gene Deitch](#) (24)

[George Pal](#) (12)

[Grant Simmons](#) (10)

[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (130)

[Hanna-Barbera](#) (10)

[Hans Conried](#) (5)

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

[Harman-Ising](#) (101)

[Henry Morgan](#) (14)

[Irv Spence](#) (12)

[Jack Benny](#) (620)

[Jay Ward](#) (35)

[Jimmy Durante](#) (22)

[John Crosby](#) (108)

[John Sutherland](#) (41)

[Johnny Johnsen](#) (42)

[Johnny Olson](#) (5)

[Kenny Baker](#) (6)

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

[Laugh-In](#) (18)

[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (7)

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

[Magical Maestro](#) (10)

[Maurice Noble](#) (12)

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

[MGM](#) (742)

[Norm McCabe](#) (10)

[Pat Matthews](#) (13)

[Paul Julian](#) (16)

[Sara Berner](#) (6)

[Screwy Squirrel](#) (42)

[Spider-Man](#) (3)

[Terrytoons](#) (117)

[Tex Avery](#) (649)

[The Cat That Hated People](#)
(10)

[Toby the Pup](#) (4)

[Tom and Jerry Human](#) (46)

[Traifaz Sunday Theatre](#) (21)

[Ub Iwerks](#) (126)

[UPA](#) (78)

[Van Beuren](#) (140)

- Vernon Scott (52)
- Virginia MacPherson (14)
- Walt Disney (208)
- Walter Lantz (324)
- Warner Bros. (875)
- Who Killed Who (12)