



Sunday, 12 November 2023

The Television Question

Television's takeover of the living room from radio was gradual but steady. After the end of the war, new stations came on the air. Television sets began to be manufactured again. Stations added programming and signed up for networks. By fall 1948, all four networks were on at night, though there were blocks—even in prime time—that were filled with local programmes. And then Milton Berle became a sensation and is credited with giving the industry a huge boot.

Radio stars saw it coming. They realised it was inevitable that network radio would die and TV would replace it. The question was—what should they do about it?

Jack Benny had appeared on what was essentially a closed-circuit broadcast in the mid-'40s, hauled in front of a camera in Minneapolis after a stopping in the city. He mulled over TV, and agreed to a limited schedule of appearances in 1950 (he ended his television career the same way with occasional specials). Fred Allen was already caustically and bluntly joking about media morphing on his radio show. Jack did it, too, in this piece for *Radio Life* magazine of August 8, 1948. The title of the article is misleading, as it doesn't question what will happen "After Television," but looks at leaping into the media itself.

Jack Benny's Own Story of How His Friends In Show Business (Including a New Young Comedian Named Hope) Are Shaping Up for The Coming Trials by Television Camera By Jack Benny

IT SEEMS that every radio comedian I bump into these days is worried sick about television. What will it be like? How will it affect them? What will be the reaction of the public when it can see as well as hear these comedians? For the actor, it means learning a new medium; mastering a different technique. No more reading from scripts; every line must be memorized. The sudden transition will not be easy. We few, who won't be affected by television, can't help but notice the fear in the faces of those less fortunate actors. It's like a Frankenstein monster that haunts the m until they can't see or think straight.

Cantor Bears Up

Only recently, I had lunch with Eddie Cantor, a case in point. He spoke about Ida; his five daughters; the new picture he's producing; a play he has coming up on Broadway. He told me a few stories (which I had already heard from Jesse) and raved about some song he was doing next week on the air. But, *not once* did he mention what was upper most in his mind — television. Cantor is always acting, but he couldn't fool me. I knew that underneath his apparent gaiety — the hand-clapping, the eye-rolling, the jumping up and down — he was trying to find escape — escape from the morbid fear that was sapping his strength and confidence.

Of course, with me, it's different.

But, I couldn't help wondering how I would feel if I were in poor Eddie's spot.

As we left the restaurant, I tried to cheer him up. I shook hands with him and said, "Don't worry, Eddie." He said, "Worry about what?" Pathetically, he pretended he didn't know what I was talking about. And as the chauffeur opened the door and little Eddie stepped into his big Cadillac, I knew that during that long drive to his forty-room home in Beverly Hills the one thing on his mind was that terrible dread of television.

Then, there's Burns and Allen. I played golf with George Burns and he pulled the same act as Cantor. He made out that he didn't have a worry in the world. He purposely played a better game of golf than I did, just so I wouldn't see how upset he was. On the way back to the club house, he kept laughing and telling me the same jokes Cantor told me (which I had already heard from Jessel) and all the while I knew his nerves were at the breaking point; that the specter of television gnawed at every fiber of his being. I kept thinking how fortunate I was — that I wasn't in the same position. Poor George, and Eddie,

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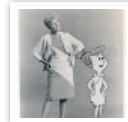


June 1940 - It must have appeared wondrous.

In 1940, someone in Morristown, New Jersey or White Plains, New York could sit at home, turn on a television set, and hear...

22 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...

4 weeks ago

Blogs to See

Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #250 - Hello my friends and welcome

back to another service of Cowboy Church. Today's musical selection begins with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans with "Whispering ...

48 minutes ago

and Bob Hope, too.

Hope Is Brave

I met Hope at N.B.C. the other day, and he was carrying on worse than Burns and Cantor. Naturally, Bob is younger. He's just getting his break, and television will hit him harder than the others. There he was, standing in the lobby surrounded by a crowd of G.I.'s, signing autographs and cracking the same jokes that George Burns told me, that Cantor told me, (which I had already heard from Jessel). And when Bob called out, "Hello Jack, I'll be with you in a second," I knew immediately from the timbre of his voice that television was making a nervous wreck out of him, too. But, I've got to hand it to Hope. In spite of the heartbreak, the fear inside of him, not once did he let down or allow his actions to betray his real feelings. He was brash and breezy, eyes sparkling, full of pep, but when I inadvertently mentioned what television would do to some radio comedians, that got him. His reaction was instantaneous. His face sobered. His manner softened. He put his arm around my shoulder, and for a brief moment I thought I saw a tear in his eye. At that instant I hated myself for having let those words slip out. How it must have hurt the boy! He said, "Buck up, Jack. It'll work out somehow." Poor Bob. He didn't want me to worry about him.

Poor Allen

'Then I got to thinking about the others. Fred Allen, for instance. What must be going on in his mind? In spite of what everybody thinks about Allen, we must admit he is intelligent. He realizes what television will mean to him. He shaves every morning. He knows what he looks like. I tuned in on his program accidentally one Sunday, and it was pitiful. He told the same jokes that Bob Hope told those G. I.'s, that George Burns told me after Cantor told me (which I had already heard from Jessel). I never felt so embarrassed for anybody in my life. The only thing that saved Allen's program was the audience. They were so sorry for him, they laughed continuously all through the show. You can't fool the American public. The people know television is just around the corner, and it was just their way of saying, "So long, Fred. You did a great job."

Last night, I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I kept tossing and turning. Every time I closed my eyes I saw poor little Eddie Cantor, Burns and Allen, Bob Hope, Fred Allen; and all those other radio comedians less fortunate than I. It was a never-ending parade. Fibber McGee and Molly, Edgar Bergen, Red Skelton, Jack Carson. Yes, even "The Great Gildersleeve." All of them potential victims of television. And as I lay there wide awake in bed, I knew what they were going through — sleepless nights, tossing and turning, wondering what the future held in store for them. The uncertainty — the agony of waiting! The feeling of complete helplessness as, moving ever closer, television crept to engulf them and relegate them to the past.

It doesn't seem fair. Why doesn't science leave well enough alone? Radio is all right the way it is. Television can wait. Another twenty years won't make any difference. I'm willing to make the sacrifice. I'll relinquish my high-place if it will help others less bestowed.

Let's not forget the human equation. Let's remember that the backbone of civilization is charity and kindness. So I say, hold off television. Science be damned! Long live radio!



Posted by [Yowp](#) at [06:53](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

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News From ME

Today's Video Link - Richard Chamberlain had the title role in the TV series Dr. Kildare which ran on NBC from 1961 to 1966 — or, making this personal, from when I was nine unt...
1 hour ago

Fernando Llera Cartoons



Intrusion of Artificial Intelligence analyzed by a group of researchers

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[fernandollercartoons.com](#)
1 day ago

Pete Hale



No Coyote vs. ACME, But a Road Runner Book - Special

thanks to reader Jonathan Avery Wilson for pointing this out to me. I had predicted a big bomb to fall on a live-action-animated film called *Coyo...
1 day ago

AFRTS Archive



Bill Stewart 1967 - Today Bill Stewart's guest is Rudy

Vallee. Rudy was the biggest of the big in the 1920s and kept going for five decades. It's a fun listen. *Bill St...
1 day ago

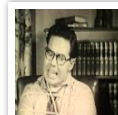
Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Born On This Day: Carl W. Stalling -

1 day ago

The Exposure Sheet





Video of the Week: Nice Try Vergill! - Hey, ya'!!! Sorry for the lack of

posts here this week, but know that I am hard at work curating next week's articles. Since this upcoming week sees Daws ...
2 days ago

**Cartoon Research**
Animal Kingdom: The 50th Anniversary of Disney's "Robin Hood" - Fifty years later, produced at that uncertain time at Disney and dismissed by a number of critics, has developed quite the audience from multiple generati...

2 days ago

**Termite Terrace headlines**



Today's Post: The 1964 World's Fair Documentary and other

64 World's Fair stuff - This documentary is quite good. Most of you have probably already seen it, but I'm sharing it here anyways. While I'm add it, why not share some ...

6 days ago

Mark Kausler's CatBlog
Felix Vs. A Spy From Brigandia - In these Felix strips from 4-24 to 5-7-32, Felix returns from the Moon, only to encounter a spy from the kingdom of Brigandia, who wants to steal all the p...

1 week ago

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