

Sunday 10 December 2023

## Dollars For Day

It took a little over seven years for the pieces of the Jack Benny radio show to be put together.

The last one was found for the start of the 1939-40 season. Kenny Baker had suddenly quit after accepting an exclusive contract with the Texas Company (he was billed for the last show of the previous season but never appeared) and Benny needed a new vocalist.

That's when Dennis Day was added to the regular cast of Mary Livingstone, Don Wilson, Phil Harris and Eddie Anderson.

I liked Baker better as a vocalist but there's no denying Dennis was able to expand his role as a timid singer into a comedic actor, with over-the-top dialects and impressions that were more than good enough to work in the context of the show. I must admit I laughed more at Day than Baker. And Day was no dummy when it came to the business side, either.



The North American Newspaper Alliance published this profile on May 11, 1950. Only in print could someone make a "Chesterfield" reference to a star of the Lucky Strike show; a network or ad agency would never allow it.

### Dennis Day's Income Close to Crosby and Hope By HAROLD HEFFERNAN

HOLLYWOOD, May 10—(NANA)—Millions of radio fans who listen to him heckling and being heckled by Jack Benny on the radio every Sunday have come to regard Dennis Day as only a naive mamma's boy with a rare tenor voice. Dennis is a lot more than that. Still on the sunny side of 35, he's scampering up the financial ladder so fast that the mighty Crosby, Hope and Godfrey must soon move over and make room.

Dennis revealed on the set of his new movie, "I'll Get By," now in production on the 20th Century-Fox lot, that already run up such a tote on the income board that his occasional personal-appearance tours around the country mean nothing on the profit side. But Dennis feels the P. A.s are part of his responsibility.

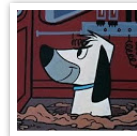
"Even if you lose money on a tour," he explained in a strident tone far removed from the guileless manner affected professionally, "you must let your radio fans see you in person. It's a tough assignment to take on at the end of a working year, but necessary. You play six shows a day and sing eight or nine songs at each. And you can chat with the people—Lord love em! This year they're going to see me in a motion picture, so no P.-A. tour. I get a real vacation on my boat as a result."

#### Has Two Air Shows

Squeezing a picture into his work schedule requires some tight planning for radioman Day. He has two air shows—his own, "A Day in the Life of Dennis Day," and his stint on the Jack Benny show. He owns two music-publishing companies and personally looks over all material submitted after it gets the green light from his brother, John McNulty, who manages his business affairs. Also he must make enough recordings to fill public demand—no small task.

"A record put me where I am today," said Dennis, "so I keep pretty close watch on that end of the business. I was studying law at Manhattan college and my singing and imitations were regarded as a bit of play by myself and my family. I had an appendectomy and while I was recuperating I would amuse myself by cutting a record or two by way of passing the time. One day some fellows from a Canadian

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### Old TV History

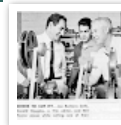


January 1932 - 1932 was not going to be a good year for one

company when it came to television, and problems started in January. The De Forest Radio Company owned sever...

1 day ago

### Yowp



A Few Hanna-Barbera Staff Pictures -

There's something pleasing about seeing pictures of the people who worked on the classic Hanna-Barbera cartoons. Of course, publicity photos of Bill Hanna ...

3 weeks ago

## Blogs to See

### News From ME

Today's Video Link - One of the first TV detective shows I liked watching was Richard Diamond, Private Eye. It was created by Blake Edwards as a radio show that ran from 1949 t...

2 hours ago

recording outfit were in the next booth. I was recording "Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair" and when I finished they offered to buy the disc. They gave me \$75 and suddenly I was in business.

"I used to sing now and again on a radio show, just for spending money, but I was all for criminal law—a branch of the profession which has always interested me immensely. About this time Kenny Baker pulled out of the Jack Benny show and they were looking for a tenor. Mary Livingstone heard my recording of 'Jeanie' and persuaded Jack to audition me. I guess I sang 20 songs before we were through. There were so many applications for the spot that I had no hope of getting it. You can imagine my surprise when my name was called out by Jack.

#### Has Wit and Poise

"I said 'Yes, please!' I was very nervous, my voice was higher than normal and eager to please as a spaniel. Jack turned to Mary and said 'That's our boy—I want him just like that—eager, shy, with his mother somewhere in the background all the time.'"

That, Dennis said, is the type character he plays in "I'll Get By"—the naive lad who says the things other people only think.

In real life Dennis, (born Eugene Dennis McNulty in New York's Bronx) is a lively, personable fellow who dresses meticulously in British-tailored clothes. He's quick with a witty retort and his social poise is enviable. He can balance a cup of tea and a sandwich and give a rattling good interview with the air of a Chesterfield.

His lawyer mind prompts him to analyze each angle of his work. He plans a season's programs as he would a lawsuit. He takes a singing lesson nearly every day.

"You can't afford to drift in the entertainment field," Dennis remarked. "There are too many clever fellows about and a lot of 'em can sing."

He lives in a modest section of Los Angeles and is one of the few big-money men in the Hollywood entertainment world who has no swimming pool. His wife, the former Peggy Ahlquist, is a non-professional. They have two small sons, Dennis and Patrick.

Dennis added to his brood and carried on appearing, off and on, with Jack in between a steady career of nightclubs, fairs, a touring company of "Brigadoon" and the like. Jack's regular weekly appearances on TV ended in 1965. Day talked to *Vancouver Sun* reporter Les Wedman about it, and his career, in a story published May 6, 1965.

Dennis Day is feeling pretty sad that The Jack Benny Show is being dropped from television, not because it means he's losing the job he's had for 25 years but because he knows how tough it will be for the famed comedian not to be working regularly.

"With nine kids I can't afford to retire," Day declared. "Jack isn't exactly penniless but he isn't happy unless he's working.

Of course, the way things are in TV, all of this season's Benny shows were on film by the end of last January. However, Day explained it wasn't until just a little while ago that anyone knew that NBC wasn't renewing the program.

"Gomer Pyle did it," Day said. "Our ratings just dropped and sponsors only look at the ratings." One sponsor was willing to pick up his part of the show again next fall but with Benny's series being the most expensive half hour on the air, Day said, it would have meant the comedian taking a substantial cut.

"It's an end of an era," Day added. "No other comedian made the successful transition from radio to television. Benny has been doing TV since 1950, which means he's been on for 15 years."

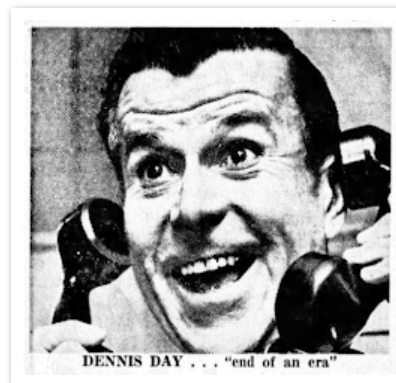
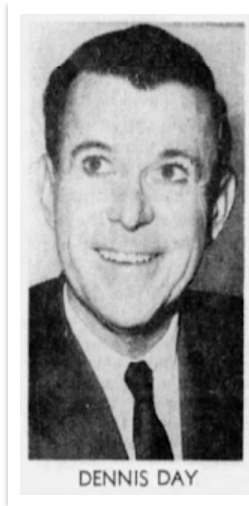
Day, who's really 47 but insists he's younger because Jack Benny is only 39 and nobody on the show can be older, says his association with Benny has meant everything to him.

"We've been like one family—Don Wilson, Rochester, Mahlon Merrick, the writers."

Benny, said Dennis, is a generous man, and all the time he's been with him he's never heard the comedian get angry at anyone.

Day is here for a singing engagement at Ken Stauffer's New Cave Theatre Restaurant. At the end of May he goes to London for some TV appearances and then to entertain servicemen in Germany.

He will be doing Brigadoon in San Francisco. He's hoping for more guest shots on TV like his Burke's Law and Bing Crosby Show this season. He'd also like to do concerts and a Broadway show but has no plans for a TV show of his own.



#### Fernando Llera Cartoons



State Department approves sale of tank ammunition to Israel,

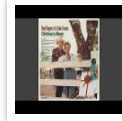
bypassing Congress. -

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fernandollera.com

7 hours ago

#### Movies with Michael

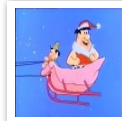


Cowboy Church #254 - Hello my friends and welcome

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

7 hours ago

#### The Exposure Sheet



Video of the Week: Hanna-Barbera Christmas Classics on

VHS - It's been another slow week for updates (don't worry, I have a little something planned for every day of next week), but I couldn't let the week go by wit...

2 days ago

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Grumpy Old Scrooge: The 45th Anniversary of "The Stingiest Man in Town" - Walter Matthau was such perfect casting for Ebenezer Scrooge.

2 days ago

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The ask... - Every year at about this time of year I ask your help. Your contributions are an important part of keeping this running. So far we're doing three thin...

3 days ago

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



This Saturday: Christmas Psychotronic in Orinda!

5 days ago

He once had one—The Dennis Day Show, with Cliff (Charley Weaver) Arquette. They were on for 2 1/2 years.

The half-year is accounted for by the show being knocked off the air by a more popular opponent . . . the I Love Lucy series.

Jack Benny has several specials lined up for next season's TV and he'll also guest on shows and make personal appearances, Day said. Benny doesn't have any other television shows his production company owns. "He hasn't been very lucky with the ones he did have—the Marge and Gower Champion show, the Gisele MacKenzie show and the Wayne and Shuster summer series," the singer stated. Day has made more from The Jack Benny Show this year than ever, because CBS is running the old shows on its daytime schedule. This means residual payments for everybody.

He also gets paid handsomely for two TV commercials—one for cigars and another for a detergent. Day said he doesn't smoke at all so he doesn't mind trying to improve on the bad image cigars got in the days when Edward G. Robinson and other movie bad guys were smoking them.

But he occasionally does do dishes so he can really be convincing about soap.

Looking at the big picture, Dennis wasn't a huge star. His TV series never achieved the popularity of shows starring other singers, such as Perry Como, Andy Williams or Dean Martin. The advent of rock and roll didn't help his music career.

In the end, he'll always be associated, more than anything, as a member of the Jack Benny cast. As a 1965 Vancouver *Province* story put it "the ageless Benny...frequently slips into Dennis Day's conversation." But the Benny boost wouldn't have happened if Day didn't have talent. Day arguably went farther in show business than any of Jack's other vocalists. Ask Michael Bartlett.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:28](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 1 comment:

**Anonymous** 10 December 2023 at 10:06

Interesting valuable historic information. Puts things in new perspective for me.

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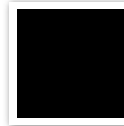
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[Looney Tunes: Collector's Choice: Volume 2 First](#)

[Feedback](#) - A review of \*Collector's Choice Vol. 2\* has just been released. Looks good to me: Oddly, he says the sync on \*The Eager Beaver\* is off. I have never se...

1 week ago

[Mark Kausler's CatBlog](#)  
[So Long Mabel](#) - H Here, as an early Christmas present, are the remaining "Now Listen Mabel" strips by George Herriman from 19191222 to 19200110. The parallels with "Kraz...

2 weeks 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 ...

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