

Sunday 30 June 2024

## Oh, Benita!

Jack Benny's radio show in the second of the 1940s benefitted from terrific casting, with new funny characters appearing on the show. One of the most inspired choices Jack could have made was hiring Ronald Colman and Benita Hume to play his next-door neighbours.

It could have been a disaster. Colman's upper-crest Englishman could have come across as cold and superior. But Colman was a fine actor. Listeners could identify with him, an exasperated man who had been imposed upon time and time again by the socially-inept cheapskate Benny. It's how they might have reacted. Benita proved to have comic abilities, too, and provided a humorous counterpoint to her husband.



On television, Jack used Jimmy and Gloria Stewart the same way, but I've always thought the Colmans were better. Ronnie still had a very English properness and bearing while, at the same time, was willing to make fun of himself (carrying his Oscar to a race-track, handing out cards with his signature, praising his own movies).

The Benny appearances were so effective, even Hollywood stars thought the Colmans lived next to Jack (they didn't), and gave them an open door for their own series, *The Halls of Ivy*, which managed to tread the line between comedy and drama.

There were times you *thought* the Colmans were on the Benny show, but they weren't. In another neat bit of casting, the Colman's butler Sherwood, played by Eric Snowden, would appear and refer to his employers, as if they were about to come on the air.

The Colmans make an appearance in a column about Jack by Tex McCrary and Jinx Falkenburg. They were, until the avalanche known as Milton Berle appeared, probably the biggest stars on television before 1948. Their careers petered out as the 1950s wore on and new people came to the fore on TV.

Here's their column of December 10, 1951, courtesy of the Herald Tribune Syndicate. This also includes Jack being quite serious about his trip to Korea during the war there to entertain and comfort soldiers.

### CANDID CLOSE-UP

By TEX MCCRARY and JINX FALKENBURG

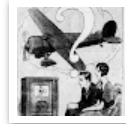
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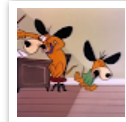


September-October 1930 - Amidst plenty of predictions

and "television is around the corner" chatter in the popular press, Chicago's two TV stations carried on with regular program...

1 day ago

### Yowp



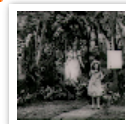
Dear Old Dad - Augie Doggie and Doggie Daddy had several

forefathers that were combined into a pleasant cartoon series. Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera partly borrowed from t...

3 weeks ago

## Blogs to See

### Movies with Michael



Silent Film of the Month: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1910) -

Run Time: 13 minutes. Studio: Selig Polyscope Company. Director: Otis Turner. Writer: Otis Turner. Based on the children's book by L. Frank Baum. Mai...

2 hours ago

KNOWN to audiences as a top comic, among comedians Jack Benny is the best possible *audience*. He proved it at the Friars' dinner this year, where he spent most of the evening writhing in the happy agony of laughter at Fred Allen, for instance, who was the first major casualty in TV, but scored highest at the Waldorf that night. Jack remembers that this joke hit him hardest:

"Jack Benny used to play the backwoods theaters," wheezed Fred Allen. "In fact one theater was so far back in the woods that the manager was a bear! (Laughter.) *They paid him off in honey!* (Howls of laughter.)"

And George Burns, minus Gracie Allen, "belted" Benny, too:

"George's speech was the kind of thing you say to three people around a table—but the way he did it, it made a thousand people howl. He kidded me about how easy it is to make me laugh. He proved it with a glass of water. He held up a glass and said, 'Look Jack—a glass of water.' I *screamed!*"

Perhaps because he has spent a lot of time on *both sides* of laughter. Jack Benny is the most highly skilled craftsman in his trade—deftly, he devised a formula whereby Ronald Colman could get laughs without losing dignity, and thus created for Colman a brand-new career as a polished comic:

"Ronnie had been—and still is—the most dignified figure in California. He did very little radio, other than serious dramatic things. His agents talked him into one comedy show that just about convinced him never to try it again—one of those insult routines.

"About a year later, I got the idea of using him on my show—but with a switch: Let *him* pitch—I was the target. We're very good friends, and Ronnie agreed to do it for me on my promise that it would be in complete good taste. Maybe you remember the show . . . the telephone rang in the Colmans' home and Benita picked it up . . .

Benita: It's fah you, Ronnie.

Colman: Who is it, Benita?

Benita: Jack Benny.

Colman: Please, *not* while I'm *eating*.

"Ronnie loved being on the throwing end of insults. Told me he'd come back on the program again any time."

He did come back, often. The Ronald Colman spots are radio classics. Colman has great respect for Benny's sense of timing, his feel for comedy. At broadcast rehearsals. Jack would repeatedly break in: "Ronnie, you're not reading that line right. Try it *this way* . . ."

Only once was Jack a little timid about his directing the week—Ronald Colman won the academy award.

Only once has Jack been stopped cold by an audience—and it was an audience of *one*. The story starts in Korea, where Jack spent 19 days at the front last summer, bringing a little laughter to a bunch of homesick, battle-weary kids.

"Whenever I'd do a show for hundreds of those kids, the faces of one or two of them would always seem to win out over the sameness of men in battle dress. One face here—one face there—seemed to sum up the whole story. And one day there was a kid that had every headline written right across his young face. He was sitting down front, and after the show, he came over to me, and talked a little—I don't remember what he said probably asked questions about things back in the States. The details, I forgot, but the face . . . never!

"Two weeks later, I was walking through a hospital in Tokyo, going from bed to bed, telling jokes, getting laughs. I heard a voice calling out—'Hey, remember me?' I turned around and all the bitterness of the war hit me right where a laugh lives. I was that same young face I'd seen up front in Korea. This time, it wasn't so easy to talk to him. What can you say to get a laugh from a kid who's *lost both his legs* . . .?"

In Korea, Jack got close enough to the front lines to feel the thump of howitzer fire:

"I stood nearby watching the boys setting off one round after another—they asked me if I would like to fire one. Sure . . . and I did. Afterward, the boys picked up the shell casing and autographed it for me. They said I had made history—not only the first comedian, but the first *civilian* to fire a howitzer at the enemy."

Besides laughter, Jack took with him to Korea, something else men miss—"Marjorie Reynolds!



Mary and Jack Benny  
Mary shared Jack's second big moment, when he was guest of honor at a formal dinner of the Friars club in November for the second time; in 1937 she shared the first. "That was a great night—they made speeches about me—Willie Collier was the toastmaster. Just before I got up to speak, Willie handed me a telegram and asked me to read it aloud. I did—'Dear Jack: When you go home tonight, be sure to put out the garbage.—Mary.'"



SURPRISE VISIT—Jack Benny, who doesn't realize that he's an uninvited guest, visits Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Colman for dinner on The Jack Benny Show over WTVT Sunday evening at 7:30. Benny's invitation was intended for an old London friend of the Colmans.

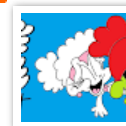
## News From ME

Last Week Several Years Ago - John Oliver and his crew are taking a few weeks off by they've left us a gift. The entirety of Season 3 has been uploaded to YouTube. Go watch 'em. Downloa...  
6 hours ago

## Cartoon Research

Howard Beckerman (1930-2024) - He left us on Saturday. Here's a little tribute to a man who inspired a generation of animators.  
6 hours ago

## Pete Hale



Read My Newest Blog - \*No, I'm NOT getting rid of this

blog.\* Check out a new blog of mine, intended as my "official site", simply titled Pete Hale, Cartoonist. It is mainly ...  
20 hours ago

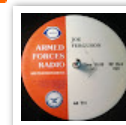
## Fernando Llera Cartoons



As poor debate showing roils Democrats, Bidders

implore donors to stay course. - ©2024 fernandollera.com  
22 hours ago

## AFRTS Archive

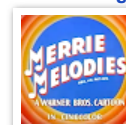


Joe Ferguson 1983 - Thank you once again Joe

Ferguson for sharing your shows with us. 1983 was a great year for me, finishing up in Panama. Quite a tour.

\*Joe Ferguson ...  
22 hours ago

## Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



And This Blog Loves Cartoon Voice Artists -

1 day ago

Remember the bit Faye Emerson did on my television show that long, long kissing routine, with Frank Sinatra? I wanted to use the same hit in Korea — Marjorie Reynolds was fine for Faye Emerson's part, but I had to be very careful about picking the right actor for Sinatra's role. You see, it would be very difficult for any actor, playing next to *me*, to register enough impact as a lover. I finally found somebody, and of course, coached him on the kissing technique. By the time of our first show, he had adapted himself to my style quite well. The boys liked him, and if I go back to Korea, I think I'll take *Errol Flynn* with me again . . .”



If you read Irving Fein's biography of Benny, you can find some of the dialogue between him and Flynn in their Asian tour. Fein reveals the pace of the tour caught up with Jack, whose doctor ordered him to go to bed for a week when he got home.

As for the Colmans, their last appearance on Jack's radio show was October 28, 1951. They re-made their radio debut from 1945 on the Benny TV show on November 4, 1956. It was their only appearance with Jack on television. By that time, the Colmans weren't "next door" to Benny; they were living in Santa Barbera. Colman's acting career was just about finished. He told the United Press at the time the kinds of roles he played weren't being written any more. His health may have been a reason, too. He was treated in hospital in 1957 for lung problems which took his life the following year.

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

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

## 1 comment:

**Hans Christian Brando** [30 June 2024 at 16:56](#)

When you get a chance, look for Brian Aherne's book "A Dreadful Man" in a library or some used book site, about his friend George Sanders, whom Benita married after Ronald Colman died. She wrote great letters, which Aherne quotes extensively throughout the book; and was crazy about George, who fell apart after she died in 1967 and finally committed suicide in 1972.

[Reply](#)

 Enter comment

### The Exposure Sheet



Video of the Week: A Daws Butler Profile - There are few people I

like to talk more about on this blog than Daws Butler, and today, I've got another opportunity to do so. Check out this news segmen...  
2 days ago

### Mark Kausler's CatBlog

Felix is a Rich Man's Toy - Hi Readers, Here are the Felix strips from 19320731 to 19320813. Felix is really passed around from rich family to rich family in these dailies. The 8-1, w...  
1 week ago

### Termite Terrace headlines



Today's Video Link -

5 weeks ago

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