

Sunday 7 July 2024

Jack Benny, 1935 Version

It's a little hard for old-radio fans to picture Jack Benny without Rochester, Dennis Day, the Maxwell and being something other than 39 years old. But not only was Benny on the air for a goodly number of years without them, he was number one in radio popularity polls.

We're talking about the Jack Benny of 1935. Don Wilson was around then, touting the real fruit goodness of Jell-O ("twice as good as ever before"). Mary Livingstone was more prone to dizziness and poetry than sarcastic cracks of later years. At the start of the year his singer was Frank Parker, who had appeared on radio in the early '30s but was elevated to stardom by the Benny show. Don Bestor was his bandleader (no Phil Harris yet).



Here are two pieces marking Jack's 190th and 200th shows, both in 1935. First up is a column from the *Pittsburgh Press*, July 14. Unfortunately, the broadcast mentioned is not available for listening. It aired before the Benny-Allen feud existed.

Vacation Days Are Here For Jack As Fourth Radio Series Is Ended Benny Plans Return In Autumn With Schlepperman

By S. H. STEINHAUSER

Jack Benny, the ginger ale--automobile--tire and desert salesman, will do his 190th coast-to-coast broadcast at 7 o'clock tonight, then leave the air until September, when he will return for the same sponsor. Fred Allen will be tonight's guest star. Since May, 1932, when he made his radio debut he has had four sponsors, three of the firm names beginning with the word General but strangely enough, he has never acquired the nickname General. His friends know him as Jack. Mary Livingstone, his wife, calls him "toots" off the air and on. He calls her Sadie, because that's her name.

In almost two-hundred broadcasts, Jack has never once wavered in the slightest from wholesome fun. On an October Sunday night he started to comment on one of Frank Parker's songs "That's darn good" and his tongue slipped and he said "damn." Jack has never ceased being sorry about that. He's that kind of a person.

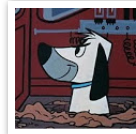
In every survey of the past year Jack has been voted almost unanimously radio's outstanding entertainer.

Jack's story is one of the rise of a vaudeville ham to a weekly radio salary of \$6,500, a stage income of \$10,000 per week and a movie contract calling for \$70,000 per picture. He has just finished one talkie and is starting another. And with their fortune, Jack and Mary remain the same folks they were when the going was not so soft. They have an apartment in New York and employ one servant. Mary likes to cook the things she knows Jack likes best. When they are at home the maid is not permitted to answer the door. They do that.

Evenings at home are "family affairs," with Gracie Allen and George Burns from across the hall in, to compare adopted babies. Drinking is at a minimum. An occasional cocktail is the limit.

Their engagement is one of the funny stories of radio. It would make an ideal skit for a broadcast. Jack

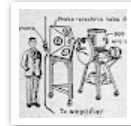
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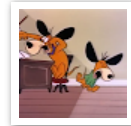


November-December 1930 - Once upon a time, there were

two related companies—the Jenkins Television Corporation and the De Forest Radio Company. Jenkins had a TV station at Jersey C...

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...

4 weeks ago

Blogs to See

News From ME

Today's (and possibly This Week's) Political Post - I have a number of friends who want to discuss the "Should Biden drop out?" matter with me. I really don't want to have the same conversation over and over...

1 hour ago

was courting Mary's sister and Mary always gave Jack the bird. In fact she bribed some of her pals to go to a theater where Jack was playing and to refrain from laughing or applauding.

If you take Jack's story, on a certain Sunday he proposed to Mary, on Monday Mary said "Yes," on Tuesday the engagement was broken, on Wednesday she changed her mind, on Thursday the engagement was off again, and on Friday they were married and life became just one gag after another.
* * *

Jack's own story begins like this, "To begin with, I used to be dumb. Then Mr. Marconi invented radio and it became unpopular and I quit fiddling while a blond girl thumped a piano, to become a vocal sandwich man. It was the toughest step I ever took in my life, to rehearse in private, then to walk into a studio where everyone looked like they wanted to hang me, then to spring gags on George Olsen's band and Ethel Shutta and hope they would laugh. The waits were terrifying."

Jack skipped too much territory. His career started when his father gave him a violin and a wrench and told him to become a plumber and a violinist. By the time Benny Kubelsky (that's Jack) was 16 he had thrown the wrench away and was playing the violin in a Chicago orchestra—and he didn't play "Love in Bloom."

A year later he went professional and started a vaudeville tour with a pianist. Come the war, and Jack joined the navy. Officers who knew of his fiddling drafted him for seamen's shows. His violin got no laughs and no money for seamen's benefits, so he started to wisecrack. That was actually the beginning of one of radio's greatest careers. Jack Benny the ace clown of radio is a war product.

The war over, Jack returned to the stage, talking and telling jokes, and without his fiddle. He broke a record of eight weeks at a Los Angeles theater, landed a contract as a master of ceremonies, met Mary and her sister, married Mary. They went east on their honeymoon, were invited to a show by Earl Carroll, joined the show—the Vanities stole the show with Jack as the star and Mary acting his dumbbell secretary. And there was born a radio idea—a comedian husband and a dumb wife. But if you think Mary's dumb, you're crazy. She's dumb enough to collect \$1,000 per week for her radio services and Jack isn't telling how much he pays her for stage work. She keeps out of the movies.

With all of the talk, scandal and divorce business in the entertainment world, Jack and Mary are outstanding examples of the other side of the story. They are madly in love. Their eighth wedding anniversary was observed in Pittsburgh. Soon after leaving here they adopted a baby. Some day, they say, they'll adopt more.
* * *

To make his story more unusual Jack, although the star, has always made himself the goat for his associates' jokes but with all that has kept his lead on them. Yet he has added fame to the careers of Don Bestor, Frank Parker, Don Wilson and Sam Hearn "Schlepperman's" "Jake sent me."

When Jack went to the coast he was wondering what to do about "Schlepperman." He had promised Sam Hearn, portrayer of the role, that he would be needed in Hollywood within four weeks but Schlepperman never got into the skits. Jack decided that "Jake sent me" was a thing of the past for the current season. So Schlepperman went on an Eastern stage tour and is still packing them in and drawing down more than \$2,000 per week.

A wire from Jack assures our readers that Schlepperman will positively rejoin him when the Benny troupe returns to work in Radio City next September. There will be a grand reunion on the first broadcast of the next series, with Frank Parker and Hearn both on the job.

But things changed. Parker got his own show on CBS and was replaced with Michael Bartlett, who didn't last two months, then Kenny Baker was brought in. Jack was in the movies now. Bestor wanted to remain in the east so he was replaced with Johnny Green.

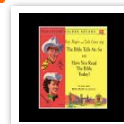
Jack's 200th broadcast was on December 1. A transcription of it does not exist, but it was touted as a tribute to the first show on May 2, 1932, with current cast members re-enacting parts performed by the original players. The only thing is the premiere broadcast consisted of music, and Jack making quips to the home audience. There were no comedy routines.

The first bandleader on the show was George Olsen. The *Chicago Tribune* caught up with him.

We've reprinted an interview with Olsen from the 1950s where he took credit for Jack Benny being hired for the show. In this story, he takes credit for an idea that turned out to be a success (but disliked by the show's sponsor). As Benny, soon with Harry Conn, wrote the

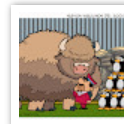


Movies with Michael



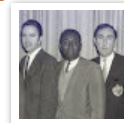
Cowboy Church #184 - Hello my friends and welcome to another service of Cowboy Church. Today's musical selection begins with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans singing "Have You Rea...
1 hour ago

Fernando Llera Cartoons



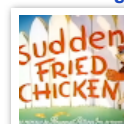
One American bison and several Humboldt penguins are the latest arrivals at Chapultepec Park zoo. - ©2024 fernandollercartoons.com
17 hours ago

AFRTS Archive



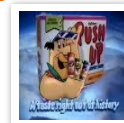
Herman Griffith 1968 - Jim Pewter, Herman and Roger Carroll Herman was the first of the really great soul jocks at AFRTS. He was making waves at KGFJ and went worldwide....
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Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



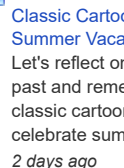
Tomorrow is National Fried Chicken Day - "What's the topic for today? How do we end a truly lousy week, notable for unendi...
1 day ago

The Exposure Sheet



Video of the Week: A Taste Right Out of History - Everyone loves ice cream when that summer heat hits, and one of my favorites growing up was the push-up popsicles. These were exactly what they sounded li...
2 days ago

Cartoon Research



Classic Cartoons on Summer Vacation Part 2 - Let's reflect on summers past and remember those classic cartoons that celebrate summer vacation.
2 days ago

Canada Dry show, and Olsen did not, you can take the claim however you want. The first show exists, and you can hear the orchestra play "That's How We Make Music" and Olsen botch Benny's name.

OLSEN RECALLS 1ST BENNY SHOW ON ANNIVERSARY

Idea of Kidding Sponsor Was George's

BY LARRY WOLTERS.

Oddly enough, the New York Philharmonic Symphony; orchestra and Jack Benny are both putting on their 200th broadcast this afternoon. The symphony will present an all request program. Jack Benny will turn back the clock (6 p. m. on WENR) and recreate his very first program. In that show, Incidentally, George Olsen and Ethel Shutta were probably regarded as the stars by radio listeners since they were already well acquainted with them. But they soon decided that Benny was good, too. George recalled some of the amusing incidents at the College inn the other evening in connection with that first broadcast. The Idea for the program was Bertha Brainerd's, the NBC executive. George and Ethel were selected to provide the music. A comedian was wanted and Benny was finally picked as one who ought to click on the air.

Kidding Product, Olsen's Idea.

And here's something for which millions of radio fans have George Olsen to thank. The idea of kidding the sponsor and the product was his. When it was suggested to the sponsor he said, "Go as far as you like." The rest, of course, is history. That suggestion has had a mighty effect in radio. In the three intervening years the heavy, stodgy hand of many a sponsor has been eased because of the success of the foolery over the sponsor's wares initiated on the Benny program.

The first Benny show went on from the old "Midnight Frolics on the Amsterdam roof In New York In April, 1932. There was an audience, but a glass curtain separated them from the performers.

Benny Introduced as Denny.

Olsen Introduced Benny thus: "Ladies and gentlemen, Jack Denny, the Canada (pause) dry humorist."

(Denny was a favorite band leader that season. What's become of him now?)

To which Jack retorted, "Jack Benny is the name, Lopez." And so the show was off amid a welter of confusion, prevailing to this day.

Ethel Shutta sang "Rockabye Moon" and "Listen to the German Band," two numbers which are almost her trade marks now. Olsen recalls that his crew played "That's How We Make Music."

In order to make the laughter spontaneous the Olsen bandsmen were not allowed to hear Benny in rehearsal. In a few weeks the program became so popular that Olsen was besieged by players from other bands who wanted to join his outfit just to hear the comedy. Bob Rice who sat fairly near the microphone laughed so loudly during the first broadcast that they had to move him back. Listeners wrote in complaining that the one fellow roared so boisterously that he obviously was a stooge. But it was really the spontaneous reaction of Rice.

How Mary Got In.

Mary Livingstone didn't even see Jack's first broadcast. She listened in on the radio. She was first introduced as a New Jersey fan who had written a letter asking Benny for a job as secretary. Her first big laugh line came when Jack asked her whether he might take her home and she retorted that Dick (later Hotcha) Gardiner, one of the orchestra men, was taking her.

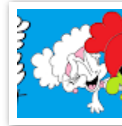
Ethel encouraged and coached Mary a lot. George and Ethel were working for NBC at the time and when the sponsor moved to CBS after 26 weeks because he found a better spot they were forced to drop out. Mary then took over the leading feminine part and Ted Weems was engaged to do the music.

For his first series Benny got \$1,250 for two programs a week. Now he is reported getting \$7,000 for one program a week. His band masters after the two mentioned above: Frank Black, Don Bestor, Jimmy Grier, and Johnny Green. Other soloists: Andrea Marsh, James Melton, Frank Parker, Michael Bartlett, and Kenny Baker.

It's a shame so few programmes from 1935 are around to be heard. Fans have to satisfy themselves with reading the scripts, all of which are intact, and re-printed by the fine folks at [BearManor Media](#). Editor Kathy Fuller-Seeley, about as knowledgeable as anyone about this period of Benny's show, provides valuable insight and context.



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 ...

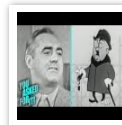
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Mark Kausler's CatBlog

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...

2 weeks ago

Termite Terrace headlines



Today's Video Link -

1 month ago

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