



Sunday 27 October 2024

Mercury Reaches Benny

Here's an example of becoming part of the popular language.

In 1956, the *San Angelo Standard* reported on a cold snap hitting Texas. The headline read: "Mercury Reaches Benny."

If you're a fan of Jack Benny, you know exactly what that means, even though he died half a century ago. People in 1956 knew about it. Ordinary people well past the age joked they were now 39 or "Jack Benny's age." The joke continued for years.

People could identify with a man who refused to admit he was getting any older. Benny instinctively knew 39 was a funny and appropriate number (against his better judgment, he celebrated a 40th birthday on TV and immediately went back to being 39).

Interestingly, publicity agents picked up on the "mercury" line. It was a different way of telling the 39 joke. This is from the *Springfield Republican*, March 31, 1957. I presume this came from CBS.



Benny's Toupee Turns Out to Be Myth

Jack Benny, whose, "'The Jack Benny Program" of last Sunday (CBS-TV, 7.30-8 WHYN-TV) was a filmed presentation from Paris with Maurice Chevalier as guest, has chalked up another "first" in a long series of "firsts" in this four-episode series made in Europe.

Jack is the first American actor to film a television comedy show in Europe for viewing in America. In fact, he filmed four of them there last summer.

Among his "firsts," Jack is the first comedian to make famous a toupee he doesn't wear. While full head of hair, he is regarded as one of the best has friends the hair-piece industry has.

He is also the first comedian who, despite the fact he constantly and publicly "murders" the violin, has played violin concerts in New York's Carnegie Hall and the Philadelphia Academy of Music. He has another such concert scheduled April 23 at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium.

His was the feature first network program to feature a singing commercial. A happy first for both Jack and The Sportsmen's Quartet, who have gone on to fame and fortune as a result of their singing Benny commercials.

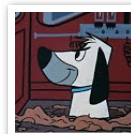
Jack is also the first to use the integrated gag-type commercial. This type of commercial, now a famous Benny trademark, gently chides the sponsor. Jack was also the first to write his announcer, Don Wilson, into the body of his show so successfully that now Don, is better known as a regular member of the Benny cast than he is as a veteran broadcaster.

Jack, back in the 1930s was the first to use trick sound effects to get laughs. Everyone has heard the sound from his mythical Maxwell; and the weird noises that come from bank vault, complete with dragging chains, have been responsible for some very hearty laughs.

Without doubt, Benny is the first comedian to enhance his reputation as a master by not saying a word, just looking—looking as only Jack Benny can look, with his timing.

Finally, of course, Jack was the first to make the number 39 this famous. The public acceptance of joke concerning Jack's alleged age is borne out by a headline on a weather story in a small town Texas newspaper. The headline read, "Mercury reaches Benny," meaning that the temperature for the day had been 39.

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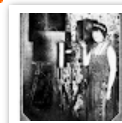
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NOTE

Comments on an article will be limited to the first few days after it is posted. While there will be a spurt of posts to early December, this blog is pretty much retired.

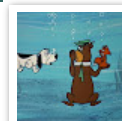
My Blog List

Old TV History



September 1928 - It wouldn't look all that elaborate today, but for 1928, it was amazing. And it happened twice in the same day. On September 11, 1928, WGY in Schenectady,...
1 day ago

Yowp



The Many Bears of Yogi - If I say "Yogi Bear" to you, you'll

likely think of pic-a-nic baskets and "The ranger won't like it, Yogi." But that isn't how Yogi started out. Warren Fo...

1 week ago

Blogs to See

Here's another from the *Hartford Courant* of Dec. 22, 1957. Again, I suspect this came from CBS.

Waukegan's Gift To TV Isn't Even Slowing Up

Who is regarded as the best friend the false hair industry ever had, although he has a full head of hair himself? Who is the worst violinist who has ever played at Carnegie Hall, the Philadelphia Academy of Music and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium? Who has been 39 years old for the past 13 years and looks younger every year? Who is so tight-fisted that he keeps all his worldly possessions tightly locked in an underground vault and installs vending machines in his living room? The answer to these questions, of course, is Jack Benny . . . a phenomenon if there ever was one.

Cracks about Benny's toupee, such as Rochester's famous one: "Mr. Benny has hair at home he hasn't even used yet!" have become part of the American language. Even though Jack has publicly murdered the violin for many years, (actually Jack is a fine violinist) every concert he has appeared in has been a howling success. One well-known critic commented, Benny is a very funny man and he makes very funny music."

As for the magic number "39," Jack Benny has made it so famous that an out of season cold snap brought forth the headline "Mercury Reaches Benny."

Many of Jack Benny's greatest admirers think he is funniest when he is not saying anything . . . just looking. Jack Benny is now in his eighth year on the CBS Television Network (this is his 20th on the air). His "regulars," Rochester and Don Wilson, have been with him the major portion of his broadcast career.

Benny has survived longer than his ancient Maxwell and every serious critic of comedy expects the Waukegan wit to continue to provide the American public with his fine brand of humor, for many more years. The Jack Benny Show is seen on Channel 18 on alternate Sundays at 7:30 p.m.



Actually, Jack wore a toupee in some of his films (photo above from *The Horn Blows At Midnight*) and in one radio promotional photo where it's really, really silly. No wonder he made fun of the idea.

I'm pretty sure Ed Wynn was exchanging retorts with announcer Graham McNamee before Benny started his radio show, though maybe by only a few weeks.

As for "39," that didn't come along until 1948. It made so big an impression that old radio fans may not know he was any age but that. While in later years, Jack told reporters he was deliberately playing down the fake age because it didn't work any more, it followed him to the grave. At least one newspaper, in a story on his death, reported "Jack Benny was 39."

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

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

2 comments:

Anonymous 27 October 2024 at 14:11

I was doing some sort of research, I think when I was in high school or college, and came across an old newspaper from 1974 that had a report of Jack's passing. I enjoyed reading the recounting of his career and his life. At the very end of the article it said "Jack Benny passed away yesterday; he was 39." I burst into tears!

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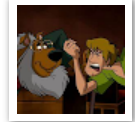


Paul Groh 27 October 2024 at 16:52

When I was growing up, practically all of my middle-aged teachers claimed to be 39 years old. I realise now that they got that from Jack Benny, but at the time I just thought that most adults refused to face facts and grow old gracefully.

The father of Major Major, a character in Joseph Heller's novel "Catch-22", is described as "a sober God-fearing man whose idea of a good joke was to lie about his age." I wonder if Heller had gotten tired of Benny's running gag by 1961.

Movies with Michael



[Scooby-Doo! Stage Fright \(2013\)](#) - A really fun direct to

video movie. In this film Daphne and Fred try out for a talent show that is to be held in an old opera house. However, when a...

1 hour ago

Cartoon Research

[Every Day Can Be Pete](#)

[Renaday](#) - Today, a special Spin tribute to the legendary Disney icon and prolific face and voice of film, television, and theme parks.

6 hours ago

News From ME

[Today's Single Feature](#) -

Barnum was a musical which I never felt got enough attention. It opened on Broadway at the end of April in 1980 and stayed there for 854 performances, whic...

8 hours ago

AFRTS Archive



[Joe Allison, 1970](#) - Joe Allison was still going the Country Corner well

into the 1970s. Somehow the music didn't need autotune... *Joe Allison - 1970* More from Joe All...

13 hours ago

Fernando Llera Cartoons



[New survey finds most Americans expect AI abuses will affect 2024](#)

[election](#) - ©2024

[fernandollercartoons.com](#)
22 hours ago

Pegbar Profiles



[The Animator, January 1938](#) - The second issue of

The Animator is missing as of this writing, so here is the third edition from the start of January 1938.

*Snow White *had its Ca...

1 day ago

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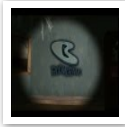
Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Mark Sandrich Presents. . . The Darkest Of Comedy

Teams -
1 day ago

The Exposure Sheet



Video of the Week: An Invitation to "Boooooomrang" - As great as

those early Boomerang bumpers that aired in the States were, the Latin American channel wasn't a slouch, either. They've had some lovely comme...
2 days ago

Mark Kausler's CatBlog
Felix 100 Smiles to Dixie - Hi Readers, Welcome to Felix from 19320925 to 19321008! Felix tries to find a new home in the dailies, but can't stand a guy with the gout in two feet...
3 weeks ago

Termite Terrace headlines



A Mistake Only Charlton Could Make - The Jetsons,

here mistakenly referred to by their Spanish name, Los Supersonicos, in Charlton's Huckleberry Hound#3.
3 months ago

Show All

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