

Sunday, 24 November 2024

## Let's Talk to Rochester

If you listen to any of the Jack Benny radio broadcasts from American military bases, you'll hear huge cheers for Eddie Anderson.

Soldiers, sailors, marines and air force personnel likely could identify with Rochester. He basically did what he felt like in the Benny home and even got in some one-liners making fun of his boss. They must have dreamed about doing that to their superior officers.

Some people couldn't see why the character was popular. They couldn't look past the fact that Rochester was a "servant" and the writers tossed in some black stereotype behaviour. The latter was mainly during the early years. By the time the Benny television show came on the air in 1950, the Benny character treated Rochester about the same as he did his non-black cast (eg. Benny asked Mary Livingstone to answer the phone or the door).

One story in a black newspaper in the eastern U.S. included a column roasting the Rochester character; the paper put a disclaimer on the article, saying it was the opinion of the writer.

Anderson briefly addressed the issue in a feature story in *The North West Enterprise*, April 26, 1944. The four-page weekly was published by a black fraternal group in Seattle.



### BACK STAGE WITH 'ROCHESTER'

By John L. (Jack) Blount

It isn't every celebrity that wants to be interviewed and "pawed over"—just to help someone else get his (the celebrity's) name in print again—and I don't blame them at all! I rather sympathize with them. Isn't it enough to spend days and months (and maybe more) in preparation for the benefit or entertainment, or pleasure of Mr. and Mrs. Public—without having to dig up and rehash all the facts in the case—plus the history of your great-grandfather's life. If you have done your job well, and they like it, the public will know all about it!

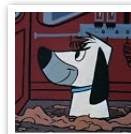
And so I don't blame Eddie (Rochester) Anderson when, Sunday night in Vancouver, B. C., he was reluctant to talk about himself. He seemed to prefer to talk about Jack Benny, whom (the company) all love as a big good natured brother.

But I had gone all the way from Bremerton, Wash., U. S. A., up to Vancouver, B. C. (I just learned about that "U. S. A." part after getting outside for about 48 hours)—with a kind of triple purpose in view: To see "Rochester" on some private business, and then to see Rochester on some public business, and finally, just to see Rochester! You see, I had promised some friends on two big Seattle papers that I would bring back a "story" if they would get me a pass to the big Jack Benny broadcast in Vancouver—and so-o-o-o

And now about Rochester. He is really a "humdinger" (if you can understand my language)—and he has got idea of his own—with dignity, poise and self-confidence.

Sunday afternoon out at Hastings Park I buttonholed him, backstage, sometime near the end of the big broadcast, after he had "gone on" and set nearly 10,000 people on their left ears gasping for breath. Of course I buttonholed him by appointment, and so, after meeting most of the company and Jack Benny himself, I got down to business, the private talk part, and Rochester obligingly promised to do what I

## About Me



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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 mid-December, this blog is pretty much retired.

## My Blog List

### Old TV History

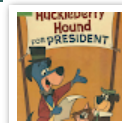


**W2XX -**  
The 1920s were an experimental age for television.

Some TV stations were owned by companies and had a regular, though limited, schedule of crude programmin...

1 day ago

### Yowp



**President Huck -**  
How long have animated cartoon characters

been "running" for the U.S. presidency? Well, Popeye and Bluto did. So did Betty Boop (as the crowd chanted her ...

2 weeks ago

## Blogs to See

### News From ME

**From the E-Mail Bag...**

I've received several messages about the Saturday Night movie. Here's one from Graeme Burk... Long time reader, probably first time commenter... Your opinion of...

5 hours ago

asked in the way of helping me with a certain project. Then, to complete the visit, I switched the talk to the other thing: Rochester's start and climax to fame. I wanted to know when and how he did it and hinted that I wanted to write something about it.

He "smelled a mouse" right away and faltered.

"Look here," he warned me. "A lot of newspaper people have got the wrong idea about Negro actors and players." (He referred to the Negro press).

"And although they are not hurting me at all, I hate to see them gum up the works for young actors coming on by trying to be "all holy" and ["]exacting in their criticisms." He went on to say that the pleasure-seeking and theatre-going public liked the portrayals and it liked fun and laughter, and if it takes a dice game to give them this then a dice game must be included in the "picture." He further hinted at an "overdose of race-consciousness["] on the part of the critics. He finally put me off on the matter of how and when he had started.

"Come on backstage again tonight," he told me, "when we will entertain the service man and their families."

You can bet I was there—although I had to drag Rochester back into a dark corner to escape autograph fans—boys and girls, men and women, everybody.

He said that he had been with Jack Benny since Easter seven years ago. He had been given an audition for the selection of a character of "Train Porter." He had scored and then applied himself in earnest to the role, and all future roles—all of which has resulted in Eddie (Rochester) Anderson attaining something close to "stellar attraction" in the Jack Benny broadcasts and pictures.

I wasn't satisfied with the brevity of the interview—but he promised more when the "Jack Benny Company and Rochester" come to the Puget Sound Navy Yard soon. Of course, I wanted to ask some of the other members of the company about Rochester to get another angle, but I did not want the answer favorable "for my benefit."

However—they didn't wait. They had seen me backstage talking with him and some of them came to me while Rochester was "out front." He was praised, and I was told that he "tops" with every last one of them!

Also—none of them failed to mention how "lovely" Jack Benny is.

And about the Jack Benny broadcast and show in Vancouver: well, that's not my subject—but it couldn't be beat anywhere—anytime!

Regretfully, it doesn't appear the columnist wrote a follow-up story.

Benny knew listeners loved Rochester. You don't hear a whole scene at the start of the radio show handed solely to Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day or Phil Harris. But you do with Rochester, in later years in dialogue with fine actor Roy Glenn. Eddie Anderson was trusted by Jack to deliver laughs. And he did, time and time again.



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

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

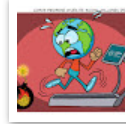
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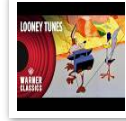
#### [Fernando Llera](#) [Cartoons](#)



[COP29 agrees to \\$300 billion for poorer nations in response to](#)

[climate change](#). - ©2024 fernandollera.com  
6 hours ago

#### [Movies with Michael](#)



[Some Cartoons for Saturday Morning #204](#) -

Hello, my friends and happy Saturday morning. Once again it is time for some classic cartoons. Today's cartoon selection begins with the second Coyote ...  
1 day ago

#### [AFRTS Archive](#)



[AFN Liza Minelli interview 1975](#) - In 1975 Liza was touring

Europe. AFN was there. Craig Miller and Bill Swisher caught up with her at the American Clipper Lounge in Frankfurt. \*Liza Min...  
1 day ago

#### [The Exposure Sheet](#)



[Video of the Week: The Flintstones Choose Swinton Insurance](#) -

Why are Hanna-Barbera characters so commonly used in commercials for insurance and banking companies? I feel like I've shared three or four of them on the...  
2 days ago

#### [Cartoon Research](#)

[Live and Let Diet: The 35th Anniversary of "Garfield's Thanksgiving"](#) - A special that captures so much that made creator Jim Davis' comic strip immensely popular.

2 days ago

#### [Mark Kausler's CatBlog](#)

[Felix Arrives in the Sunny South](#) - Howdy Readers! First off we have a color drawing by Cathy Hill, my favorite cartoonist. She's celebrating Halloween night this year and many years past in ...  
2 weeks ago

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Taking A Post-Election, Pre-Holiday Hiatus -

2 weeks 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...

4 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.

4 months ago

[Show All](#)

Why Not Read...

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Watermark theme. Powered by [Blogger](#).