



Sunday, 15 December 2024

## He Banished the Blues

Jack Benny had several stage names before Benny Rubin (so goes one version of the story) suggested Ben Kubelsky change his name to Jack Benny. He had been using Ben K. Benny prior to this, but apparently Ben Bernie complained about the similarity and Jack adopted the name he was to use for the rest of his life. (One of the Salt Lake City papers announced Bernie was coming to the local Orpheum when it meant Benny).

Jack's act was popular with pretty well all the newspaper critics. Let's see what some of the papers had to say in 1920. One of his tours that year took him on the Orpheum circuit across Western Canada and down the West Coast. The Marx Bros. were on the bill with him until San Francisco, rejoining him when he was held over for a second week in Los Angeles.



Incidentally, following Benny and appearing at the Pantages in Vancouver starting April 1 was "just a young fellow trying to get along." He was a juggler and ventriloquist named Fred Allen.

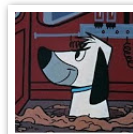
Ben Benny, the violinist, will offer his repertoire of operatic excerpts and popular selections calculated to banish blues. He will play and gag in such a way that he will keep his audience thoroughly amused until like Oliver Twist, they will ask for more. It is Benny's ambition to prove that a violin in capable hands possesses a sense of humor. *Winnipeg Tribune, Feb. 21, 1920*

Ben K. Benny plays sweetly on the violin and talks even better. He was one of the best numbers on the show. *Winnipeg Tribune, Feb. 24, 1920.*

A violin is meant for something besides difficult concerns. In the proper hands it possesses a sense of humor. Of course, these must be the hands of a comedian as well as a musician and this is just what Ben.K. Benny is. He plays a little, gags a great deal and keeps his audience thoroughly amused. Just to show that he is really a musician he plays one operatic number, but the rest of the time he occupies the stage is devoted to banishing blues. *Calgary Albertan, Feb. 26, 1920*

A few minutes with Ben K. Benny only make the house wish it could have an hour with him and his violin and patter. *Victoria Times, March 6, 1920.*

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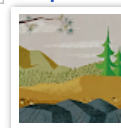
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A few minutes with Ben K. Benny with his violin will prove an acceptable offering. Benny can play his violin seriously, but he prefers for the moment to get comedy out of it. He plays a little, sings a little, but all the while his act is one that is meant for banishing blues.

*Vancouver Sun, March 6, 1920*

Ben K. Benny makes himself most popular. A violin is his only companion and this he turns into a comedian. He intersperses trick playing with classical numbers, dispensing entertaining patter all the time. *Vancouver Daily World, March 9, 1920*

The "few minutes with Ben K. Benny" were all too short. He plays the violin well and is a still better comedian. His comedy is new and never forced and the big applause he received was merited. *Daily Province, Vancouver, March 9, 1920.*

Ben K. Benny, a talented boy with a violin and the gift of comdy offers an exceedingly entertaining turn. Ben looks like the twin brother of the accordeon [sic] "nut" we heard here last week. *Vancouver Sun, March 9, 1920* (The accordionist, by the way, was Phil Baker)

Ben K. Benny gets all there is to get out of a violin, interspersed with a clever line of patter. *Daily Province, Vancouver, March 12, 1920.*

Ben K. Benny uses a violin to advantage in putting over his monologue. His "line" is new and his playing good. He shared honors with the headliner for applause Sunday. *Seattle Star, March 15, 1920.*

Ben Benny is a likable young chap of ingratiating personality who tells stories, mostly about a girl he claims in Seattle. When he plays San Francisco next week the girl will have moved to Portland. She's a nice enough girl, according to Ben, but her family has its faults. "Whenever you see two men talking on a corner and one of them looks bored to death, the other one is her brother," explains Ben. For commas and periods and exclamation marks in his chatterlogue Benny fiddles delightfully. *Leone Cass Baer, Oregonian, March 22, 1920*

Ben K. Benny says that he is the brother of Phil Baker, who was here last week, and since he is quite as amusing as Baker and has all the tricks of voice and expression, why dispute him? He has a good line of rapid comedy. *San Francisco Chronicle, March 29, 1920*

Ben K. Benny, with his violin and a battery of witty remarks, also proved a popular feature, drawing down several encores. *Oakland Enquirer, Apr. 5, 1920*

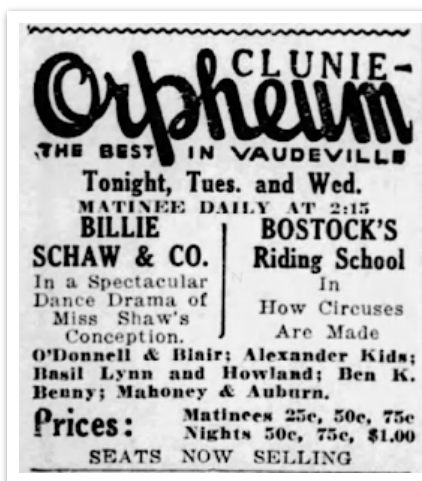
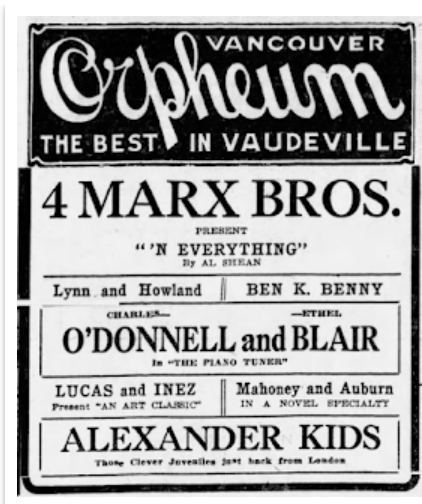
#### Ben K. Benny Heads Orpheum Bill

Ben K. Benny gives Orpheum audiences a few worthwhile minutes this week with his violin and comedy chatter. Benny has a monologue that gets across big and a personality that makes him many friends. *Sacramento Star, April 12, 1920*

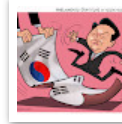
Ben K. Benny took possession of the audience with his pleasing personality, his captivating smile and last but not least his whimsical way of playing the violin. He wanders along chattering the way, with a stop now and then to draw a strain or two of music from his fiddle. *Sacramento Union, April 12, 1920*

A few minutes with Ben K. Benny are sufficient to bring out his ability as a comedian and trick violin player. In his more serious moments he gives evidence of his skill with the bow. *Sacramento Bee, April 12, 1920*

The good-looking Ben K. Benny has lost his baby stare and acquired a monologue since we saw him last, but he still plays the violin to a flirting obligato, or vice versa, just as you please. Ask the girls on the



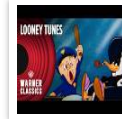
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Roland Bynum 1977 - Old school magic from Roland

Bynum. 1977. \*Roland Bynum 1977\* More Roland Bynum  
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front row. Anyhow he stops the show. *Los Angeles Times, April 20, 1920*

Phil Baker wanders on and off the stage the entire program, just as a bad boy from a good family should. He plays the accordeon a bit, chats a while and gets the laughs generally. He assists Ben K. Benny and his violin, although Mr. Benny is well able to take care of himself with his stories and foolishness. *Los Angeles Record, April 20, 1920*

Ben K. Benny is still popular with his violin and line of stories. *Los Angeles Times, April 27, 1920*

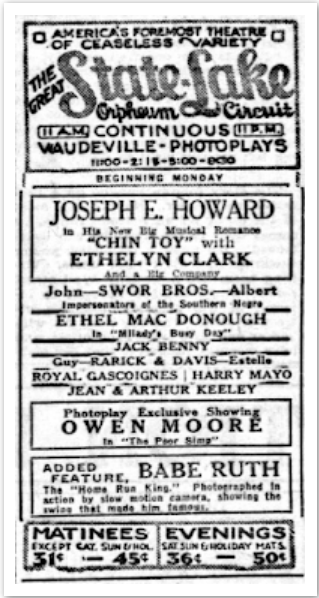
There's always one in the crowd who disagrees. After Los Angeles, Jack moved to the next spot in the circuit: Salt Lake City.

Ben K. Benny plays the violin a little and talks endlessly. He would add to his act materially if he were to play more. *Deseret News, May 6, 1920*

The anonymous critic liked all the other acts.

Jack carried on with stops in Denver, Lincoln, Omaha, Kansas City (where he finished the season) and a few others according to ads in local papers. *Variety's* weekly round-up of vaudeville bills isn't altogether complete as it does not mention, for example, the Orpheum in Victoria, B.C. which, at one time, was where acts bought booze and tried to get it through customs into the Prohibition-strangled U.S. via Seattle. Not always with success.

The following September 13 when he appeared in the Monday matinee at the State-Lake in Chicago, after a stop at the Orpheum in St. Louis, he had a new name. So it was that Benny Kubelsky's career as Jack Benny began.



Posted by Yowp at 07:07

Labels: Jack Benny

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