



Sunday, 26 January 2025

## Jack Benny, Music Devotee

The Palace in New York may have been the desirable destination for many a vaudevillian, but it was just one stop on the prestigious Keith Orpheum circuit, which stretched across the U.S. and Canada.

There were Orpheum Theatres down the West Coast from Vancouver to Los Angeles. One of them was in Portland, and one of the many stars who appeared there to delighted audiences was Jack Benny.

Long after vaudeville died, Jack decided to go stage again—this time to help symphony orchestras and their homes raise money through his violin concerts. One of his stops was in Portland.

In 1964, organisers in the city put together a “Benny Weekend” with the hope of raising part of the local symphony’s expanded \$290,000 budget for that year. On the Saturday, there was a Benny Ball at the Multnomah Hotel (the cost, a thrifty \$10) and on Sunday, a concert at the Auditorium (prices were \$12.50, \$7.50 and \$5, though seats without much of a view of the stage could be had for \$3). Here’s part of a story about Jack and his concerts from Martin Clark of the *Oregon Journal*, November 2, 1964.

ALTHOUGH THE famed comic has built a radio-TV image of himself as “an unspeakable violinist”, he has played Sarasate’s “Aiguenerweisen”, Mendelssohn’s E-Minor Violin Concerto, and similar demanding classics with such notable conductors as Leonard Bernstein, George Szell, Fabien Seitzky, and Alfred Wallenstein, as soloist with 33 symphonies from Honolulu to New York.

Since 1956, without fanfare, the alleged skinflint has raised more than \$4 million for orchestras’ maintenance, pension, and endowment funds and side causes — retarded children, local hospitals, the City of Hope, and the committee “To Save Carnegie Hall.” Never charging a fee, only modest expenses, Benny has brought in sums ranging from \$21,000 for the Bloomington Symphony to \$1,200,000 in Toronto.

JACK BENNY’S violin prowess is not a simple matter of playing “Love In Bloom” out of tune. Isaac Stern once told him his bowing arm was “still perfect” and Benny says of his concerts “although the orchestra and audience don’t always realize it, I play the best I can.”

A first-line performer longer than any other currently active TV personality. Benny’s goal at 70 (his real age) is to appear with every major symphony orchestra in the U.S. . . . and everyone has entered a standing invitation to him.

Here’s what Benny has to say on the subject, “Why I give concerts”:

“THE MOST IMPORTANT reason for my giving violin concerts — which have been doing for the past eight years — is because I am definitely a frustrated violinist.

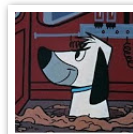
“Some of my frustrations come, of course, from the fact that my wife, Mary, long ago banished me to a far corner of the house when I practice. It’s a small room, 90 per cent tile and 10 per cent towel — the same place in better circles is known as the powder room.

And she has long since stopped apologizing to the neighbors who live on that side of the house. We did once hear them wonder why they never saw the cats we obviously house, and didn’t know about the kennel laws in Beverly Hills, but we ignore those slurs.

“IF BY SOME miracle, I could become another Isaac Stern or a Yehudi Menuhin overnight, I would gladly give up my career as a comedian. As it is, I have managed to combine the two careers. One pays more than the other, however. Fortunately.



## About Me



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## NOTE

Comments on an article will be limited to the first few days after it is posted. This blog is virtually retired, with daily posts ending Feb. 1.

## My Blog List

### Old TV History

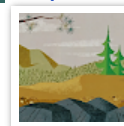


TV in Bakersfield, 1933 - Last week, we briefly mentioned

W6XAH in Bakersfield, California. The internet has some fine research on the station; you can read it on this page. I'm n...

1 day ago

### Yowp



Bear For Punishment Backgrounds - One way of getting into a Yogi

Bear cartoon was a pan over a long background while Don Messick, as narrator, sets up the plot. One of those cartoons was \*

1 month ago

## Blogs to See

"I have given concerts with practically every major symphony orchestra in America, and to show you the guts I have, I appeared first at Carnegie Hall. I fear nothing.

I have been acclaimed by such great conductors as Alfred Wallenstein, Leonard Bernstein, Paul Paray, Izler Solomon, George Szell, Paul Kletzki, William Steinberg and Stanislaw Skowaszewski to name a few. (In fact, the last name sounded like a few.)

DURING MY LIFETIME I have also played duets with Jascha Heifetz, Isaac Stern, Yehudi Menuhin, Joseph Szigeti, the late Albert Spalding, Jayne Mansfield and Henny Youngman.

My closest friend in the world of classical music is Isaac Stern. He insults me more often than George Burns, who has been a friend of mine for 40 years. I'll never forget a remark that Isaac made to me after a concert I gave in Philadelphia.

We went out for a bite to eat afterwards and suddenly he looked up at me and said, "You know, Jack, when you walk out on the stage with your violin, dressed in tails, stand in front of a 90-piece orchestra, you actually look like the world's greatest violinist... It's a darn shame you have to play."

If he had stopped in the middle of that sentence, I would have appreciated it much more.

Jack got loads of favourable press in Portland, even days after his appearance. There are a number of stories we can pick from. Here's one from the *Oregonian* of Nov. 22, 1964.

### Jack Benny's First Love Good Music, Not Comedy By HILMAR GRONDAHL

*Music Editor, The Oregonian*

Jack Benny is an extraordinary person. And his devotion to serious music is touching. You might have thought that after the Jack Benny Weekend in Portland he might have looked forward to a gay party following the concert with the Symphony Orchestra. But no, he wanted nothing so much as to talk about music. So in his suite at the Benson Hotel he engaged some of the city's best in that kind of discussion until into the morning hours. Benny said at his press conference here that the work he enjoys most is these concerts. They represent something for his inner spirit which the adulation he gets from his role as a comedian can not satisfy. It is interesting to recall that Benny began his professional life as a musician. His father, a clothing store [sic] owner in Waukegan, started him on violin lessons at an early age. As a kickerbockered boy in grammar [sic] school he played in the pit of the Barrison Theater, and at high school doubled between this orchestra and the school band. There was only a year of high school, however, and this fact later became one of Benny's adult regrets. He had studied the violin for ten years when, at 16, he went into vaudeville. That was about 1912.

During the World War I, Benny's routine in the Navy's Great Lakes Training Station Revue was mainly musical. But one night during his performance the electricity failed and the lights went out in the auditorium. To keep the crowd from getting restless Jack and pianist Zev [Zez] Confrey started talking. The audience roared, and this ad libbing in an emergency told Benny that he could be funny. So he was off to a career as a comic which earned him a great deal of money, and immense popularity.

But through it all the yen for the violin ate at his complacency.

Benny will be 71 in February. When he reached 62 he decided he couldn't stand not getting ahead with his violin, so he hired a teacher. He practices every day with diligence and serious purpose.

When you hear Mr. Benny perform before a symphony orchestra you are hearing him play the very best he can. He may make a glaring mistake. When he does, he knows it, and is apt to let the audience in on the blooper with the expressive lift of an eyebrow.

He may have been a prodigy as a boy, but he has not returned to that rare status. And he knows it.

**Concerts Liked**

**BOXOFFICES OPEN NOW**  
J.K. Gill ★ Auditorium  
Meier & Frank (Downtown,  
Lloyd Center, Salem)

**JACK BENNY**  
IN PERSON

with  
Portland  
Symphony  
Orchestra  
Jacques  
Singer,  
Conducting

**SUNDAY EVENING  
NOVEMBER 8  
8:30 P.M.  
Portland Public  
AUDITORIUM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Tel. Number \_\_\_\_\_

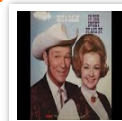
Please send me Following Tickets:  
—\$12.50 —\$7.50 —\$5 —\$3  
My check is enclosed for \$\_\_\_\_\_  
Also enclosed is a self-addressed  
stamped envelope for return of tick-  
ets. Make checks payable to and  
mail to Portland Symphony, 426 Park  
Bldg. Portland.

Tickets Also Available for  
"Weekend With Benny" Ball,  
Saturday evening, November 7  
— Tickets \$10.00 per person.



JASQUES SINGER, conductor of the Portland Symphony Orchestra, urges son, Gregory, 7, a violin student, to purchase lesson from Jack Benny, who was in Portland to perform in Symphony's benefit program Sunday at 8:30 p.m. Benny has raised \$404 million in symphony benefit performances around country.

### **Movies with Michael**



**Cowboy Church #203** - Hello my friends and welcome

back for another service of Cowboy Church. Today's musical selection begins with the King of the Cowboys and The Queen of ...

5 hours ago

### **News From ME**

**Today's Political Link** - I'm not watching or reading a lot of news or political chatter at the moment but on a whim, I read this article by Rich Logis and thought it was spot-on ab...

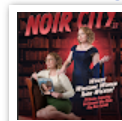
6 hours ago

### **Mark Kausler's CatBlog**

**Felix and Danny** - Howdy Readers, As our introduction to this post, we present "Felix On His Stick Horse", drawn by my most beloved cartoonist, Cathy Hill. I love the ch...

1 day ago

### **Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog**



**Noir City Returns** -

1 day ago

### **Fernando Llera Cartoons**



Border czar says military planes will deport migrants

every day. - ©2025

fernandollera.com

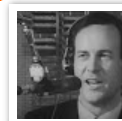
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### **Cartoon Research**

**Earning His Stripes: The 25th Anniversary of "The Tigger Movie"** - There is much about The Tigger Movie that connects to Walt Disney and his rich legacy.

2 days ago

### **AFRTS Archive**



**Cousin Brucie for Vietnam** - In 1969 the Coca-Cola company

asked some very bigtime jocks to record shows for the troops, which were distributed on LP. The Real Don Steele did on...

3 days ago

It is easy to understand why Benny loves his concert appearances more than anything else he does these days. He admits that the quality of the audiences is a joy to him. And he feels grateful [sic] that he can ward off orchestral deficit and build up capital funds by his efforts in this direction.

The gross take from his weekend in Portland was \$55,000.

Leonard Bernstein, conductor of the New York Philharmonic said, "Benny has done more than raise millions of dollars to eradicate operating deficits of major orchestras. He has brought multitudes of people who would not otherwise be there into the concert halls to learn that good music can be entertaining and rewarding."

Jack Benny has said of himself that he is "a frustrated violinist."

Some of the frustrations must be wearing away in these many concert appearances in which he performs creditably, if not really up to the standard of his friends, Heifetz and Stern. But, as his daughter Joan says, "who does?" Benny's attitude toward serious music is a measure of his basic values.

The Jack Benny purpose toward music now goes beyond improving his technique and playing with fine orchestras. He is working on a violin concerto, which is said to contain autobiographical implications. Everyone who met Mr. Benny during his stay in Portland has been pleased by his kindly and generous nature; this includes doorkeepers, society matrons, business executives, press people, and orchestral musicians.

As we suggested at the beginning, Jack Benny is an extraordinary person. And his devotion to music is touching.

Besides the concert and the ball, Jack met with students at the University of Portland where the daughter of writer George Balzer was attending. 60 years later, Bonnie Balzer Neel remembered the day with fondness in a conversation on the International Jack Benny Fan Club page on Facebook.

Jack also received a life membership in the now-Petrillo-less America Federation of Music. And he met the press, as Miles Green of the *Journal* reported in a page one story:

Sitting behind a bank of microphones and holding a long cigar which he never got around to lighting, the comedian answered a wide array of questions ranging from "Who are the best young comedians?" to "Are you really as insecure and frightened as they said you were in that magazine article?"

HE NAMED Buddy Hackett, Joey Bishop and Alan King as among the best of the current crop of comedians and noted young entertainers today don't have the proving ground of vaudeville and burlesque that he and his contemporaries had. "As George Burns has said, it is unfortunate that no one has a place today to be lousy" he said.

Benny noted he had spent several years on these circuits, including frequent appearances in Portland, and they gave him a chance to polish his style. "If you didn't have a good act in Portland, you could improve on it at your next stop. Now, when a young comedian gets a pretty good act, he is thrown to the wolves and is put on television."

Of the magazine article which pictured him as an in secure and moody person despite his fame and fortune, Benny said he told the interviewer first that he was happy most of the time and then said at times he had bad moods ("maybe a couple of hours a month.")

HIS MOODINESS was greatly magnified in the article, however, he said. "Since then, people have been sending me encouraging letters and books to read" he noted.

Although the statement doesn't square with the "stingy character" role which has become his trademark, Benny claims he enjoys playing the violin free for benefit performances more than any other type of entertaining, "It's a role that doesn't fit any other comedian," he said.

It is also a role in which he has been eminently successful. He has raised more than \$4 million for symphonies all over the nation and is expected to raise several thousand more here Sunday night.

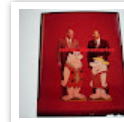
Portland mayor Terry D. Shrunk noted that day that Jack "in the short span of 39 years" had attained recognition as "America's foremost comedian" and "the world's foremost violinist." Only the vain Benny radio/TV character would have believed the latter, but there were many in 1964 who would have agreed with the mayor's assessment of Jack's comic abilities.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:08](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)



## The Exposure Sheet

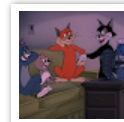


Miscellaneous  
Flintstones  
Cast  
Photos -  
Hey, guys.

I'm back again with a post that's a little on the short side, but I hope you find it sweet despite that. There are a lot of photos out there of...

4 days ago

## Tom and Jerry: Toon by Toon



Smarty Cat  
(1955) -  
\*Smarty Cat  
\*is the  
fourth and  
last cheater

cartoon of the original Hanna and Barbera era. The term cheater cartoon refers to a short that relies heavily on...

6 days 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...

3 months ago

[Show All](#)

## Why Not Read...

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