

Sunday, 2 February 2025

## Vaudeville vs Radio

You'd think the grind of vaudeville would be tougher than radio for comedians.

Vaudeville consisted of months on end of train trips to different towns, living out of a suitcase, and multiple stage shows a day using your own props. Despite work and work and work, some acts never made the big-time. Compare this to radio, where you were on the air for a half an hour and rehearsed maybe the day before.

But Jack Benny says it wasn't all that simple.

Jack and his gang went up to Oakland in 1940 and broadcast his East and West Coast shows there to benefit the March of Dimes. Admission wasn't a dime; it was 50 cents or a dollar for the afternoon broadcast to the East and Midwest, a dollar or \$1.50 for the later show.

Besides the radio broadcasts, Jack met five small patients at the Children's Hospital in Oakland, and sat in on plans for a special party for disabled kids at the Jefferson School.

At the inevitable news conference, Jack referred to his days on the Orpheum Circuit in the 1920s which included stops in San Francisco and Oakland. He compared vaudeville and radio in this story in the *Oakland Tribune* of January 25, 1940.

### RADIO IS TOUGHER THAN VAUDEVILLE, DUE TO STANDARDS REQUIRED IN PROGRAM PREPARATION, JACK BENNY BELIEVES

*March of Dimes Show Bid Accepted to Compare Present Audiences Here With Old Ones*  
By WOOD SOANES

Jack Benny, Waukegan's gift to show business, stepped down from the highly rarefied atmosphere of the ether lanes yesterday to prepare to walk the earth like a common man on his way to the March of Dimes benefit at the Auditorium on Sunday.

"And don't for a minute get the idea that I'm conferring a favor on anybody," grunted Benny as he shifted his cigar pugnaciously. "I speak for the whole troupe when I say that we snapped at the invitation to come to Oakland for these shows.

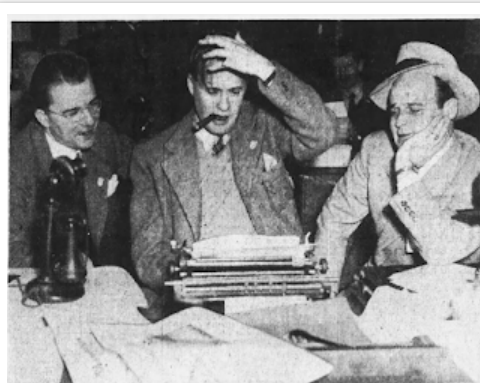
"I wanted to see what the place looked like after vaudeville collapsed. I wanted to see if audiences were just as tough as they used to be on those old Monday shows at the Orpheum. Brother, you had to be good then. Radio is a cinch by comparison.

NO CHANCE TO REFUSE

"Anyway, I had no chance to refuse. Can you imagine what my life would be like from now on if I passed up a bid from Rochester's home town. As it is he steals every scene that isn't tacked, and he isn't half trying. He'd probably sick Carmichael on me."

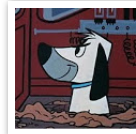
Mention of Rochester, who is Eddie Anderson, a product of West Oakland who made his start as an entertainer hoofing in the night spots some twenty years ago, turned the conversation into a more serious vein and took up the problems of radio entertaining.

"I never listen to comedians on the air," he said, "not because I don't think the other fellow is funny or



Jack "Buck" Benny, screen and radio comedian, visited the editorial rooms of The Tribune for inspiration for the show he will give Sunday at the Oakland Auditorium for the March of Dimes fund. Ready to seize on any brain children Jack produces are his writers, Eddie Beloin Geth, and Bill Morrow, who accompanied Benny from Hollywood.—Tribune photo.

## 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. 8.

## My Blog List

### Old TV History

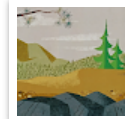


September-October 1929 - Television was continuing

to expand in September 1929 and there was even live programming from New York, although it wasn't over a TV channel. D.E. Replog...

20 hours ago

### Yowp



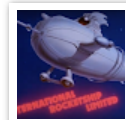
Bear For Punishment Backgrounds - One way of getting into a Yogi

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

### Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



International Chess Records Rocketship Limited -

7 hours ago

that I am envious of his gags, but because I can't get into the spirit of the jest. All I can think of is the hours of sweat and struggle he put into the preparation of the broadcast.

In the days of vaudeville, you worked out a routine, bought or manufactured a few jokes, practiced a few tunes, tried the sketch out for a week or so in the smaller houses and then sallied forth on a tour that ran anywhere from 20 to 52 weeks without a worry in the world.

#### RADIO FAR DIFFERENT

"In radio as soon as the final commercial is given on a show, I go into a huddle with Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin. We try to get an idea for the next bill. If we get it, swell; if we don't, headache. Once we have it, all three of us are in a turmoil until it is put on paper.

"And that's only the beginning. It has to be worked over and polished, transposed and altered, submitted to the sponsor, arranged for production. Granting that everything goes without a hitch—and it rarely does—we are then ready for a series of intensive rehearsals.

"What we are striving for all through this is to achieve what passes for spontaneity. We want it to sound as if we are having a lot of fun—very frequently we are, but we're always on the spot. We have to watch the clock, we have to get the gags snapping over, and we have to think of the unseen audience [sic].

#### TWO AUDIENCES

"For programs such as ours there are two separate and distinct audiences—the fellow who says: What's on tonight? Benny? Oh well, let's give him a whirl!"—and the fellow who makes a ritual of the program, who insists that his wife make no engagements for Sunday nights, who demands that the children keep quiet, and who won't allow a paper to be rustled while he's listening.

"The trick is to make a regular of the casual listener; and to keep the regular listener happy. Oddly enough, the regular listener is easier to please. He is familiar with the characters—we try to build interesting characters more than hilarious incidents—and he understands that we can't always be a hundred per cent funny.

"But even the regular's patience is short. Give him three bad programs in a row—let's say they are not even bad but dull—and you've lost him. It's like pictures. They say that three stinkers in a row will kill the biggest star in Hollywood. I wouldn't know about that. So far they keep giving Spencer Tracy the nod on those Academy Awards."

#### ABOUT 'BUCK BENNY'

I wanted to know if "Buck Benny Rides Again" would turn the trick for him.

"For my money," Benny chuckled. "It's got everything that the cinema needs, if you know what I mean. The upshot of it will probably be that Rochester will get the award.

There are many sides to Benny's character beyond that of the clown who prefers to be the Patsy Bolliver in his programs, who is heckled by his man servant, twitted by Mary Livingstone, badgered by Phil Harris, and accused of penury by every taxi man, telegram boy and waitress.

Benny's interest in the "March of Dimes" benefit may have been prompted, as he argues, by his desire to walk the boards again, but the underlying fact is that he has a tremendous interest in the other fellow, particularly in youngsters who classify generally as underprivileged.

#### HAS HAD EASY GOING

"I've had it pretty soft all my life," he admitted. "Back home in Waukegan we never knew what privation was. We were what is generally known as 'comfortably fixed.' In show business, I had easy going. Then the radio and pictures got me into higher brackets. I'm kept pretty busy, but not too busy to look around and see that other people have pretty tough sledding."

This interest of Benny's in the underpup is not something that has come with wealth and acclaim. In his salad days as a variety comic and occasional violinist, he was always the first to agree to attend a benefit performance. He has given more free shows, I venture to say, than any entertainer except Eddie Cantor and George Jessel—and he's done a lot less talking about it.

Benny will be in seclusion in Oakland for the next few days working on the radio program to be broadcast from the Auditorium. Later in the week he will be joined by other members of his troupe who are coming up from Los Angeles. He will give two shows here on Sunday, one in the afternoon, for the eastern lanes, and in the evening for the Coast area.

The comedian's plans for the future involve nothing but radio until Summer when he takes his annual lay-off and will put in the time at Paramount working on a picture with his ancient "enemy," Fred Allen. "Buck Benny Rides Again," his next opus, is set for general release on May 31.

Incidentally, a dime did eventually show up. As the *San Francisco Examiner* reported on January 25, 1940:



#### AFRTS Archive



Ira Cook  
1970 - Ira  
Cook with  
Singer  
Becca Adler  
It's a Friday

in 1970, and a happy day!  
\*Ira Cook 1970\* More Ira  
Cook

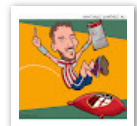
8 hours ago

#### News From ME

**Wonky Stuff** - This is being posted all over Facebook and other dens of social media. I found it interesting and decided to put it here. This is by Prof. David Honig of I...

9 hours ago

#### Fernando Llera Cartoons



Soccer  
player  
Santiago  
Giménez  
signs with  
Milan Team.

- ©2025

fernandollera.com

10 hours ago

#### The Exposure Sheet

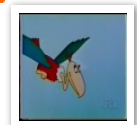


The  
Fantastic  
Four Get  
Animated -  
Mr.  
Fantastic.

The Invisible Girl. The Human Torch. The Thing. On their own, they may not look like much, but together, they make up the Fantastic Four. Cr...

1 day ago

#### Movies with Michael



Some  
Cartoons  
for  
Saturday  
Morning  
#216 - Hello

my friends and happy Saturday morning once again it is time for some classic cartoons. Today's cartoon selection begins with Heckle and Jeckle in...

1 day ago

#### Cartoon Research

**Purfect Heroes: The 40th Anniversary of "ThunderCats"** - In the genre of fantasy and sci-fi animated shows that dominated the airwaves in the 1980s, ThunderCats stands out. From its opening, filled with dynamic ...

2 days ago



[Jack Benny] invited visitors into sprawling on a low divan in his suite at the St. Francis, then searched the cushions and the floor and came up with a ten centavo piece which he carefully tested with bicuspid that Mary Livingston [sic] says have a habit of slipping out.

After the broadcasts, Jack and his two writers spent several days in Yosemite National Park. No doubt this gave birth to a series of episodes of the Benny show involving the park and Jack skiing into a lodge after being called out on his “ability” to go down the slopes.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:24](#)

Labels: [Jack Benny](#)

No comments:

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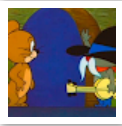
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[Tom and Jerry: Toon by Toon](#)



[Pecos Pest \(1955\)](#) - This short film marked the last of the Hanna

and Barbera directed shorts to not be in Cinemascope and the last Tom and Jerry cartoon to be produced by...  
[6 days 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 week 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](#)

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[Likely Looney, Mostly Merrie](#)

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