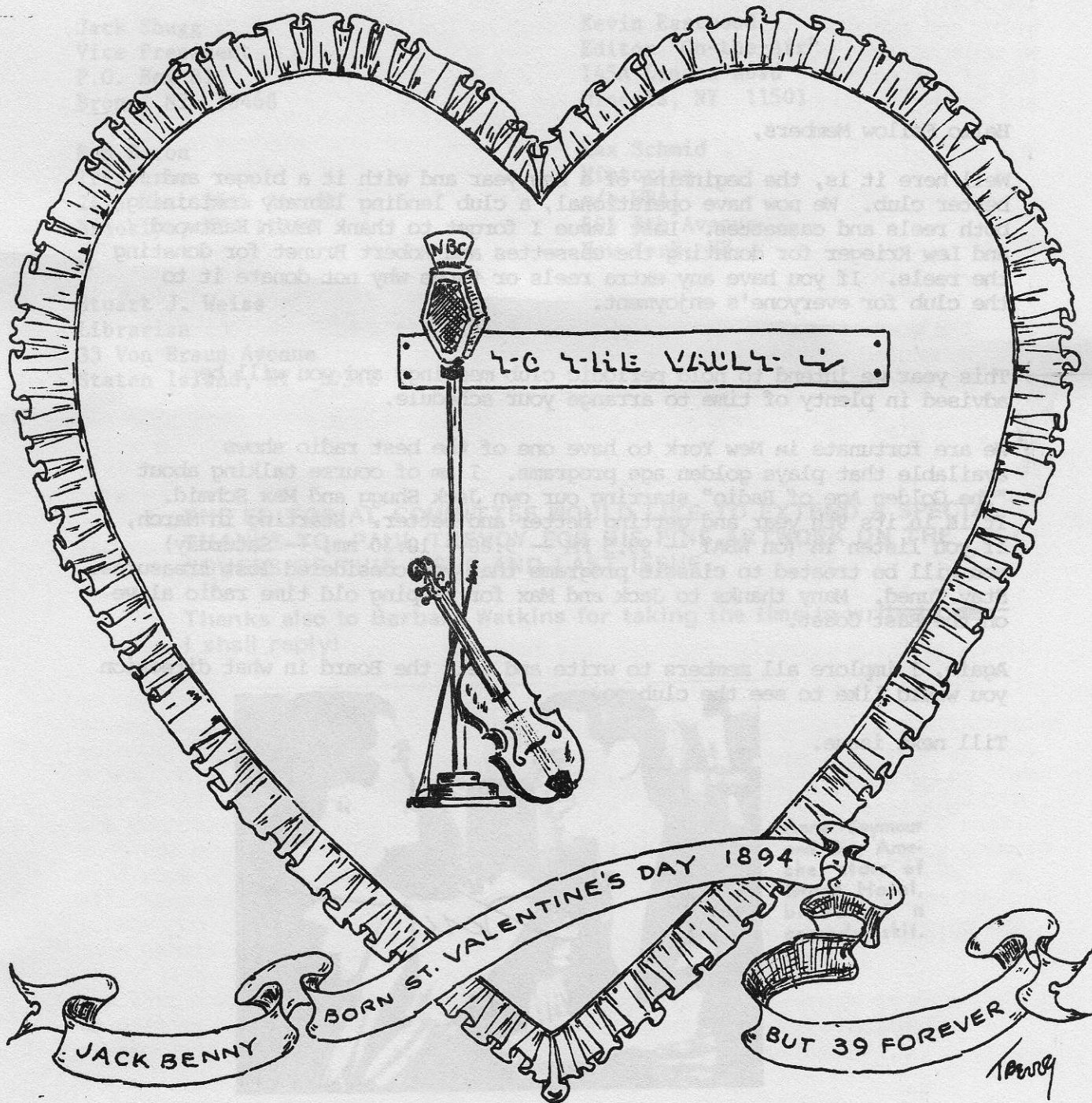


# ON THE AIR


OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE VINTAGE BROADCAST SOCIETY

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1985



# Report From the President



Hello Fellow Members,

Well here it is, the beginning of a new year and with it a bigger and better club. We now have operational, a club lending library containing both reels and cassettes. Last issue I forget to thank Kevin Eastwood and Lew Krieger for donating the cassettes and Robert Brunet for donating the reels. If you have any extra reels or tapes why not donate it to the club for everyone's enjoyment.

This year we intend to hold periodic club meetings and you will be advised in plenty of time to arrange your schedule.

We are fortunate in New York to have one of the best radio shows available that plays golden age programs. I am of course talking about "The Golden Age of Radio" starring our own Jack Shugg and Max Schmid. It is in its 9th year and getting better and better. Starting in March, if you listen in (on WBAI -- 99.5 FM -- 9:00 - 10:30 am. -- Saturday) you will be treated to classic programs that you considered lost treasures. Stay Tuned. Many thanks to Jack and Max for keeping old time radio alive on the East Coast.

Again, I implore all members to write and tell the Board in what direction you would like to see the club go.

Till next issue.





Listed below are the names of the Club's Board of Directors. If you have any suggestions or information which might be useful to the club, please call or write any of the individuals listed.

Lewis Krieger  
President  
Membership Chairman  
3000 Bronx Park East  
Bronx, NY 10467

Robert Brunet  
Secretary  
21 W. 74th Street  
New York, NY 10023

Jack Shugg  
Vice President  
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Bronx, NY 10468

Kevin Eastwood  
Editor "On-the-Air"  
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Mineola, NY 11501

Ron Baron  
Treasurer  
2475 West 16th Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11217

Max Schmid  
Historian  
c/o WBAI  
505 8th Avenue  
New York, NY

Stuart J. Weiss  
Librarian  
33 Von Braun Avenue  
Staten Island, NY 10312

THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A SPECIAL THANKS TO PAUL TREVROY FOR HIS FINE ARTWORK ON THE COVERS OF THIS ISSUE AND LAST ISSUE.

Thanks also to Barbara Watkins for taking the time to write to me. I shall reply!



Anne Seymour  
and Don Ame-  
che, stars of  
Grand Hotel,  
broadcast a  
comedy skit.

9/1935

# Feedback

The Board of Directors are always glad to see club members take the time to write and express their views and feelings on how the club is progressing. We welcome both pro and con comments. Last month I received a letter from one of our members, Arlene Sabba, and the Board feels that both the letter and answering comments should be printed in "On-the-Air".

The following is Arlene's letter:

Dear Lew:

I thought a few comments would convey the feelings I have upon receiving the V.B.S. newsletter.

I'm wondering what the due go for. Surely, it's not the regularly scheduled publications. A double issue doesn't quite make it when half of it is photocopies of old articles.

I'm glad the seven of you Board Members have a good time at your announced after the fact closed door meetings. Why don't you all just hang around together and forget the pretense that there are other people in the Club.

Good thing there is a trading post page - funny thing though is that the first two people to request something just happen to be our same old board members.

Good thing that the club is based in N.Y.C. - how else would I manage to get to all those meetings that are held so consistently.

On the page where it lists the Board Members it says you can write or call with suggestions. I know, as you, I wouldn't list my phone number, fearing I would get all this "wonderful" and "complementary" feedback.

Sincerely,

Arlene Sabba



Dear Arlene:

I will try to answer each of your comments as you listed them in your letter.

You mentioned we published a double issue in place of two separate issues. If you would check the number of pages you would see that the double issue contains almost the same amount of pages as two separate issues would contain. I guess we could have published two separate issues but as you are probably aware, all the Directors of the V.B.S. do have jobs and as such can only devote spare time to produce the magazine. As you can see from the contents of all the issues printed, probably 90% of the contents are written by the Directors. We are constantly begging people to send in articles but only one or two members have done so. Which brings up the second point about reprints. Perhaps I missed something. We did reprint a Sherlock Holmes article and maybe several other pages but where is all the other reprinted material located. Please let me know. If you are aware of other club's publications you know that one reprints "pulp" magazine stories while another contains oversized type which make the article take up more space plus both of the publications use small size paper. If you think we should go this route let us know.

Concerning Board of Directors meetings. We try to hold meetings on a monthly basis at the convenience of the board members since, as I stated before, we all work. We sometimes do not know about a meeting until two or three days prior to the meeting. Most Director's meetings are held this way but if you wish to attend by all means let me know and we will be happy to call you and have you come down.

Concerning the "Trading Post", the Board Members only placed their wants as an example of what we would like the ads to look like. Let me also say that as of this date (January 30th) no one has submitted an ad.

You bring up the club meetings. Last year we held one meeting. I am glad to say that you and several other members made it. As we remarked in one of the issues of "On-the-Air", the Board Members outnumbered the other attending club members. Immediately after the meeting we sent a questionnaire to every club member asking for their feed back on such matters as meetings, a lending library, etc. Only about a dozen replies were received and of them very little was about a meeting. Most wanted a lending library. Even with the response we are looking forward to hold club meetings this coming year, once the cold weather lets up. However, we must be certain that many members will show up since we must rent accommodations and prepare refreshments. We will keep members advised of developments concerning general meetings by either "On-the-Air" or by special notices. If you know of any place we can hold general meetings, please let me know.

The last comment concerns the Board of Directors listing where it says to call or write any of them concerning club matters. I apologize for saying call the Board members without listing their phone numbers.

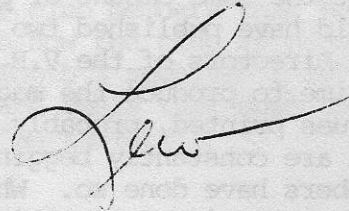


However, our addresses are listed and several other members beside yourself have written their comments to us.

I have tried to answer each of your comments in such a way as to bring to the attention of the other club members that this is your club and you must take an active interest in its well being. Send letters like Arlene. Say what you don't like, what you do like, what you want. In this way we can have the best darn club in the good old U.S. of A.

Thanks again Arlene and we hope to see you at future meetings.

Sincerely,



**A LONG CAREER OF RADIO ACE, JACK BENNY, ENDED WITH HIS DEATH, DECEMBER 26, 1974.**



**FIRST PARTNER**—Jack started his stage career at the age of 17 when Cora Salisbury, pianist, teamed up with him and started a vaudeville tour that led Benny into the entertainment business for keeps.



## A SKINFLINT REVISITED

In writing about Jack Benny one might have the urge to continue until he's got enough information to fill a book. I shall, on the other hand, try to stick to discussing Mr. Benny's radio career only (huh, this could turn out to be a lengthy essay anyway).

Jack Benny's radio career began on March 29, 1932, over station W.H.N. This first appearance was on the Ed Sullivan program. His great wit came through the minute he was introduced, as he uttered these words: "Ladies and gentlemen, this is Jack Benny talking..... there will be a slight pause while you say 'who cares'."

Following this performance on Sullivan's program N.B.C. signed Jack to host their new Canada Dry show, beginning May 2 and airing twice a week at 9:30pm. The program was mainly made up of popular music played by George Olsen's Orchestra and sung by vocalist Ethel Shutta. The show needed a host, however, and that's where Jack came in. He introduced the musical numbers, mixing in jokes and wisecracks, as a matter of fact, Jack told skinflint and Miser jokes about Olsen (a trait that would become a vital part of Jack's own character in later years).

In January of 1933 the show moved over to C.B.S. where it ended its run that same month. Not one to be out of work for long however, Jack was back on N.B.C. by March, with a new sponsor and new supporting players.

The Chevrolet Program began on March 3, 1933 and was broadcast each Friday at 10:30pm. Jack was joined this time by orchestra leader Frank Black and vocalist Frank Parker, as well as his wife of six years, Mary Livingstone. This program gave us the first glimpse of Jack's unfolding character...the egotistical tightwad. He would often call himself the "Clark Gable of the air", and would often borrow money from members of his gang. The program instituted a 'first' in radio in that it was the premier show to allow the supporting cast to share in the laughs along with the star. In this case Jack's gang would deflate his ego when it became apparent that he'd gone a bit overboard in his braggings. On the show Jack and cast did skits spoofing popular movies and novels. This, however, was not the vehicle that General Motors had hoped for (they felt that music programs sold more cars than comedy shows) and proceeded to pull out as sponsor, even though ratings were very good.

The General Tire Company took over as sponsor in 1934, a year that saw Jack receive the award as best comedian of the year. The skits continued, but the show began to deal more with life at home for Jack and friends. This was an idea Jack liked because it brought the characters closer to the listeners, making them more identifiable.

During this time a new member was added to the gang. Long-time sports announcer, Don Wilson, was chosen as Jack's new announcer. The choice worked out very well as Don went on to become one of the most popular announcers in radio. He worked very nicely as Jack's straight man, as Jack would use such insults towards Don as: "George Global" & "Cinemascope Stomach," among others. Don, however, like everyone got in his digs at Jack also.

In 1935 Jell-o took over sponsorship of the program. On January 3 of that year a new vocalist joined the ranks....Kenny Baker, who also became very popular with the audience.

During the 1930's Benny's program was always the highest or second-highest rated show. Lots of additions and changes were made in the late 30's. Among those changes were the addition of Eddie Anderson and Phil Harris. Harris replaced Johnny Green as orchestra leader during the 1936-37 season and quickly showed that he belonged in the gang. He played a conceited southerner who interacted well with the vain Benny. The altercations between the two were always a crowd pleaser, as evidenced by this routine:

JACK: " YOU DON'T PLAY ANY INSTRUMENTS,  
YOU CAN'T LEAD AN ORCHESTRA....  
PHIL, JUST WHAT IS IT I'M PAYING YOU  
FOR?"

PHIL: " LISTEN JACKSON, IF YOU'RE A DOPE,  
DON'T BLAME IT ON ME!"

Eddie Anderson, or Rochester, as he was better known, began his long run on the program on June 20, 1937. Of all the members of the gang, Rochester was best at bringing Jack's inflated ego down to earth. One cannot forget what Eddie did for radio. He was the first black performer to crack the medium as a regular, paving the way for others such as Eddie Green of Duffy's Tavern.

Another fact that was evident during the late 30's and early 40's was that Jack's format was beginning to be copied nearly everywhere in radio, as people began to realize that Jack had hit upon the perfect formula for a comedy show to thrive in the medium. He also proved that if you had a good program, the audience would still be there in the Fall, if a Summer vacation was in order for the star and his troupe.



The mold was finally set by the end of the decade. In 1937 Jack bought his Maxwell, and in 1939 Dennis Day and Mel Blanc (someone had to make the SOUND of the maxwell!) joined the show.

In 1944 Lucky Strike took over sponsorship of the program... they would remain as sponsor until the end of the show's run in 1955. The commercials that Don Wilson did became as popular as any bit on the show.

The total homespun (home being California) style of the show had matured to it's fullest by the early 40's. A flick of the radio dial at 7:00pm on a Sunday would bring you into the home of the famous tightwad (who, in real life, as everyone knows, was as generous as one could be). It was like eavsdropping, as we were let in on the daily experiences of Jack, Mary, Don, Phil, Dennis, Rochester, and all the rest of the very real and very human characters that helped to create that aura of reality.

We will never forget those famous bits from the show. No other show had as many familiar routines as Benny's, routines that are still well remembered today..... The 'I Can't Stand Jack Benny Because...' contest..... Jack trying to get his song, 'When I Say I Beg Your Pardon', released (on one show, while Jack is out walking, he wonders why his song was never released. He stops a moment, sings the first line of the song and says: "I know why.....It stinks!") Who will ever forget Jack's Christmas presents for Don.....Ed, the guardian of the vault.....and of course the famous "feud" with Fred Allen.

He was perhaps the most popular performer in radio, and he later went on to a successful run on television. Ironic, it is, that this man's birthday should fall on such a day as Valentine's day. He was never linked with any of the controversial incidents which most show business people end up getting mixed in. A bad word was not often spoken about him, unless meant in jest. So on this Valentine's day of 1985 we celebrate the 91st anniversary of the birth of the best-loved skinflint the world has ever known.

*Kevin Eastwood*

## RADIO READER'S DIGEST

WITH

QUENTIN REYNOLDS

WABC 9 P.M.

INTERESTING STORIES AND PEOPLE FROM  
READER'S DIGEST—AMERICA'S FAVORITE MAGAZINE

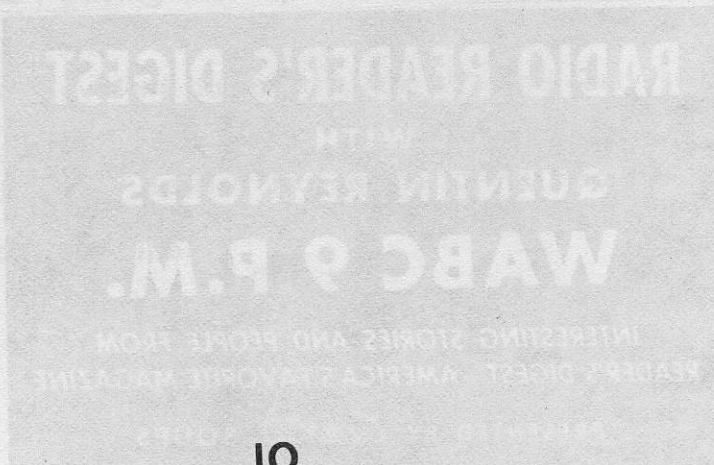
PRESENTED BY *Campbell's* SOUPS

Hello again. I hope everyone enjoyed themselves over the holidays. I also hope everyone has sharpened their trivia knowledge because this month's quiz is the toughest yet! Since this issue is devoted to Jack Benny, all of the questions deal with the Jack Benny show. As an extra incentive, a prize will be awarded to whoever correctly answers all ten questions first. Send your answers to: Kevin Eastwood, 145 Linden Road, Mineola, N.Y. 11501 The first one we receive with all ten correct answers will be the winner. Don't forget to include your name and phone number on your answer sheet.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What was Rochester's last name?
2. Whose Oscar did Jack lose?
3. What hotel did Jack always stay at while in New York?
4. What was the telephone number of the hotel?
5. Name the three celebrity judges of the "I Can't Stand Jack Benny Because..." contest.
6. Who stayed at Jack's house for two weeks and offered to pay for the stay?
7. What was the date of Ronald and Benita Colman's debut on the Jack Benny Show?
8. How many delicious flavors of Jell-o were there?
9. Name the members of the Sportsmen Quartet.
10. Where was the character Rochester born?

This is John Eccles wishing everyone the best of luck with this month's quiz.





# Beyond the deadpan: a comic confessions

By JUDSON HAND  
Books Editor of The News

**D**URING THE 1930s and 1940s, you could stroll down any residential street in America at 7 p.m. on a warm Sunday, and, waiting from dozens of radios through open windows, you'd hear the same thing: The Jack Benny Show. In those days, Jack ruled as the absolute monarch of family comedy.

He always came on like a petulant tightwad, a loser's loser, the butt of everyone's jokes. His winning delivery on radio was as familiar to most Americans as President Roosevelt's voice.

Jack's real personality, everybody knows, was far different from the one he projected in showbiz as Irving A. Fein, for many years Jack's friend and business associate, makes clear in his biography, **JACK BENNY** (306 pages. With an introduction by George Burns. Pocket Books. \$1.95).

In real life, Jack was generous to a fault, a shrewd businessman who always made it in the cut-throat world of show business and a perfectionist who thought about how to improve his comedy routines to the exclusion of almost all else. Once he had to ask Fein what the Watergate scandal was all about, but he never had to ask about the fine tuning of a joke or how to build Phil Harris, Rochester or Dennis Day into a comic personality on his show.

Fein's book is a comprehensive and warmhearted one because, during the 25 years he worked as one of Jack's righthand men, he was also Jack's friend. Still, in stretches, the book becomes a bit tedious because Jack had few real ups and downs in his long life. He lived a series of successes in vaudeville, radio and TV. He was married only once, happily. And, for the most part, he seemed happy with what he'd achieved. He was a comic who, apparently, never seriously yearned to play Hamlet.

Benny fans from the old days should love the book, though. It's comprehensive and full of little anecdotes which bring the man alive.

For example, in the early days, Jack faced a

## PAPERBACKS

hooting audience at the old Academy of Music theater on Manhattan's 14th Street (today it's called the Palladium and features rock music).

"Hello folks," he said as he galloped on stage. A couple of ripe tomatoes were thrown at him. "Good-bye folks," he said immediately and disappeared off the other side of the stage and through the stage door of the theater.

Another time, he played a vaudeville show after the Marx brothers. He got no laughs and was discouraged until Minnie Marx, the mother of Groucho & Co., explained to him that her sons were so funny that no act could follow them. Jack had to agree.

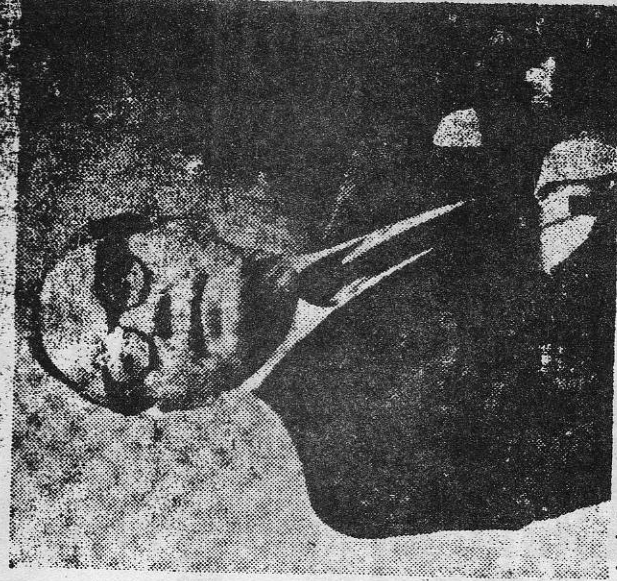
Jack made the transition from vaudeville into radio with a minimum of defeat, being assisted along the way by Ed Sullivan, then a columnist for The News. On radio he achieved his finest hours.

Gradually, he and his writers built up the characters in the radio show:

Mary Livingston, played by Jack's wife as a dizzy, naive girl; Phil Harris, who pretended to be a drunken bandleader; Dennis Day, a boy tenor who was even more naive than Mary; Rochester, Jack's servant who generally outwitted him; various far-out characters played by Mel Blanc and others. For all of these characters, Jack was the perfect foil.

Jack also entered into a fake feud with his pal and fellow radio comic, the late Fred Allen. On the air, the two comics would revile each other, but, whenever Jack was in New York, Fred was one of the first people he'd visit.

Not surprisingly, Jack made the transition from radio to television with little anguish. After all,



Jack Benny: the only waves in his life were air-

he'd served his apprenticeship in putting eye-al gags in vaudeville. His peculiar, mind-boggling alone was enough to draw laughs. People also showed up to see him in person at Las Vegas and elsewhere.

Jack never became a big movie star, though cinema just wasn't his medium. Once he even made a standing joke on radio about how bad his films, "The Horn Blows at Midnight," was.

On Dec. 29, 1974, Jack Benny died. He was 80 years old, but to his fans he would always be a young man of 39.

Fein's book isn't a distinguished biography, but a long shot, but, like all of Jack Benny's work, it's lots of fun. Every real Benny fan should read it.







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