

# RADIO COMEDIANS

## Just How Funny Are Their Jokes?

(Written for "The Listener" by JOHN SPEDDING)

THE fallacy of the popular contention that America's highly-paid professional radio jesters are about the most amusing people on two legs is shown clearly by a survey which has been made of the comedians' own ideas of their best jokes of the month. Some of their entries are so well upholstered with whiskers that, if they were put across on television it would look like an on-the-spot relay of the transfer of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane.

Personal insult is obviously regarded as a sure-fire laugh-getter. Current affairs—particularly problems affecting the home—are steady motifs, while diluted sex never fails to put in its appearance. Here, then, are the lines which America's most popular radio comedians regard as the most humorous in their month's scripts:

*Red Skelton*

Red, where were you when brains were passed out?

I was there, but they didn't have my size.

*Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna*

Get your hands off her, Colonna. I'll teach you to trifle with a princess.

That won't be necessary—I already know how.

*Jack Benny and Rochester*

Say, boss, when are you going to buy a new car?

I don't know. Why?

This car is so old the headlights are wearing glasses.

*Abbott and Costello*

I think I'm going crazy, and all over a pot roast.

Why, pot roast is very good for you.

That's why I think I'm going batty. After I ate the pot, I had no appetite for the roast.

*Fred Allen*

How does your mother sweeten her coffee?

Mama takes a mouthful of coffee. Then she thinks of the old days.

And?

A lump comes up in her throat.

*Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy*

You know, Bergen, all you have to do to catch mice is to feed them spinach and other foods containing iron.

What's the idea.

It's simple. When he gets enough iron in his system, you just drop a magnet down the hole and you've got him.

*Fibber McGee and Molly*

I've looked at that water through a microscope, you mass murderer. There's animals in there that would make a sabre-toothed tiger look like a house cat. Monsters, they are. Horrible ones. Vicious ones.

If they were looking up through that microscope, I can imagine what they are saying about you, too.

*Eddie Cantor*

I'm never going to the movies with him again.

What happened?

It was awful. He took me to a very romantic picture and in the middle of the movie I slipped my hand in his—then I nudged a little—then I kissed a little —

Yes, yes?

Then I remembered we didn't get two seats together.

\* \* \*

THAT is the stuff that fortunes are made of! That is the material on which hired gag-writers labour for weeks. Seen in cold print, it makes one realise the extent to which personality is necessary to "put it across"—to make millions of people all over the world roar with laughter, and to make the cash registers of the programme sponsors jingle.

According to the professional gag-writers, there are only about seven basic jokes in the world. When their labours are scanned in the cold light of print, one is inclined to agree with them. But put those lines in the mouths of persons with reputations as humorists, tie them up with lively music, garnish with slick production, and top it all off with skilfully insinuated commercial "plugs," and you and I and millions of other people will continue to be bluffed into thinking that we have just heard the wittiest wisecracks ever created.

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