

EDDIE CANTOR

In February of 1931 Eddie Cantor made a guest appearance on the Rudy Vallee Fleischmann Hour and the comedian from the Ziegfeld Follies began a successful career on radio.

His own show, the Chase and Sanborn Hour, premiered on September 13, 1931.

In the early months he was well received by listeners but he was somewhat uncomfortable doing a radio show. Eddie Cantor did not get any reaction from his studio audience.

They were told *not* to react to anything being broadcast. In fact, before each program, announcer Jimmy Wallington would stand up before the studio audience and make a speech prepared by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency:

“Ladies and gentlemen, you are here as guests of Chase and Sanborn. We ask you to cooperate with us in not applauding, not laughing, so that our listening audience can have the illusion of hearing a show without distraction.”

Cantor wasn't happy about this, especially because he needed the reaction of the studio audience to be assured that his material was going over.

During one broadcast, he and Wallington were doing a sketch in which women take over the jobs of men. They were lady truck drivers “Edwina” Cantor and “Jenny” Wallington. Props were not necessary on radio but, on an impulse, Cantor grabbed some women's hats, he and Wallington put them on and the two clowns minced around the microphone during the skit.

The audience howled and there was no stopping them. They kept on laughing until the show was over. One minute after the broadcast ended, Cantor got a call from the agency.

“Eddie, what happened?” said John Reber of J. Walter Thompson.

“I'm impulsive,” Cantor said. “I got carried away.”

“Well, the show's finally come alive! You have audience participation!”

And from that moment on, all studio audiences were permitted to react to the performers during radio broadcasts.