



# Pages in Time



## Does the name Spike Jones ring a bell?

by Milt Huntington

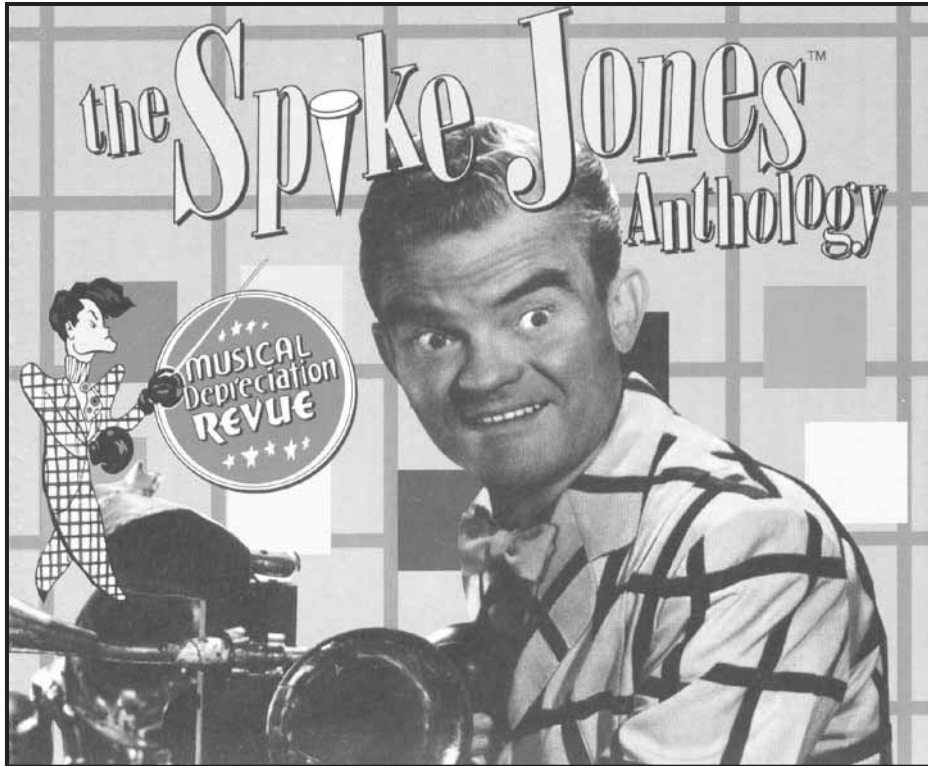
Does the name Spike Jones ring a bell? Ring a bell? Yuk! Yuk! Yuk! We're talking here about a bandleader from the 1940s and '50s who worked hard to gain the reputation as the man who murdered music. Back then, we were mesmerized by his musical mayhem.

Here was a funny-looking bandleader on TV, attired in a suit with huge check patterns, nonchalantly chewing gum. All over the stage were midgets and people with no heads running around while clutching wash boards, bulb horns, cowbells and pistols. Spike seemed quite content with all the madness. He appeared very serious about the music and never cracked a smile.

The satirical arrangements of popular songs and serious high-brow music, punctuated with gunshots, whistles, gargling and goofy lyrics put Spike Jones and His City Slickers on top of the charts. He had a ton of hits, not the least of which were: "Der Fuehrer's Face," ridiculing Adolph Hitler; and "All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth," a Christmastime smash which we continue to hear today – like it or not.

All the silliness appealed to intellectual high school musical aficionados like me and Chuck Hewins. Chuck, whose father owned the original Knowlton & Hewins Funeral Home, and I went to Smith School together and pretty much appreciated each other's distorted sense of humor. Chuck started the one and only Spike Bones Band. He gathered up three or four other classmates with a smidgen of musical talent, and we started rehearsals in the music room of his home. I played a one-valve bugle. Chuck tickled the ivories and sang. The rest manned washboards and cowbells and gurgled a lot. One of the musicians did nothing but sit in the background and read funny books. When asked by Spike Bones during a performance why he was there, he would reply, in a Mexican Mel Blanc imitation, "I'm just here to make the orchestra look 'beeger.'"

Well, believe it or not, we paraded our questionable musical talent before a Cony High school assembly. We were apparently a hit. From there, we performed on WRDO's "Meet The Mike" with broadcaster Dan Kelly and were actually asked to return. We were on our way to stardom and even cut a plastic



record. I don't know what happened to the stardom. I don't even know what happened to the record.

Anyhow, getting back to the oh-so-beautiful sounds of the Spike Jones and Spike Bones Bands, one of the hilarious tunes we tried to emulate was the beautiful and enduring masterpiece, "The Blue Danube." The bandleaders, Spike Jones and Spike Bones, set out to musically and lyrically destroy the song by singing: "What they say is not true. The Danube ain't blue, (plink, plink, plink plink). The Danube is green, (plink, plink, plink, plink). It's green as a bean, (plink, plink, plink, plink). It ain't not serene. What's more it ain't clean. The Danube isn't blue. It's green."

In the rendition of "Der Fuehrer's Face" during WWII, the lyrics contained the German salute, "Heil," followed every time by a derisive razzberry sound. That's putting it gently. Everybody, but everybody was repeating the salute back in those good old days.

Utilizing Mel Blanc, the voice of Bugs Bunny and other cartoon characters, the real Spike Jones and His City Slickers performed a drunken, hiccuping rendition of "Cocktails For Two." It provided a horn-honking, voice gurgling, hiccuping hymn to a not-so-sophisticated cocktail hour. The original composer of the song, Sam Coslow, found no humor in the butchering of his music.

One of my all-time favorite pieces of classical music is the

"William Tell Overture." It was the background music and introduction to the radio and television show, "The Lone Ranger." Spike Jones and Spike Bones boys reproduced the song, utilizing kitchen implements, washboards and bulb horns and came up with "Beetle Bomb." The rendition used a horse race as a backdrop with a crazed race track announcer. "And the winner is-B-e-e-t-l-e--B-o-m-b."

Some of the other classics with a Spike Jones signature: "Chole," where the vocalist would proclaim: "Where are you, you old bat!" Then of course there was the inimitable "Holiday For Strings" in which some character played a toilet seat with strings. "Hotcha Cornia" was a take-off on a Russian ballad. "You Always Hurt The One You Love" featured gunshots and background screams.

Others I almost hesitate to mention include "The Sheik of Araby, the extremely popular "Mairsy Dotes," "Yes, We Have No Bananas," and the ever-popular: "Never Hit Your Grandma With a Shovel."

The original Spike died on May 1, 1965, at the age of 53. His satirical arrangements of popular and classical music will live forever in the memories of some of us with distorted senses of humor and questionable musical tastes who were there when it all began.

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Note: Lindley Armstrong "Spike" Jones was born on December 14, 1911. His father, was a railroad agent and Spike got his name because he was as thin as a railroad spike. He was a musically talented child, had his own teen bands and played on the pots and pans when he worked in the railroad restaurant. Although he and his band were all seriously talented musicians, most people enjoyed and remember them for their outlandish look and sound.

"Yes We Have No Bananas"  
Spike Jones' version

I need not search for precious gold;  
Of wealth, I have my share.  
For with my eyes, I scan the skies  
And find my fortune there.  
A host of priceless dreams unfold  
In songs that bluebirds sing.  
The earth, the sea belong to me  
I'm richer than a king.  
To add to things that money cannot buy,

An echo brings this very soft reply:

Yes! We have no bananas!  
We have no bananas today!  
We've string beans and onions,  
Cabrillas and scallions,  
And all kinds of fruit and say.  
We have an old-fashioned toma-  
to;

Long Island potato;  
But, yes! We have no bananas!  
We have no bananas today!  
Yes, we no-nje gotta de bananos.  
We no-nje gotta-da banano  
today, but one-a menoots!  
We gotta new kinda garlic  
When-a use-a dees garlic,  
It-a meka you stand apart-a from-  
a you friends.

We gotta 64,000 watermelone!  
We don't-a sell any, but the guy  
we buyem from  
Mama mia! Does he sell a water-  
melone!

But-a yes! We no-nje gotta the  
bananas. Hey, why you-on?  
We no-nje gotta de bananos  
today!

Yes! Ah, we have no bananas!  
What's that? An half a banana?  
Now what good is a banana  
split? Uh-huh-huh-huh!  
We have a muttons, and buttons,  
And kippers with zippers,  
And pounds of devaluated  
pounds

Banana: S T I N K !  
They ain't no stinkin bananas!  
Precisely! They ain't no stinking  
bananas!

Yes! Ah, we have no bananas!  
Pip pip, cheerio, and \*\*\*\*\*! Uh-  
huh-huh-huh!

Yes, we ain't got bananas.  
We ain't got bananas today.  
We got pickles and crocks;  
We got bagels and locks;  
A bagel that's-a done-a dipped in  
cement.

We got delicious knishes and  
kosher champagne  
The kosher champagne there's  
two cents plain;  
Pastrami, salami, matzos, and  
jam.

You should pardon the expres-  
sion: We even got ham!  
But yes, we ain't got bananas.  
We ain't got bananas today.



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