

## **Eddie Jaffe's obits that ran in the NYT and the LATimes.**

### **Eddie Jaffe,**

#### **the Press Agent Of Broadway, Is Dead at 89**

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

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Eddie Jaffe, a press agent legendary for his lost causes, chutzpah and angst, who all but made Broadway his alias and held that the best kind of promotion was self-promotion, died on Tuesday at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx.

He was 89 and had been hospitalized since November, said his daughter, Jordan Jaffe of Alexandria, Va., his only surviving family member.

Until old age and complications from a hip operation confined him to his cluttered apartment on 52nd Street off Eighth Avenue, the spectral Mr. Jaffe was a familiar presence at Gallagher's Steak House down the street and the rapidly vanishing haunts of Walter Winchell and Damon Runyon.

Neal Gabler, Winchell's biographer, called Mr. Jaffe "the last of a breed -- the do-anything, buccaneering press agent." Mr. Jaffe, he said in an interview, "marked the dividing line between that breed and all that came after, the public relations experts." Press agents like Mr. Jaffe, Mr. Gabler said, "flew by the seat of their pants and were willing to do anything for a client and at the same time themselves."

Robert Sylvester, a longtime entertainment columnist for The Daily News, devoted a chapter to Mr. Jaffe and his zany circle in a 1970 book, "Notes of a Guilty Bystander." Describing him as "a small wiry man with a shock of wiry hair," Mr. Sylvester wrote, "Underneath the hair is an imagination that knows no bounds, great energy and a basic nature so kindly that, thinking over everybody who is left from this act, I cannot name a single person who puts the knock on him."

At a time when fame was measured by orchids in Winchell's column, Mr. Jaffe held sway out of a raucous Times Square crash pad known as Eddie's Place and that became sometime home to Marlon Brando, Dorothy Dandridge, Julie Newmar, Jackie Mason, Gwen Verdon and assorted other rising stars, agents and journalists. His eclectic and ever-changing client list included Jackie Gleason, Vice President Henry Wallace, Victor Borge, Marlene Dietrich, the Shah of Iran, John Wayne, Martha Mitchell, Jimmy Hoffa and Claus von Bülow, along with movie studios, television networks, giant corporations and government agencies.

He got his client Joe Namath \$10,000 to shave off his celebrated Fu Manchu mustache with a Schick electric razor. He helped Treasury agents reclaim credit stolen by the F.B.I. He counseled Jimmy Davis, the song-writing ("You Are My Sunshine") Louisiana politician in his successful campaign for governor. And he did publicity for scores of films -- mostly clunkers, but good ones, too, like "King Kong," "Sunset Boulevard," "The Red Shoes," "Juárez" and "Mon Oncle."

But Mr. Jaffe was at least equally remembered for his failures. He called himself "the world's worst salesman," explaining, "I always see the viewpoint of the customer who turns me down."

Wispy and nasal-voiced, he was forever peddling an autobiography he wanted to call "How You Can Become Famous." Many of his stories, told with a self-effacing cackle, seemed to have the same downbeat ending: fate shortchanged him, fortune eluded him. As a stunt, he once bought an electric chair to promote a 1959 Mickey Rooney prison movie, "The Last Mile," but it was never delivered. No one would help him track it down, either. His advice to posterity: "Don't pay for an electric chair until it arrives."

Proving that the phrase "insecure press agent" was no oxymoron, Mr. Jaffe made no secret of his 2,500 sessions on the couch. As he wrote in one of many unpublished memoirs, one psychoanalyst called him "the unhappiest looking person I ever met," and, when he fell behind on his bills, threatened, "Pay up or I'll let you go crazy." He said he failed his analyst, too: "I thought my job was to amuse him."

Edward Jaffe was born in Duluth, Minn., on Oct. 22, 1913, the son of Isadore and Ann Jaffe. His father was a tailor from Lithuania who borrowed the money for a passage to America from a woman acquaintance who assumed he would then send for her and marry her. When he did not, she came over herself, tracked him down in Duluth and got a rabbi to perform the wedding.

When Eddie was 4, they moved to Hibbing, Minn., where his mother died giving birth to a daughter. He was sent to live with relatives and then, when he was 13, his father sent him to an orphans' home in Cleveland. "I was a paid orphan," he wrote years later, "the only one I ever heard of whose stay was financed by a parent."

At 16, inspired by a Richard Harding Davis story about the glamorous life of a copy boy, he left for New York and got a job in the advertising department of The New York Telegram, working afternoons and evenings and going to high school in the mornings. He also covered school sports

for 25 cents a column inch, plus 50 cents for the score. He coached nuns to collect Catholic school results for him.

He drifted into publicity work, starting with vaudeville and burlesque acts that, he figured, had little to lose in hiring him. When Winchell published his column item calling the stripper Margie Hart "the poor man's Garbo," her pay skyrocketed from \$250 to \$2,500 a week. His career took off. Still, he said he learned that "a life spent praising others is not as rewarding as one devoted to blowing your own horn."

After a stint in Hollywood promoting films, he returned to New York and moved into a \$100-a-month three-room walk-up apartment on the top floor of 156 West 48th Street. It became a perpetual party zone and refuge for aspiring starlets and actors, including Mr. Brando, who was just attaining stardom in "A Streetcar Named Desire."

Mr. Jaffe continued to promote television and movies, with mixed results. He wrote that at NBC's behest, he went to Philadelphia and helped make Ernie Kovacs a star. He also acquired the rights to a 1955 G. W. Pabst film, "The Last 10 Days of Adolph Hitler," only to have the release blocked by a fearful studio executive who asked, as Mr. Jaffe later wrote, "What if Hitler isn't dead and comes back to make problems for us?"

Happily single, he married many years ago after his analyst warned he could become "a lonely old man." But, he recounted, after a month he told the analyst, "I prefer to be a lonely old man." His former wife, Pat Kelly, lives in California.

In the 1950's and 60's he promoted boxing and helped set up some of the earliest pay-per-view closed circuit television fights. One simulcast in the White Plains Convention Center in 1962 was so fuzzy that 10,000 viewers couldn't tell who was felled in the first round knockout -- Sonny Liston or Floyd Patterson. (It was Patterson.) Menaced by irate fans, Mr. Jaffe recalled, he saved himself by yelling, "Let's hang the promoter!" Everyone ran off. He was the promoter.

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**LA TIMES**

**Eddie Jaffe, 89;**

**Old-School Publicist Got Ink for Such Clients as Dietrich, 'Duke'**

March 29, 2003 | Dennis McLellan | Times Staff Writer

Eddie Jaffe, a New York press agent with a Runyonesque charm and a list of clients ranging from Marlene Dietrich to Rosita Royce the Dove Dancer, has died. He was 89.

Jaffe, who was equally adept at self-promotion and once billed himself as "the world's ugliest press agent," died Tuesday of undisclosed causes in a hospital in the Bronx, where he had been hospitalized since November.

In a career that spanned more than 50 years, Jaffe boasted a client list that included the Andrews Sisters, Count Basie, John Wayne, Joe Namath, Jimmy Hoffa, Martha Mitchell and Claus von Bulow. He also promoted everything from major corporations and government agencies to boxing matches.

His former two-room apartment on the top floor of a building on West 48th Street became a legendary hangout in the 1940s and beyond for an assortment of out-of-work actors, songwriters, chorus girls, hustlers and politicians.

A small, slightly built man with wiry hair, a nasal voice and a ready grin, Jaffe displayed an endless supply of energy and imagination in a profession whose early years required large doses of it.

Jaffe was part of a bygone breed of Broadway press agents who honed their promotional skills at a time when clients still came from the ranks of vaudeville and burlesque, and when placing a client's name in Walter Winchell's column was considered the ultimate success.

Starting his career in the early 1930s, Jaffe had no shortage of clients guaranteed to generate some press. As he recounted in a 1984 Associated Press interview:

There was Zimmy, a legless man who swam from Albany to Manhattan while eating bananas. "With no legs, he floated just like a cork," recalled Jaffe.

There was Think-a-Drink Hoffman, a magician who conjured drinks mentally summoned by the audience. "He carried on his person 190-proof alcohol and flavorings," Jaffe said.

And there was Rosita Royce the Dove Dancer, a stripper who was undressed by 39 pigeons. "I got space for her in the papers when her birds collapsed with a nervous breakdown," he said.

As Jaffe said, those were the days when "the papers welcomed the imagination."

A couple of times, Jaffe lost clients before they hit the big time.

He recalled being thrown out of every booking agency in New York trying to sell piano-playing comic Borge Rosenbaum's act. But a year later -- after leaving Jaffe and changing his name -- Victor Borge hit it big.

Jaffe also promoted an overweight New York club comic whose career was going so badly that his phone was disconnected because he couldn't pay the bill. He also couldn't pay his press agent, who filed suit against the unknown Jackie Gleason.

In his prime, Jaffe sent out an average of 1,750 separate items a month to columnists from New York to Los Angeles. As he told Associated Press: "A publicist loves space more than money."

In the process of getting his clients publicity, Jaffe scored some memorable hits and misses.

He successfully planted a story that Zorita the Snake Charmer had fallen in love with one of her snakes. To keep Zorita's name in the papers after that stunning disclosure, he hired a psychiatrist to diagnose Zorita's condition. But the promotional gambit backfired when the psychiatrist said that the only thing wrong with Zorita was her press agent.

Another time, Jaffe promoted an album he claimed was recorded live in the Holland Tunnel. "At one point, three-quarters of the way through the record, you can even hear someone trying to make a U-turn," he told columnists. Jaffe, it turned out, was pulling their legs. But the story garnered exposure for his two struggling songwriter clients.

While promoting his clients, Jaffe became something of a legend himself. His name was frequently mentioned in newspaper columns, along with his clients'. He even generated headlines of his own such as "The Little Monster" and "Jaffe, Press Agent of Hopeless Causes."

A case in point: He once sent a national magazine pictures of himself with a group of stripper clients along with a note that said, "From the world's ugliest press agent, the world's most beautiful strippers."

"Sorry," the magazine's editors responded. "Can agree with only the first half of your statement."

The son of Lithuanian immigrants, Jaffe was born in Duluth, Minn., in

1913. The family moved to Hibbing, Minn., when Jaffe was 4. After his mother died while giving birth to a daughter, his father, a tailor, sent him to live with relatives. At 13, he was sent to an orphanage in Cleveland.

When he was 16, Jaffe moved to New York City. He attended high school in the mornings and worked afternoons and evenings as an errand boy in the advertising department of the New York Telegram, where he also began earning extra money covering school sports.

At 20, he left the paper to become a press agent.

Burlesque queen Margie Hart was Jaffe's first client. He dubbed her "the Poor Man's Garbo," Winchell printed the item, and Jaffe was on his way.

Jaffe is survived by his daughter, Jordan Jaffe of Alexandria, Va.