



SOMEONE once characterized Milton Berle as the most resourceful ad-libber since Scheherazade, and estimated that if he had 25,000 jokes in his card file, he carried the other 975,000 in his head. Some are good, some are bad, most have been used by someone else first.

Good, bad, or indifferent, Berle and his jokes have received more free publicity from rival comedians than from any other source. When Mama Berle first took to sitting among the spectators and keying them with her well-practiced, booming laugh, one comic threatened to have the Berles investigated under the antitrust act. Another comedian regularly interrupted the laughter after his best gags to scream into the audience: "Drop that pencil, Berle!"

And Berle ate it up.

An incurable extrovert of 43, Uncle Miltie is already a 36-year show-business veteran and will probably go on forever. At the very least, his new 30-year contract with NBC will keep him in front of the TV cameras until he is 72—at which time he may stop dancing with the dancers and tumbling with the tumblers but undoubtedly will still be cracking wise.

Any two people make an audience for Berle—he loves to be "on." After his Tuesday night show, he locks the studio audience in and indulges in a two-hour "warm-over." Then he heads for Lindy's and ad-libs with the kibitzers until 3 A.M. or thereabouts.

The man who would just as soon throw away the script and fire gags at the rate of some 20 a minute from the most fabulous memory in show business cannot be stopped, stumped, or annoyed when he is onstage—least of all by hecklers—he is much too entranced by his comedy. Once, a drunk down front persisted in trying to match wits with the master—until Miltie chortled: "Look, Mister, I'm trying to make a living. Do I come down to where you work and kick your shovel out from under you?"

Coronet

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