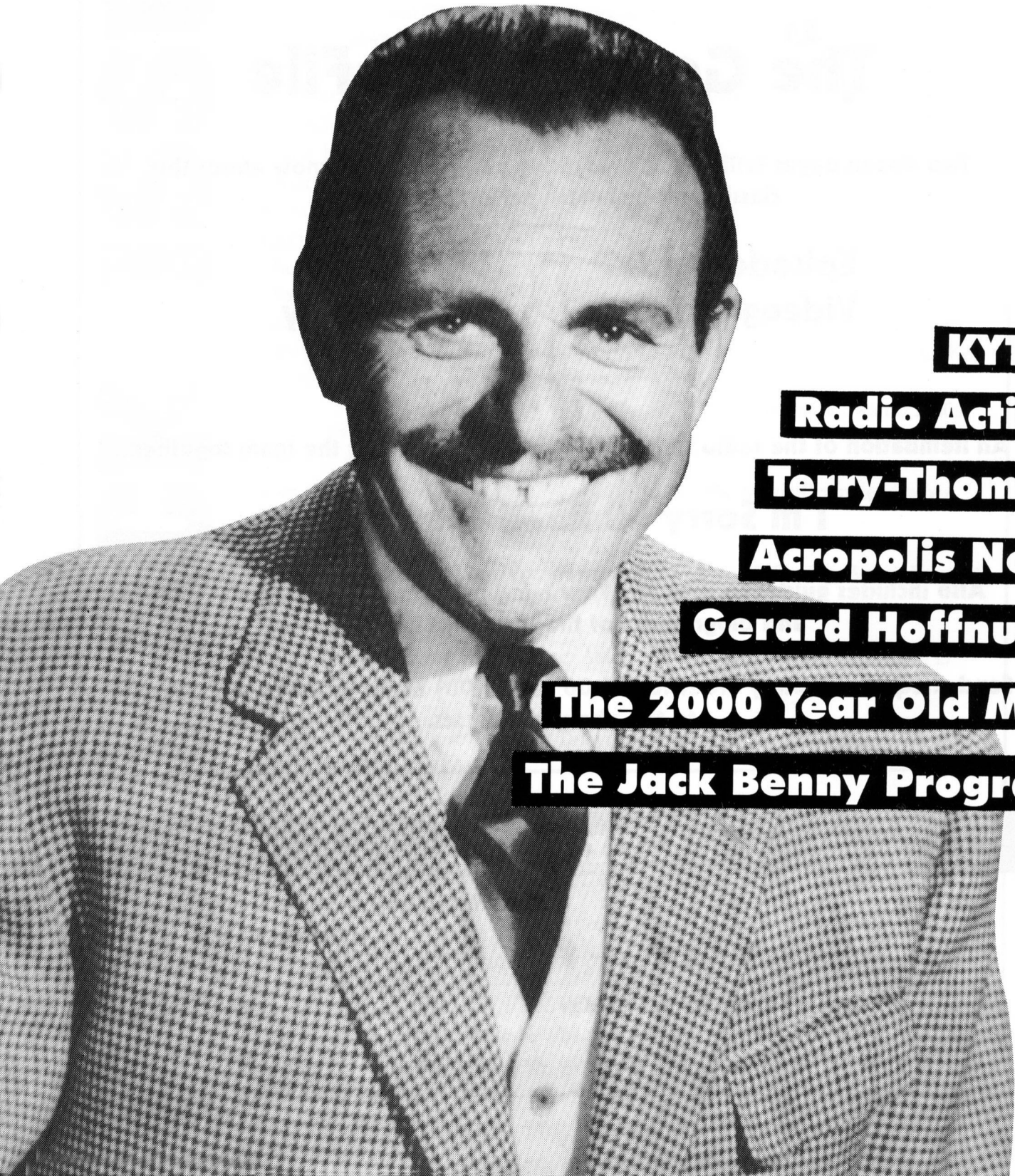


£2 United Kingdom/\$4 Australia & U.S.

LAUGH

The Comedy Magazine

Issue 18 1998



KYTV

Radio Active

Terry-Thomas

Acropolis Now

Gerard Hoffnung

The 2000 Year Old Man

The Jack Benny Program

Editor: Peter Tatchell **Layout & Design:** Mark McKay & Peter Tatchell

LAUGH is priced at \$4.00 per issue (plus \$1.00 postage) in Australia and the United States of America and £2.00 per issue (plus 50p postage) in Britain.

Subscription rates for four issues are \$20.00 (Australia and U.S.) or £10.00 (Britain) sent by air.

Subscriptions to LAUGH should be made payable to P. Tatchell and directed to the following addresses:

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**Episode Guide
Videography**

**Discography
Bibliography**

plus

An itemisation of the radio series which originally brought the team together...

I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again

Also includes guides to Broaden Your Mind and I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue and biographies of the three cast members

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RADIO ACTIVE

by Tony Lang



BACK in 1980, commercial radio had only been running in the U.K. for a few years when a new local station burst on to the airwaves ... **Radio Active**. Being difficult (if not impossible) to pick up with conventional radios, they had to make do with a series of live link ups with BBC Radio 4. Or so the perpetrators would have us believe ... it was actually a novel sendup of the fledgeling industry inspired by the 1978 Oxford University student show which was adapted for the 1979 Edinburgh Fringe.

The first of the so-called "simulcasts" took place on April 8th 1980 as part of the **The Oxford Revue**, and starred Helen Atkinson Wood, Angus Deayton, Philip Pope, Karen Rasmussen, Michael Stevens and David Jackson Young. The B.B.C. subsequently commissioned a season of six further link ups under the title **Radio Active** which were aired eighteen months later. In the series, Rasmussen and Young were replaced by Geoffrey Perkins and (occasionally) Morwenna Banks. Eventually the programme would run to some fifty editions (plus a couple of specials).

As the show progressed, we were introduced to various staff members at the radio station ...

- *Mike Channel* (played by Deayton) - the station's "imploding" personality, who started out as a presenter of a peak time weekday show, was moved to the Sunday morning 4am timeslot, and ended up as Aaron The Aardvark on the Saturday morning kiddies show.
- *Mike Flex* (Perkins) - the cocky presenter whose career was heading in the opposite direction to *Channel's*.

- *Anna Daptor* (Wood) - the podgy host of the midday show, whose obsession with food caused all sorts of problems.
- "*Uncle*" *Mike Stand* (Stevens) - the 'kiddies favourite', whose well-intended actions inevitably led to his arrest for child molesting.
- (Oh so daring) *Mike Hunt* (Pope) - the station's daredevil, who performed stunts which even a five-year-old would consider tame.
- *Anna Rabies* (usually Wood, but occasionally Banks) - the very aggressive agony aunt, whose solution was usually to kill the source of the problem.
- *Martin Brown* (Stevens) - the shyest DJ on radio, who started on the local hospital radio 4am show, and was employed for one reason - he was cheap.
- *Nigel Pry* (Pope) - a one-man accident black-spot, who often demolished the studio within seconds of starting his show.
- *Oivind Vinstra* (Perkins) - a Norwegian DJ with a poor command of English (another inexpensive announcer).
- *Sir Norman Tonsil* (Deayton) - the pompous, opinionated and downright obnoxious chairman.
- *Dr. Philip Percygo* (Pope) - the singing medico.
- *The Right Reverend Reverend Wright* (Deayton) - the resident head of Religious Affairs, with a liking for heavy metal hymns.

Over the years the show sent up just about every sort of radio programme, ranging from mass debates (*Are you in favour of all-out nuclear destruction?*), cookery (*I thought everybody knew coq au vin was a recipe with chicken, and I can't be held responsible for what has happened to your husband*), and unbiased election specials (with the station chairman, Sir Norman Tonsil, standing as the candidate for the *Free-Enterprise-Bring-Back-The-Rack-And-Send-Home-All-Those-With-A-Touch-Of-The-Tar-Brush-In-Them Democratic Party* in the Thodding Bye-Election) to a fly on the wall documentary about an average family (*Mr and Mrs Famley*) with intimate details of their disintegration, nervous breakdowns and the major fire caused by a faulty microphone lead.

Each episode had a musical break (usually written by Philip Pope) consisting of a sendup of a popular group or artist. One of these groups was the HeeBeeGeeBees, that well-known trio of Norris, Dobbin and Garry Cribb. As portrayed by Pope, Deayton and Stevens, the trio began releasing commercial recordings even before **Radio Active** began, and their "life story" was profiled in a Radio 2 documentary broadcast in 1981.

The shows were broken up by a wide range of advertisements including sendups of real ads (*the sound of someone being violently sick, followed by "I bet he drinks Carling Black Label"*) and exclusive products (*suck Quillies throat lozenges*). A regular advertiser was *Honest Ron* (Stevens), who threw in a visit from six out-of-work jockeys bent on rearranging parts of your anatomy if you didn't pay up on time.

Also broadcast were blindingly obvious public information advertisements to warn you against such activities as letting small children play in the fast lane of a motorway.

Radio Active tried to help the community with a wide range of telephone help lines including the *I'm In Trouble Line*, the *Oh God, I'm Unemployed Line* and the *Christ Almighty, I'm Starving To Death Here And You Bastards Don't Seem To Be Able To Do Anything About It Line*.

Radio Active was immensely popular but had its controversial moments. The satire on religious broadcasting (aired on September 12 1987) provoked a series of complaint letters to the Radio Times when some took it the wrong way. The *D-Day Show* (November 1 1986) also received complaints, with apologies being demanded by some of those who had fought at Normandy.

The show ran for a total of seven seasons. There were rumours of an eighth season, but instead the team transferred to television in May 1989 as part of the **Comic Asides** series. This was a showcase for five 'pilot' programmes (akin to the **Comedy Playhouse** series which spawned **Steptoe And Son** and many others back in the 1960s and 1970s).

In the move from radio to tv, the idea switched from being a commercial radio station to a satellite tv company, and in the process gained a new chairman - Sir Kenneth Yellowhammer. Unfortunately another group was already using the name SKY TV, so the "Sir" part was dropped. He led the station in an aggressive drive for what the Radio Times described as "a headlong chase for ratings at the expense of quality".

Some new characters appeared, such as *Mad Hattie*, the *fitness expert* and *Rabbi Rabbit*, a glove puppet who appeared in the religious programmes.

Much of the material in **KYTV** was taken from **Radio Active** including a charity fundraiser, the D-Day special and a fly-on-the-wall documentary (this time featuring *Mr and Mrs Walls*). TV sendups included *Challenge Anna*, in which Anna

Daptor had to locate a spleen for a life-saving transplant operation and a documentary about the making of the play *Martin Chizzlenutt* (loosely based on an idea by Charles Dickens). Other **Radio Active** ideas surfaced in modified form such as *Brown Nose Day*, sending up the BBC's **Red Nose Day** (where twenty-five barefoot East End kiddies set off across Antarctica with **KYTV** T-shirts, sandwiches and buckets and spades to recreate Captain Scott's expedition).

KYTV has run three seasons, but with the last over five years ago, the concept seems to have run its course. **Radio Active** was honoured with the BPI Award for Best Radio Comedy Show of 1981, the Sony Award for Best Light Entertainment Programme of 1982 and the Premio Ondas of 1983. **KYTV** won the Silver Rose Of Montreux in 1994.

Radio Active

The Oxford Revue: R4 April 8 1980

Series 1: R4 September 8 to October 13 1981 (6 editions)

The Late Show
Bedrock - The Early Morning Breakfast Show
Midday Show
The Radio Active Roadshow
What's News
Radio Active Awards

The HeeBeeGeeBees Story: R2 December 19 1981

Series 2: R4 August 16 to September 20 1982 (6 editions)

The History Of Radio Active
Charity Radiothon
Good Day Sport
What's Going On
The Nigel Pry Show
Pick Of The Week

Series 3: R4 July 12 to August 16 1983 (6 editions)

Euroshow
Probe Round The Back
Funday
Repeat After Three
Lunchtime With Anna
What's Going On At The Edinburgh Festival

Radio Active's Christmas Turkey: R4 December 20 1983

Series 4: R4 July 9 to August 27 1984 (8 editions)

Salute To New York
The Martin Brown Show
Round Your Parts
Breakfast Show
Minorities Programme
Bio Show
Gigantaquiz
Martin Chizzlenutt

Series 5: R4 July 5 to August 23 1985 (8 editions)

Wimbledon Special
Nuclear Debate
Out Of Your Depth
In Australia
Get Away With You
Wey Hey It's Saturday
Music Festival
Did You Catch It?

Series 6: R4 October 11 to November 29 1986 (8 editions)
A Thodding By-Election Special
The Fit And Fat Show
Radio Active's Bogie Awards
The D-Day Show
Radio Active Goes To The Movies
Stop That Crime UK
In House Documentary
Backchat

Series 7: R4 August 29 to October 19 1987 (8 editions)
It Was 20 Years Ago Last Tuesday
Radio Radio Programme
God Alone Knows
Probe Round The Back
Mike Says - Here's A Bit Of Talent
Flu Special
You And Your Things
Mega Phone In

KYTV

Comic Asides: BBC2 May 12 1989

Series 1: BBC2 May 3 to June 7 1990 (6 editions)
The Launch Of KYTV
Big Fight Special
The Green Green Show
Those Wonderful War Years
It's A Royal Wedding
Challenge Anna

Series 2: BBC2 March 17 to April 21 1992 (6 editions)
KY Telethon
God Alone Knows
Good Morning Calais
Crisis Special
Talking Head
Speak For Yourself

Series 3: BBC2 September 17 to October 22 1993 (6 editions)
The Making Of David Chizzlenutt
Those Sexciting Sixties
Fly On The Walls
2000 'n' Whither
Hot Crimes
Get Away With You

Discography

Meaningless Songs/Posing In The Moonlight
Original Records/R.C.A. single ABO 2 (1980)

439 Golden Greats - The Original HeeBeeGeeBees
Original Records/R.C.A. LP TWITS 101 (1981)
Meaningless Songs (HeeBeeGeeBees)/(Dancing) Up The Wall
(Jack Michaelson)/Dead Cicada (The Beagles)/Quite Ahead
Of My Time (David Bowwow)/You're My Son (Kenny Rogered)/Boring Song (Status Quid)/Ah! (HeeBeeGeeBees)/
Too Depressed To Commit Suicide (The PeeCees)/Simple Song
(Paul McCarthrob & Wangs)/Granma (St. Winalot's Reform
School Choir)/Music Machine (Babba)/Oh Me! (Larry
Pilsson)/Bird Of Peace (Neil Dung, Bob Vylan, The Bland,
Frank Sumatra, Dean Martian, Leonard Crowing, George
Harrassing)

**Too Depressed To Commit Suicide/Up The Wall +
Meaningless Songs**

Original Records/R.C.A. single HGBG 1 (1981)

Boring Song/Dead Cicada

Original Records/R.C.A. single HGBG 2 (1981)

Radio Active

B.B.C. LP REH 471 (1983)

highlights from series 1 and 2: Police File + Shipping Fore-
cast/Commercial Break/Ches And Des/Luscivia In The Foyer/
Dedication + Wordplay Jackpot/Radiothon/Kate Bosch/Pen-
sioner At The Ritz/Soap Box Corner/Commercials (Wilson's
Cricket Bat + Martin's Of Bond Street)/S.O.S. Message/
Thought For The Day/Sword Fighting/Results Service/Next
Time/Incorrect Traffic Report/Commercial Time (Bad Breath
Advert)/Bob Dylan Sings/Sooty's Magic Show/David
Copperfield/Hymen And Carbuncle/Playhouse/Masterquiz/
Commercials (The Basement + Nappies)/Adventure Holiday/
Wang Wang/Should You Find Any Fault

HeeBeeGeeBees Present - 20 Big No 2's

J & B LP (Australia only) JB 197

Pretty Boys On Video (Drone Drone)/Kiss And Make Up
(Couture Club)/Purple Pants (Ponce)/When Two Songs Sound
The Same (Frankie Goes To The Bank)/Wherever I Lay (Paul
Yuk)/Scatalogical Song (Supertrash)/Down Tools (Men Re-
laxing)/Dancelot (Pox Music)/Toyland Rhapsody (Queer)/
Gary Clitter Is Back (Gary Clitter)/Get 'Em Off, Irene (Sexist
Midnight Runners)/I Don't Want Your Baby (Human Leak)/
Me! (The Kids From Shame)/Bored In The U.S.A. (Bruce
Springbok)/Song Without A Tune (Billy Idiot)/Curdled Milk
And Boot Polish (Paul McCarthrob and Stevie Blunder)/Are
Trains Electric? (Gary Inhuman)/Out Of Proportion (Jack
Michaelson)/I Don't Wanna Smoke Anymore Dope (Eddy
Grunt)/Lies (Spamdown Belly)/We Can't Have Hits Of Our
Own Anymore (Stars Over 45: Kenny Rogered, Dolly Hardon,
Julio Insidias, Bob Vylan, Frank Sumatra, Paul McCarthrob,
John Denture, Jack Michaelson, The HeeBeeGeeBees)

(When) Two Songs (Sound The Same)/Purple Pants
10 Records single TEN 61 (1989)

Radio Active

B.B.C./Canned Laughter audio cassette ZBBC 1522
features Mega Phone-In/Martin Chizzlenutt

Further Selections From Radio Active

B.B.C./Canned Laughter audio cassette ZBBC 1718

Books

Radio Active Times

Sphere Books paperback, 1986

**The Utterly, Utterly Amusing And Pretty Damn Definitive
Comic Relief Revue Book**

Penguin paperback, 1989

includes scripts: Three-Way Quiz and Martins' Of Bond Street

Video

KYTV

B.B.C. Video BBCV 5193

features The Making Of David Chizzlenutt/Those Sexciting
Sixties/Fly On The Walls

THE JACK BENNY PROGRAM

by Peter Tatchell

It is probably the most fondly remembered show of the era affectionately known as *the golden days of radio*. For twenty years, Sunday nights at 7:00pm meant one thing ... **The Jack Benny Program**. The antics of Jack and his castmates became must-hear listening for millions of Americans for a generation. Between the years 1934 and 1954 it was the medium's top rated show three times, and only out of the top five once (and then, only falling to number six).

Jack Benny himself wasn't that special a comedian. Born Benjamin Kubelsky in Chicago in 1894, his first taste of performing came during his stint in the navy during World War I when the then violin player was asked to offer a few words of repartee as part of a concert for his fellow sailors.

After the war he worked up a comedy music act and toured the vaudeville circuits throughout the 1920s. He called himself Ben Benny, until confusion with bandleader Ben Bernie led to him changing his first name to Jack. In January 1927 he wed the former Sadie Marks (who adopted the stage name of Mary Livingstone), in a marriage that would last nearly fifty years.

When the talkies arrived Jack appeared in a handful of shorts (**Bright Moments, Songwriters Revue, A Broadway Romeo, Cab Waiting and Taxi Tangle**) and occasional features (**The Hollywood Revue Of 1929, Chasing Rainbows and Medicine Man**) where he was usually cast as a debonair wisecracking leading man.

The other burgeoning entertainment medium of the era was radio, and Jack made his debut on the Ed Sullivan broadcast of May 2 1931. Within a year he'd been signed for his own show (sponsored by Canada Dry ginger ale) which aired over the NBC Blue network twice weekly for six months. He then switched to CBS (with the same sponsor) for a further three months of two programmes a week.

Soon after, Al Jolson deserted his Friday night Chevrolet show on NBC Red and Jack Benny was signed to replace him. Hoping to capture some of the magic of his best friend George Burns' success with wife Gracie Allen, Jack arranged for Mary Livingstone to become his regular on-air partner from this point on (though she'd first broadcast with him on August 3 1932). It was the first step to the formation of radio's most successful group.

Though now a popular performer on the airwaves, Jack Benny was still very much in the mould of the many other comedians appearing on radio ... each broadcast would feature some traditional repartee, orchestral numbers by the resident band and a song by the male vocalist.

By April 1934, Benny had a new sponsor (the General Tire Company) and a new announcer, the rotund Don Wilson. Another player had joined the team, and when the makers of Jell-O began backing the show later that year, **The Jack Benny Program** had a timeslot it would keep for the next twenty-one seasons ... seven o'clock on Sunday nights.

In only four years on air, Jack's show had featured no fewer than six orchestras (under the batons of George Olsen, Ted Weems, Frank Black, Don Bestor, Jimmy Grier and Johnny Green) before Phil Harris signed on in October 1936 and the writers were able to create an elbow-bending egotist to regularly antagonise the host.

Being a popular broadcasting name led Jack back to the movies in regular appearances on the big screen (**Mr. Broadway, Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round, Broadway Melody Of 1936, It's In The Air, The Big Broadcast Of 1936, College Holiday, Artists And Models, This Way, Please and Artists And Models Abroad**). In each he appeared in fairly nondescript roles which, in fact, could have been played by any number of other show business names.

The 1930s was a popular time for Hollywood westerns, and Jack's radio writers decided to send up the genre by having him play a character called Buck Benny on a number of broadcasts. As part of the proceedings, movie favourite Andy Devine became a semi-regular for several weeks (and in fact made frequent appearances on the show over the following three seasons). The routine even spawned a feature film ... **Buck Benny Rides Again** in 1940.

December 30th 1936 saw the start of radio's greatest feud when Fred Allen welcomed child violinist Stuart Canin to his programme and threw in a line about how well he played in comparison to that other alleged exponent of the catgut ... Jack Benny. In response, Benny fired off some remarks of his own (or, to be more accurate, from the pens of his writers) the following Sunday, and the tit-for-tat routine was off and running. Several months of diatribes led to an appearance at New York's Hotel Pierre in March 1937 which paved the way for a movie spinoff (**Love Thy Neighbor**) and nearly twenty years of top-rating radio and tv confrontations.

Returning by train from the New York hijinks, the Benny programme featured black actor Eddie Anderson in a bit part as a porter, and reaction to the character saw him joining the cast full time as Jack's wisecracking, gravel-voiced manservant Rochester, and acting as sparring partner for Benny for the next quarter of a century. Anderson's character was also featured in a handful of Benny motion pictures (including **Man About Town** and **The Meanest Man In The World**).

Over the years the show had featured several male vocalists (James Melton, Frank Parker and Kenny Baker) but a replacement was needed for the 1939/40 season. The successful candidate was tenor Eugene McNulty, who used the stage name Dennis Day. Day's fine singing talents were augmented by a zany Gracie Allen-like sense of logic which immediately caught on with the listeners and, after almost a decade of building, the Jack's ensemble was complete. After several seasons at number 2, in 1940 **The Jack Benny Program** finally topped the ratings.

Along the way, the writers had transformed the star from a fairly traditional joke-telling comic into a finely drawn, three-dimensional character who was vain, notoriously penny-



pinching, a lousy violinist with a curious walk and the butt of the idiosyncrasies of his supporting players. Benny himself was wise enough to realize the laughs could be spread evenly throughout his team and the show's success would still sit squarely on his shoulders.

Radio had reached its peak, but the coming of the Second World War brought change to all areas of show business. The Armed Forces Radio Service was set up to make sure the morale of America's fighting men was enlivened by the popular broadcasting favourites from back home, and stars like Jack Benny appeared on hundreds of specially-scripted programmes which were played in battle zones all round the world. In addition, most of the weekly series were edited (to remove commercial content) for rebroadcast by the A.F.R.S.

The war also affected the Benny show in a more tragic way. In January 1942, the death of Carole Lombard in an air crash (returning to Los Angeles from a war-bond tour) led to Jack cancelling that week's broadcast ... the pair had recently starred in the Lubisch comedy **To Be Or Not To Be**.

In December that year, Phil Harris temporarily left the show to join the service. He returned three months later, at a time when Orson Welles had stepped in to the host's role for four broadcasts while Benny was ill. In November 1944, Dennis Day also left the series to enlist, with Larry Stevens filling in as the weekly vocalist until Day's return in March 1946.

After eight incredibly successful seasons touting Jell-O, sponsor General Foods decided to have the Benny team switch to another of its products, Grape Nuts, from October 1942. Two years later Lucky Strike cigarettes took over for a marathon run which lasted until the show's eventual demise over ten years later.

Apart from the half-dozen regulars, **The Jack Benny Program** also featured several occasional players ... among them Sam Hearn (as Schlepperman) who first appeared in early 1934, Frank Nelson (the antagonistic *Yeeees* man) from June 1934,

cartoonland's immortal Mel Blanc (the voice of violin teacher Professor Le Blanc) a participant since February 1939, and later, Artie Auerbach (Mr. Kitzel) from January 1946 and Frank Fontaine (as the loudmouthed L.C. Sivoney) from April 1950. Vocal group The Sportsmen Quartet also joined the cast from September 1946 to wax lyrical about the sponsor's wares and irritate the host.

In addition to the annual grudge-match with Fred Allen, in December 1945 Benny began an ongoing antagonism with movie legend Ronald Colman and his wife Benita (who supposedly lived in the house next door). The war of nerves (which resulted in over twenty appearances by the pair over the next six years) had Jack trying to ingratiate himself into their Hollywood circle and generally making a pest of himself. Later the routine was continued in the television version of the show with James Stewart and his wife being the exasperated butt of Benny's company (though the Colmans guested in one of Jack's tv editions in November 1956).

By the late 1940s, NBC had come to dominate the airwaves (thanks in no small manner to institutions like the Benny show). In desperation, CBS chief William Paley organized his infamous "talent raid" which snared Jack, Amos 'N' Andy and Red Skelton. Two million dollars saw CBS buy the entire **Jack Benny Program** which they scheduled (midway through the season) at the regular 7pm Sunday slot from January 2nd 1949. In the process, Benny made a huge tax-free capital gain and Paley got himself a guaranteed ratings winner.

Not merely content to offer a diet of quips and putdowns, the show's writers were encouraged to expand the boundaries of their craft. The first show of the 1949/50 season is remarkable in scripting a half-hour sitcom where the host doesn't make an appearance until the final four minutes ... such was the appeal of a penny-pinching joke about the Benny character that the star agreed to allow the radical idea. Script updates were also permitted during the broadcast with the most famous occurring during the January 8 1950 programme when an accidental name mispronunciation by Don Wilson was cleverly exploited in a later part of the storyline.

The end of the decade saw the emergence of television as the entertainment world's next big craze and by late 1950 most of the big names had either switched mediums or provided tv offerings in addition to their radio efforts. Jack decided to ease into tv gradually with only an occasional show, and continue on with his weekly broadcasts (see LAUGH #1 for a complete guide to the Jack Benny television series).

By mid-1952, radio had lost a huge amount of its advertising dollar to the new competitor and budgets had to be cut. In Benny's case, Phil Harris was replaced by the more economical Bob Crosby and his orchestra (though Phil would return for a tv guestspot in October 1958).

Jack (along with Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and Edgar Bergen) were the last big names to stay on the airwaves but the writing was on the wall and in a few short years the industry would change to disk-jockeys and wall-to-wall music. The 1954/55 season was the last for **The Jack Benny Program** and twelve out of the thirty-five broadcasts were repeats of programmes aired a couple of years before.

Its last years saw no lessening of humour or creativity and up to its final edition **The Jack Benny Program** maintained its reputation as a leading light in the history of American broadcasting, and happily time has not tarnished the delight in listening to the old favourite.



Episode Guide

Season 1: NBC BLUE Mondays and Wednesdays May 2 to October 26 1932 (52 editions)
with Ethel Shutta and George Olsen's Orchestra
sponsor: Canada Dry Ginger Ale

Season 2: CBS Sundays and Thursdays October 30 1932 to January 26 1933 (23 editions)
(* no Sunday editions after January 1 1933)
with Andrea Marsh, Sid Silvers and Ted Weems' Orchestra
sponsor: Canada Dry Ginger Ale

Season 3: NBC RED Fridays March 3 to June 23 1933 (17 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, James Melton, Howard Clancy and Frank Black's Orchestra
sponsor: General Motors — Chevrolet

Season 4: NBC RED Sundays October 1 1933 to April 1 1934 (27 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Frank Parker, Alois Havrilla and Frank Black's Orchestra
sponsor: General Motors — Chevrolet

Season 5: NBC RED Fridays April 6 to September 28 1934 (26 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Frank Parker, Don Wilson and Don Bester's Orchestra
(replaced by Jimmy Grier's Orchestra from June 8)
sponsor: General Tire Company

Season 6: NBC BLUE Sundays October 14 1934 to July 14 1935 (40 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Frank Parker, Don Wilson and Don Bester's Orchestra
sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 7: NBC BLUE Sundays September 29 1935 to June 21 1936 (39 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Michael Bartlett (until Oct 27), Kenny Baker (from Nov 3), Don Wilson and Johnny Green's Orchestra
sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 8: NBC RED Sundays October 4 1936 to June 27 1937 (39 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Kenny Baker, Don Wilson and Phil Harris' Orchestra
sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 9: NBC RED Sundays October 3 1937 to June 26 1938 (39 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Kenny Baker, Andy Devine, Sam Hearn, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson (from Dec 26), Don Wilson and Phil Harris' Orchestra
sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 10: NBC RED Sundays October 2 1938 to June 25 1939 (39 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Kenny Baker, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris' Orchestra
sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 11: NBC RED Sundays October 8 1939 to June 16 1940 (37 editions)
with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Verna Felton, Mel Blanc, Don Wilson and Phil Harris Orchestra
sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 12: NBC RED Sundays October 6 1940 to June 1 1941 (35 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 13: NBC RED Sundays October 5 1941 to May 31 1942 (not on Jan 18) (34 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: General Foods — Jello

Season 14: NBC RED Sundays October 4 1942 to May 30 1943 (35 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra (absent from Dec 13 to Mar 14)

sponsor: General Foods — Grape Nuts

Season 15: NBC Sundays October 10 1943 to June 4 1944 (35 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day (until Apr 23), Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Minerva Pious (until Feb 6), John Brown (until Dec), Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: General Foods — Grape Nuts

Season 16: NBC Sundays October 1 1944 to May 27 1945 (* not on Apr 15) (34 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Larry Stevens (from Nov 5), Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 17: NBC Sundays September 30 1945 to May 26 1946 (35 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Larry Stevens (until Mar 10), Dennis Day (from Mar 17), Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 18: NBC Sundays September 29 1946 to May 25 1947 (35 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day (until May 4), Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson (until May 4) and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 19: NBC Sundays October 5 1947 to June 27 1948 (39 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 20: NBC Sundays October 3 to December 26 1948, CBS January 2 to May 29 1949 (35 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 21: CBS Sundays September 11 1949 to May 28 1950 (38 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 22: CBS Sundays September 10 1950 to June 3 1951 (38 editions)

(* Benny was ill on Mar 11 so a repeat was broadcast) with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 23: CBS Sundays September 16 1951 to June 1 1952 (38 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Phil Harris’ Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 24: CBS Sundays September 14 1952 to June 7 1953 (39 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Bob Crosby’s Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 25: CBS Sundays September 13 1953 to June 6 1954 (39 editions)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Bob Crosby’s Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Season 26: CBS Sundays September 26 1954 to May 22 1955 (23 editions, plus 12 repeats *)

(* reruns aired on Oct 10 and 17, Nov 7, Dec 12 and 19, Jan 23, Feb 6 and 20, Mar 13 and 27, Apr 10 and May 8)

with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Don Wilson and Bob Crosby’s Orchestra

sponsor: American Tobacco Company — Lucky Strike Cigarettes

Bibliography

The Jack Benny Show

by Milt Josefsberg (Arlington House, New York 1977)

Jack Benny - The Radio And Television Work

compiled by the Museum of Television and Radio (Harper Perennial, New York 1991)

plus three Jack Benny biographies ...

Jack Benny

by Irving A. Fein (Putnam, New York 1976)

Jack Benny

by Mary Livingstone Benny and Hilliard Marks (Doubleday, New York 1976)

Sunday Nights At Seven

by Joan Benny (Warner Books, New York 1990)

Discography

The Jack Benny Album

Top Ten 4x78rpm set (1947)

The Violin Lesson/Schizophrenia/Getting A Haircut/A Letter From Mary's Mother/Getting A Shave/America's Foremost Violinist

The Radio Fight Of The Century - Jack Benny vs. Fred Allen

Radiola 2LP 2MR 2930 (1974)

extracts from Jack Benny Program broadcasts of 1938, March 27 1938, January 15 1950 and April 26 1952,

AFRS Command Performance Christmas broadcasts of 1942, 1943 and 1944 and May 9 1947,

Fred Allen Show broadcasts of March 25 1938, May 26 1946 and June 26 1949,

Camel Comedy Caravan of June 11 1943

and The Big Show of November 5 1950

The Jack Benny Story

Radiola 2LP 2MR 4546 (1975)

includes the broadcasts of January 2 1949 and January 25 1953 plus numerous extracts

Jack Benny And Fred Allen - The Radio Feud Continues

Radiola LP MR 1111 (1980)

includes the broadcast of December 27 1942 plus radio promotions for Buck Benny Rides Again and Love Thy Neighbor

The Jack Benny Show

Radiola LP MR 1147, CD CDMR 1147 (1984)

includes the broadcasts of June 18 1939 and April 9 1950

Duffy's Tavern/The Jack Benny Show

Yorkshir LP 716

includes the broadcast of December 16 1945

One Night Stand With Benny Goodman In 1942 And 1943

Joyce LP 1073

includes the broadcast of December 13 1942

Vintage Radio Broadcasts - Jack Benny

Mar-Bren LP 748

track details unknown (may not have been issued)

Jack Benny - 1933

Mark 56 LP 764 (1976)

includes the broadcasts of March 31 1933 and June 23 1933

Jack Benny - 1936

Mark 56 LP 765 (1976)

includes the broadcasts of October 25 1936 and November 29 1936

Jack Benny - 1940

Mark 56 LP 766 (1976)

includes the broadcasts of June 9 1940 and April 20 1941

Jack Benny - 1944

Mark 56 LP 767 (1976)

includes the broadcasts of April 23 1944 and May 7 1944

Jack Benny - Original Radio Broadcast

Nostalgia Lane LP PB 0261, NLR 1003 (1977)

includes the broadcasts of February 12 1950 and April 25 1948

Nostalgia Lane Treasury Of The Best Of Old Time Radio

Nostalgia Lane 6LP set NLR 60

includes the broadcast of March 28 1948

The Three Funniest Hours In The History Of Radio

Nostalgia Lane 3LP set (1977)

includes the broadcast of February 12 1950

The Great Radio Comedians

Murray Hill 5LPs 931699

includes the broadcast of April 24 1949

Jack Benny And Fred Allen - Radio's Greatest Feud

Murray Hill 3LPs 898039 (1978)

reissue of Radiola 2MR2930 plus an extra Jack Benny Program and Fred Allen Show broadcast

Greatest Original Broadcasts - Jack Benny

M.F. Distribution Co. 3LPs MF 214 (1978)

includes the broadcasts of March 16 1952, April 7 1946, April 14 1946, January 5 1947, March 23 1952 and January 19 1947

The Continental Jack Benny And His Friends

Broadcast Tribute LP BTRIB 0004

includes extracts from radio and television

Listener's Choice - The Best Of Jack Benny

Metacom CD 906 (1994)

Jack's Birthday/Your Money Or Your Life/The Necktie Counter/Violin Lesson/King For A Day/Magician Act With Sister Sue + Last Live Radio Show

Best Of Radio Comedy - Fred Allen + Jack Benny

LaserLight CD 12 686

includes broadcast of December 6 1942

Radio's Greatest Comedians

Prime Time Nostalgia 5CD set PTN 724

(* Benny disc sold separately as 8010K) (1992)

disc #2 features various excerpts

The Smithsonian Collection - Old Time Radio - All-Time Favorites

Radio Spirits 4CD set SAFD 1-4 (1994)

disc #2 features the broadcast of November 16 1953

The Smithsonian Collection - Old Time Radio - Comedy Favorites

Radio Spirits 4CD set SAFD 1-4 (1994)

disc #1 features the broadcast of February 15 1948

The Smithsonian Collection - Old Time Radio - Comedy & Laughter

Radio Spirits 4CD set SCL 02 (1994)

disc #1 features the broadcast of April 14 1946

*** other Jack Benny radio appearances may be found on ...

The Horn Blows At Midnight

Radiola LP MR 1068 (1977)

features the 60 minute Ford Theatre of March 4 1949

Jack Benny

Famous Personalities LP 1002

includes extracts from five AFRS broadcasts

The Man Who Came To Dinner

Star-Tone LP ST 226

features the 60 minute radio presentation

(* this LP was scheduled, but may not have been released)

TERRY-THOMAS

by Mark McKay

THE Americans regarded him as the quintessential Englishman. With smartly tailored suits, impeccable grooming and the long cigarette-holder protruding from underneath a curled moustache, he gave the impression of a self-confident old-world toff. But the characteristic languid upper-class accent and refined manners Terry-Thomas flaunted on the screen did not emanate from an aristocratic upbringing. All his lordly affectations were acquired in an attempt to improve his social status.

Why was he always in demand amongst producers and directors of all nationalities? Surely it was because, whether playing the cunning rotter, henpecked husband or military twit, he alone was usually worth the price of a movie ticket. T-T was simply hilarious — one of the few comedians to consistently bring laughter every time he appears on the screen.

Thomas Terry Hoar Stevens was born on Bastille Day 1911, the fourth son of an itinerant company director father. From his mother, he inherited a distinctive gap between his front teeth. He was the only male to sport this dental deficiency, which seemed standard issue for the female members of the family.

Following a belated and undistinguished schooling at Ardingly College in Sussex, young Tom was sent to earn a living with a cold storage company at Smithfield meat market. Here he exhibited his sartorial elegance, regularly reporting for work clutching a silver-topped Malacca cane and wearing yellow gloves, suede shoes and garish ties. The managing director informed him he looked “like the juvenile lead in a musical comedy”. Felicitous words, seeing that T-T had become one of the leading players in the firm’s amateur dramatic society.

It soon became clear that Terry wasn’t cut out for the world of commerce, and much to his father’s chagrin, moved into the entertainment industry. The late 1930s saw him playing ukulele with his own band, *The Rhythm Maniacs*, giving exhibition dances and performing odd dates in cabaret. At first he assumed the name Mot Snevets (Tom Stevens spelt backwards), but later settled for his forenames reversed. The hyphen was added as an afterthought.

As a sign of things to come, he began working in films as an extra. Fellow background artistes included Michael Wilding, Richard Greene and Stewart Granger, who all eventually climbed their way up the hierarchy to star billing.

T-T claimed that the life of a film extra, involving long periods of idleness, suited him perfectly. Appearing variously as a stone-age man, dude or mediaeval knight, he graduated from non-speaking rôles to uttering a line or two, and even contributed animal noises for the soundtrack to a Jessie Matthews picture!

In 1939, Terry-Thomas received, as he would later tell radio audiences, “a cunningly worded invitation to join the



Army”. He promptly reported to the Royal Corps of Signals in Yorkshire. Upon alighting from his chauffeur-driven limousine, a sergeant-major asked for his number. “Kensington 0736”, T-T replied. This quip was rewarded with a contemptuous glare. He was informed, “From now on, you’re just number 2389211.”

Not surprisingly, Terry proved altogether less than spectacular as a soldier, although in time he did become an NCO. His military career picked up, however, after joining the Army entertainment unit, ‘Stars In Battledress’. Here he trod the boards alongside other future stars of variety, amongst them, Charlie Chester, Harry Secombe and Arthur Haynes. In these shows, he began performing a routine called *Technical Hitch*, which was to become his passport to fame.

In this sketch, he played a frantic BBC radio announcer who is forced to imitate popular vocalists (Paul Robeson, Richard Tauber and Al Jolson) when he discovers he has mislaid their records. Terry’s amazing vocal range of four-and-a-half octaves turned out to be a tremendous boon, allowing him to sing bass, tenor and baritone. A few snippets of this turn were included in the 1949 screen comedy, *Helter Skelter*.

Following demob, T-T presented *Technical Hitch* to a West End audience in the Sid Field revue *Piccadilly Hayride*. In addition to another solo spot, titled *In Town To-night* (for which he supplied all the voices and sound effects), he joined Sid and straight-man Jerry Desmonde in a Shakespearean King John sketch. Suddenly, Terry was pulling in big money and being noticed by many influential people. On 4th November 1946, the *Piccadilly Hayride* company performed before the King and Queen in the Royal Variety Performance.

In 1948, T-T returned to the film studios, but now as a star. First he appeared with Jean Carson in *A Date With A Dream*, closely followed by *The Brass Monkey*, co-starring Carole Landis. Tragically, Miss Landis committed suicide shortly after returning to Hollywood, and the picture's release was postponed.

Around this time, Terry was making an impact in other media. His first radio broadcast was back in 1938, on a tea dance programme called **Friends To Tea**. It didn't go well. He later attributed his poor performance to being persuaded to copy the style of the famous wireless story-teller, A. J. Alan. After the war, he tried his hand at writing a series to be called **Terry's Topics** with the late Frank Muir. Unfortunately, the two found it too difficult to write together, and although a pilot episode was recorded, it never made it to air. Muir had to look elsewhere for a scriptwriting partner.

After occasional broadcasts in showcases for new talent like **Victory Star Show** and **Variety Bandbox**, his first radio series began in anger. **To Town With Terry**, which he co-wrote with Talbot Rothwell (later responsible for the *Carry On* movie screenplays), ran for six months. The BBC chiefs were happy with it, but Terry felt it wasn't up to standard. Five years passed before he embarked on a follow-up, **Top Of The Town**, featuring a different guest star each week. For the premier episode, this was the great Tony Hancock.

T-T made a very early and significant impact on television with a series called **How Do You View?** He played a man-about-town surrounded by eccentric characters: an aged butler called Moulton (H. C. Walton), Miss Hap the secretary (Janet Brown), tea-lady Rosie Lee (Avril Angers) and Locket, his car-deficient chauffeur (*Carry On* regular and husband of Janet, Peter Butterworth).

The programmes also featured an interview spot, where T-T in various guises (the first being the Rank films gong-basher) would answer questions from Leslie Mitchell or Brian Johnston. Terry enjoyed these segments immensely and found it extremely difficult to keep a straight face.

One of these interviews, with a beefeater at the Tower of London, surfaced on a feeble album of songs and sketches released in the early sixties. Titled *Strictly T-T*, the funniest thing about it was the cover, which showed our hero seated in a well-stocked wine cellar, tucking into an enormous brandy glass filled with milk.

How Do You View? was written by Sid Colin and Talbot Rothwell, and transmitted 'live' but without an audience. For the third season, a shapely newcomer joined the cast — Britain's answer to Marilyn Monroe, Miss Diana Dors. Wednesday nights became a viewing must for eighty percent of people with sets, but unfortunately no tele-recordings were made. Consequently no snippets from this historic series survive.

Terry's TV success was instant, and shot him to stardom in Britain. When a new magazine, *TV Mirror*, was launched in August 1953, it was T-T who graced the front cover of the

inaugural issue, smoking four cigarettes at once through a holder shaped like a television antenna.

In between series, he popped over to New York and guested on the Ed Sullivan show. The Sunday before he was due to appear, Sullivan told the audience, "Don't forget to watch next week folks... we have England's top television star, Tommy Tucker!"

But, important as his work on radio, television and the stage was at the time, it is not for those that we remember Terry-Thomas today. The more permanent medium of film has captured all his finest characterisations — the cads, silly-asses, villains and frightfully-keen Britons abroad which were guaranteed to ameliorate any movie, regardless of any other shortcomings.

His first full-length feature was the Boulting Brothers' *Private's Progress*. He played a stern major who goaded his troops into action with the memorable catch-cry, "You're an absolute shower!"

Terry made four pictures with another British actor who was destined for international stardom, Peter Sellers. The first was *The Naked Truth*, concerning a scandal magazine of the same name, whose editor (Dennis Price) threatens to publish damning stories about certain high-profile members of the community, unless a ten thousand pound suppression fee is paid. T-T particularly disliked filming the scene in which he was drugged and dumped into a snake-infested lake. The discomfort continued with MGM's *tom thumb* as he was in agony with acute back pains through most of the shoot.

This effective partnership of comedy actors continued with two satires from the Boultings. *Carlton-Browne Of The F.O.* dealt with Foreign Office diplomatic relations with a long-lost remote British colony. Later that year, industrial friction between management and labour was sent up in *I'm All Right, Jack*. Terry, as personnel manager Major Hitchcock, represented the former, while Sellers received accolades for his performance as union leader, Fred Kite.

Although a stunt man was usually employed for the more physically demanding scenes in his movies, Terry, against his better judgement, often risked injury or even death for a few seconds of footage. In *A Matter Of WHO*, he had to drive an open-topped Austin 7 straight underneath a moving lorry. Later he was clinging on for dear life, as he travelled up an Austrian alp in a ski-lift without a floor! *Kill Or Cure* saw him secured upside-down to a spinning steel pillar. He even ran along the top of a moving train for *Those Magnificent Men In Their Flying Machines*.

This last film marked the beginning of a comic double act with Eric Sykes. (It wasn't the first time they had worked together — in the late 1950s they had both performed in a 'Three Musketeers' skit for the London Palladium stage show, *Large As Life*.) In this star-riddled aviation epic and its motoring sequel, *Monte Carlo Or Bust!*, T-T played different generations of Ware-Armitages. Both were identical and just the sort of wonderfully wicked villain found in Edwardian melodramas.

Eric was the downtrodden lackey, mercilessly bullied into nobbling the other competitors' machines. His master's nefarious schemes naturally come unstuck, causing the Ware-Armitage handlebar moustache to bristle with rage. Sykes invariably copped the blame and was given a thorough horse-whipping, or, if his boss was feeling particularly peeved, a lit cigar up the arse!

The pair also made one commercial for Benson & Hedges. More were requested, but Eric didn't want to continue in the rôle of Terry-Thomas's dogsbody. Hardly surprising, really.

In the sixties, Tinseltown beckoned T-T. Many American directors saw the appeal of this eccentric Englishman, who boasted a collection of over 150 waistcoats, and were quick to sign him up. It also gave Terry a chance to work with some very beautiful actresses: Tuesday Weld in *Bachelor Flat* (his first Hollywood movie and a hefty rôle as a professor of archaeology!), Gina Lollobrigida (*Strange Bedfellows*) and the outstanding Jayne Mansfield in *A Guide For The Married Man*.

During this Hollywood period, he contributed to TV shows such as **Burke's Law** and **The Judy Garland Show**. Another LP recording was issued, specifically for the US market, with some amusing monologues in the Bob Newhart style.

Terry was the only non-American among a cast of famous comedians in Stanley Kramer's *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. This time T-T was on the receiving end of the bullying. His intimidator was the brash Ethel Merman. The following year, he co-starred with Jack Lemmon in his personal favourite picture, *How To Murder Your Wife*.

The Europeans too felt there was a place for Terry in their productions. He claimed in his posthumously released autobiography, *Terry-Thomas Tells Tales*, that a list of all his films, including foreign assignments, would number more than 150. Many of these only required a few days' shooting, and he returned home blissfully unaware of their titles! In others, he had more substantial rôles. For *Arabella*, made on location in Italy, he took on four different characters, aided by wigs and coloured make-up.

Despite a heavy workload throughout his adult life, Terry managed to find time for a lot of womanising. His first wife, Pat, was nine years his senior and once a French Vicomtesse. She became his dancing partner in a cabaret act, Terri and Patlanski, before they married in 1938. Theirs was a stormy relationship and it wasn't long before they both embarked upon a succession of extra-marital affairs.

In the 1950s, Australian singer/actress Lorrae Desmond became T-T's girlfriend. Once Pat caught them in bed together, and began thrashing the nude Lorrae with a dog leash!

A pregnant twenty-six year old Belinda Cunningham became the second Mrs. Terry-Thomas in 1963 (at fifty-two, her husband was precisely twice her age). They had met a few years earlier on holiday in Majorca. Belinda gave Terry two sons, Timothy (nicknamed Tiger) and Trumper (who became known by the equally absurd 'Cushan').

Terry and Belinda settled on the Balearic island of Ibiza in the late 1960s. As his concession to that era of hippies and flower power, T-T had his Mercedes painted with a psychedelic floral pattern. Life was idyllic for a while but it wasn't to last.

The downhill slide started with a near fatal illness in South Africa. He spent weeks recovering in hospital. Shortly afterwards T-T learnt he was suffering from Parkinson's disease, a nervous disorder causing muscular rigidity and tremors. Work became impossible and expensive medical treatments quickly ate up all his savings.

Sadly, the man who, in his heyday, had frittered away millions of dollars, was now living off charity in a three room flat in south London. He passed away peacefully in a Surrey nursing home on 8th January 1990, aged 78. The showbiz world mourned the loss of the lovable king of the cads.

Books

Three Men And A Gimmick

biographies of Peter Cushing, Terry-Thomas & Arthur Askey
by Robert Hirst
(The World's Work Ltd., 1957)

Filling The Gap

by Terry-Thomas
(Max Parrish & Co. h/back, 1959)

Terry-Thomas Tells Tales

by Terry-Thomas with Terry Daum
(Robson h/back, 1990; also available as Isis Audio Book read
by John Rye IAB 93045, 1993)

Records

Jeeves

Caedmon LP TC-1137 (1958), Harper Audio Cassette
Indian Summer Of An Uncle/Jeeves Takes Charge
with T-T as Bertie Wooster & Roger Livesey as Jeeves

Strictly T-T

Decca LP LK 4398 (1961), London LP 5764 (1963)
Bring Back The Cat/A 'Reasonable' Rhyme/Ram In A Jam/
Mixed Bathing/Jo The Carrier Lad/Mishap In Mayfair/The
Vegetarian Beefeater/The Poy Friend/Amazing/Nouvelle
Vague or How Vague Can Some People Be/Send For Me/
Mary Bella Crawfish Esq.

Terry-Thomas Discovers America

Warner Bros LP W(S) 1558 (1964)
It Could Have Been So Pleasant/Booking The Beatles/You
Haven't Lived/Home Sweet Home/One Of The Gang/The Ring
Fell Under The Sofa/P.T.A. Meeting/Hello Mater, Hello Pa-
ter/Joan Of Arc And The Mouthpiece

Vintage Variety

BBC LP REC 134M (1973)
Includes one track with T-T from *Victory Star Show* (8 June
1946)

They Played The Palladium

Decca double LP RFLD 30 (1983)
Includes: Lay Down Your Arms by RSM Terry-Thomas with
the Band of the WRECS

Three Billion Millionaires

United Artists LP UTL 4
T-T plays a doctor in one sketch

Terry-Thomas can also be heard on the following movie sound-
tracks:

The Day Dreamer

Columbia LP OL-6540/OS-2940

Robin Hood

Disneyland LP 3810

The Wonderful World Of The Brothers Grimm

MGM LP 1E/S1E-3

It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World

RYKO enhanced CD RCD 10704 (1997)

Radio

To Town With Terry (BBC Home Service)

with Ruth Dunning

Weekly, 12 October to 14 December 1948 (not 26 Oct);
20 December 1948; 28 December 1948 to 18 January 1949;
24 January to 28 March 1949 (not 14 Feb)
(23×45min episodes)

Top Of The Town (BBC Light Programme)

with Joan Sims, Leslie Mitchell, H. C. Walton

Series #1: Weekly, 1 November 1953 to 21 February 1954
(not 31 Jan) (16×60min episodes)

Series #2: Weekly, 31 October 1954 to 27 February 1955
(not 30 Jan) (17×45min episodes)

Television

How Do You View? (BBC)

with H. C. Walton, Janet Brown, Avril Angers, Peter
Butterworth

Series #1: Fortnightly, 5 April to 17 May 1950 (4 episodes)

Series #2: Fortnightly, 8 November 1950 to 28 February 1951
(9 episodes)

Series #3: Fortnightly, 19 September to 28 November 1951
(6 episodes)

Series #4: Fortnightly, 2 April to 11 June 1952 (6 episodes)

Around The Town (BBC)

with Max Miller

1 October 1955

Strictly T-T (BBC)

with Lorraine Desmond, Kenneth Griffith, Dennis Kirtland

Fortnightly, 12 January to 22 March 1956 (6 episodes)

My Wildest Dream (Associated-Rediffusion)

with Tommy Trinder, Alfred Marks and David Nixon or
Eddie Gray

Weekly, 8 May to 4 September 1956; 19 September 1956 to
6 February 1957; 11 February to 22 April 1957; 30 April to
11 June 1957 (57 episodes) (London)

Terry-Thomas (BBC)

20 July 1963

The Old Campaigner (BBC1)

with Jean Harvey, Jonathan Cecil, Lois Penson, Janie Booth,
Reginald Marsh

Pilot from *Comedy Playhouse* 30 June 1967

Weekly, 6 December 1968 to 10 January 1969 (6 episodes)

The Best Laid Plans/Minx/Man Of Letters/White Man's Tomb/
Home Cooking/French Farce



Stage

Piccadilly Hayride (revue with Sid Field)
(Prince Of Wales, 1946)

Humpty Dumpty (pantomime)
(Palladium, 1951)

Fun And The Fair (revue with George Formby)
(Palladium, 1953)

Room For Two (farce)
(Prince Of Wales, 1955)

King John (play)
(Adelphi, 1956) (single performance only)

Large As Life (revue with Harry Secombe)
(Palladium, 1958)

It's In The Bag (play)
(Duke Of York's, 1960)

Don't Just Lie There, Say Something (farce)
(Australian Metro Theatres, 1973)

Films

• Terry-Thomas appeared as an extra in italicised titles

1936: *When Knights Were Bold*
Things To Come
Once In A Million
It's Love Again
Rhythm In The Air
This'll Make You Whistle

1937: *Rhythm Racketeer*

1938: *Climbing High* (voice)

1940: *For Freedom*
Under Your Hat

1948: *A Date With A Dream*
The Brass Monkey (aka *Lucky Mascot*)

1949: *Helter Skelter*
Melody Club

1951: *Cookery Nook* (short)
The Queen Steps Out (short)

1956: *Private's Progress*
The Green Man

1957: *Brothers In Law*
Lucky Jim
Blue Murder At St. Trinian's
The Naked Truth

1958: *Happy Is The Bride*
tom thumb

1959: *Too Many Crooks*
Carlton-Browne Of The F. O.
I'm All Right, Jack

1960: *School For Scoundrels*
Make Mine Mink

1961: *His And Hers*
A Matter Of WHO

1962: *Bachelor Flat*
Operation Snatch
Kill Or Cure
The Wonderful World Of The Brothers Grimm

1963: *Mouse On The Moon*
It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World
The Wild Affair

1965: *How To Murder Your Wife*
Strange Bedfellows
Those Magnificent Men In Their Flying Machines
You Must Be Joking!

1966: *Our Man In Marrakesh*
The Sandwich Man
Munster, Go Home!
The Daydreamer (voice)
Top Crack

1967: *Kiss The Girls And Make Them Die*
Jules Verne's Rocket To The Moon
The Perils Of Pauline
A Guide For The Married Man
The Karate Killers
I Love A Mystery (TV)

1968: *Danger: Diabolik*
Where Were You When The Lights Went Out?
Don't Look Now — We're Being Shot At
How Sweet It Is!
Don't Raise The Bridge, Lower The River
Checkmate For McDowell
Arriva Dorellik

1969: *2000 Years Later*
Monte Carlo Or Bust!
Twelve Plus One
Arthur Arthur (unreleased)

1970: *Seven Times Seven*
Arabella

1971: *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*

1972: *Dr. Phibes Rises Again*

1973: *Vault Of Horror*
Robin Hood (voice)

1974: *The Cherry Picker*
The Heroes

1975: *Side By Side*

1976: *Spanish Fly*
The Bawdy Adventures Of Tom Jones
The Mysterious House Of Dr. C.

1977: *The Last Remake Of Beau Geste*

1978: *The Hound Of The Baskervilles*

• Unconfirmed performances:

1967: *Bandidos*

1967: *Pig Malione*

1969: *Colpo Grosso... Grossissimo... Anzi Probabile*

1970: *Atlantic Wall*

1973: *Ella, Ellos Y La Ley*

1974: *Tradition*

1974: *Who Stole The Shah's Jewels?*

1978: *The Master's Pants*

1981: *Happy Birthday Harry!*
How To Kill 400 Duponts

• Terry claimed appearances in many more foreign productions. He also produced the following film travelogues:

Terry-Thomas In Tuscany

Terry-Thomas In The South Of France

Terry-Thomas In Northern Ireland

THE TWO THOUSAND YEAR OLD MAN

by David Hirsch

It all started by accident, according to the creators. Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks were among the many talented writers of Sid Caesar's *Your Show Of Shows*. Sometime in 1950, Mr. Reiner bought a \$138 Revere tape recorder and during a social gathering he approached Mr. Brooks. "Is it true ..." he asked into the microphone, "... that you were at the scene of the Crucifixion some two thousand years ago?" Brooks, who wasn't expecting the question, instinctively moaned "Ooooooooooboy". He began to improvise; yes, he remembered Christ, a nice thin lad, wore sandals, always came into the store but never bought anything. And so was "discovered" the Two Thousand Year Old Man, the famous schtick which still remains a major staple in the history of American comedy.

Reiner, the straight man, poses as an anonymous interviewer who asks questions and seeks advice from Brooks, the Two Thousand Year Old Man (or Brooks' acronym - TTYOM). The character has experienced two millennia ... seen it all, done it all, and is happy to give his anecdotes, in a thick Yiddish accent.

Reiner: Is it true you are 2,000 years old?

Brooks: I'm not yet. I'll be 2,000 on October 16th.

Reiner: What was the means of transportation then?

Brooks: Mostly fear.

Reiner: Fear transported you?

Brooks: Fear, yes. An animal would growl and you'd go a mile a minute.

Reiner: Robin Hood, did he exist?

Brooks: Oh, yes, lovely man. Ran around the forest.

Reiner: Did he really steal from the rich and gave to the poor?

Brooks: No. He stole from everybody and kept everything.

Reiner: How did legend ...

Brooks: How did legend? He had a fella Marty. Marty the press agent.

Reiner: Are you married?

Brooks: I have been married several hundred times.

Reiner: I'm afraid to ask the next question. How many children do you have?

Brooks: I have over 42,000 children. And not one comes to visit me.

The TTYOM is clearly rooted in the Borscht Belt, famous for Jewish ethnic humor performed at the summer resorts in the Catskill Mountains. It was here where a young Brooks appeared before writing for *Your Show Of Shows*. The character comes from his upbringing in the Bronx and Brooklyn, his mother, his Uncle Joe and all the people in the old Jewish neighborhoods.

Another important ingredient to the success of this character is Brooks' phenomenal ad-libbing ability. Reiner once said

of him "He's at his best when he's up against the wall, and doesn't know which way he's going to go". Brooks often goes off on tangents about trivial things, like his admiration for nectarines and Saran Wrap. Out of the blue he'll say things like: "Ever had dinner with Dracula? He has bad table manners, he'll wipe his face on your neck!"

Although Brooks' ancient character wasn't unveiled to the public until 1960, it had become very popular and was often requested at private parties and social gatherings, including production meetings of *Your Show Of Shows*. Steve Allen urged Reiner and Brooks to record their material for a friend of his at World Pacific Records. Their decision to follow up on the offer proved to be a wise one. When **2000 Years with Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks** was released it sold over a million copies. This was particularly good news for Brooks, who had been suffering from financial and emotional strain since the sudden cancellation of *Caesar's Hour*. He recalled that the album had saved him, and started him on a whole new career.

In 1961, with their first album such a hit, Reiner and Brooks began taking their act on variety/comedy television shows. On *The Ed Sullivan Show* they both appeared in simple suit and tie. Brooks explained his long life by taking care of himself, while puffing on a cigarette. On a whim, he said that Sullivan shouldn't doubt his longevity ... he'd been around for 200 years himself. As the act and subsequent albums gained in popularity, Brooks attired his character in a snazzy black cape and white cane. Riding this crest, the team appeared numerous times on *Hollywood Palace* and as presenters at the 1964 Emmy Awards.

In the mid-60s, the duo went off in separate directions. Reiner worked as a television producer and writer for *The Dick Van Dyke Show* in which he also starred. Brooks made a name for himself as writer and co-producer of the spy spoof *Get Smart* and won an Academy Award for **The Critic** and **The Producers**. He appeared in the TTYOM outfit on the 2000th episode of the game show *Jeopardy*, but otherwise, the routine was history. Or was it?

In the summer of 1973, Reiner and Brooks received a call from Joe Smith, president of Warner Bros. Records, urging them to come back for one more recording. They agreed on condition that they perform in a studio with no more than ten people. However, on that fateful day, Saturday August 25th 1973, over 150 fans and friends showed up at the Burbank Studios. Nonetheless, they agreed to go on with the show. In this classic recording, **Two Thousand and Thirteen**, Brooks praised the greatest human invention - the shampoo Liqueur Prell. Why this over other inventions? "The heart-lung machine: if it's in your medicine cabinet and falls out, it's gonna break!" He denounced Paul Revere as "an anti-Semite bastard" until Reiner pointed out that Revere hadn't shouted "The Yiddish are coming!" He explained his strict healthy diet, nothing but cool mountain water and stuffed cabbage.



That supposedly was the last routine done by the two as a team, but TTYOM also showed up in other guises. In 1974, Brooks appeared in a magazine advertisement for Scotch whisky, posing in caveman attire enjoying his Scotch on some rocks. And in 1975, he appeared in an animated television special, using soundtracks from the first three albums. In the special *The Two Thousand Year Old Man*, Reiner looks almost like his real self, while TTYOM is drawn roughly 2 feet tall with spectacles and a long white beard to his toes, an incarnation that “looked” more his age. Soon after, the routine was again retired. Or was it?

Now a generation had passed. On television in America, the variety comedy show has disappeared in favor of sitcoms and talk shows. Yet, the TTYOM act has not gone out of style, but maintained a large following and admiration even with the younger audiences. In 1994, the four TTYOM albums were re-released as a boxed set of CDs. On *The Simpsons*, Homer Simpson drove an animated Mel Brooks in a limousine, urging him to do the act. And with the year 2000 fast approaching, it seems fitting that the man who lived 2,000 years should come back by popular demand. And that is what has happened.

In late 1997, the duo reunited to give us a new CD *The 2000 Year Old Man in the Year 2000* and a book of the same name. On the new recording, the two (now in their early seventies) are still as funny as ever. Brooks recalls some extra commandments that were scrapped, such as “Thou shalt not squint”. He remembers Ovid being banished by the emperor Augustus ... he read it in the Roman Tribune “Ovid Ousted, Augustus Disgusted”. The book is also a very amusing read, using both old and new material. Of course, reading the act in print doesn't have the full effect of listening to the audio, and Brooks is aware of that. He adds that the book should best be read in a Jewish accent. The now Two Thousand and Thirty Seven Year Old Man is truly a class act ... let's hope it doesn't go into retirement anytime soon.

Discography

2000 Years With Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks

World Pacific LP WP 1401, Capitol (S)W 1529 (1961), Rhino CD R2 72165 (1995)

(reissued as: **The Two Thousand Year Old Man**
Pickwick LP SPC 3279)

2000 Year Old Man/Fabiola/The Astronaut/In A Coffee House: The Depressed One + The Actor + The Painter + The Folksinger/The Peruvian/The Psychiatrist

2000 and One Years With Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks

Capitol LP (S)W 1618 (1962), Rhino CD R2 72166 (1995)
2000 & Six Month Man/Tax Expert/The Two Hour Old Baby/
The New Technique Psychiatric Society/The Third Best Poet

Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks at the Cannes Film Festival

Capitol LP (S)W 1815 (1963)
Cannes Film Festival: Adolph Hartler + Frederico Feticcini
+ Tippy Skittles/Dr. Felix Wheird/2000 and Two Year Old
Man/L.M.N.O.P. Ad Agency

The Best of The Two Thousand Year Old Man

Capitol LP ST 2981

The Incomplete Works of Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks

Warner Bros. 3LP 3XX 2744

reissues the above three LPs in a boxed set

Two Thousand And Thirteen

Warner Bros. LP BS 2741 (1973)

Intro/Will To Live/Slow Growth/Natural Foods/Phil/Asparagus/Origins Of Words/Great Inventions/Strawberries/Miracle Fruits/The Greatest Invention/Ancient Poetry/The Fig Leaf/Paul Revere/Ma And Pa/Jesus And The Apostles/Generals/Winston Churchill/War Of The Roses/Dolly Madison/Lord Byron/21,000 Doctors/Jolson/America's Economic Plight/Hope For Mankind

The Complete 2000 Year Old Man

Rhino 4CD R2 71017 (1994)

reissues all four original LPs in a boxed set (with booklet)

The 2000 Year Old Man in the Year 2000: The Album

Rhino CD R2 72944 (1997)

A Re-Pleasure To See You/See Moses Run/Diseases And The Plagues/Pain/Wives And Famous People/Parents/First Place You Ever Lived/Yarmulkes Galore And The Inquisition/Computer Sex And Self Help/Seven Wonders Of The World/Famous People/Pet Peeves And Words Of Wisdom

Reiner and Brooks may also be heard on one track of ...

The Sullivan Years - Comedy Classics

TVT CD TVT 9432 2 (1991)

taken from the Ed Sullivan Show of February 12 1961

Video

Two Thousand Year Old Man

1975 animated tv special with dialogue from the first 3 LPs

Book

The 2000 Year Old Man in the Year 2000: The Book (Including How Not To Die and Other Great Tips)

by Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner: As Told To Each Other (1997)

The Recordings of GERARD HOFFNUNG

by Matthew K. Sharp

GERARD Hoffnung had a short life (22 March 1925 to 28 September 1959), but a concentrated one. In those thirty-four years, he proved himself an excellent cartoonist, a keen musician, a first-rate broadcaster, and the perfect after-dinner speaker - all infused with a marvellously funny sense of the ridiculous. Fortunately, the art of gramophone recording has ensured that the wit of Hoffnung will live on.

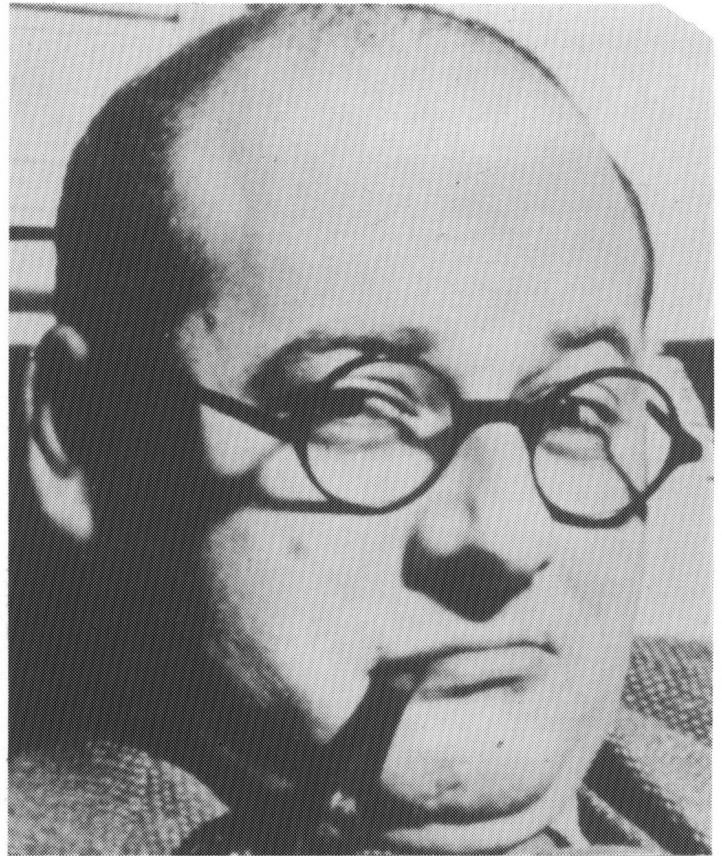
The young Gerard displayed a talent for cartooning (specialising in hideous monsters that gave his teachers cause to question his mental state), which led to his work appearing in *Lilliput* and *Punch*. He produced several books of cartoons with musical themes, one of which was *The Hoffnung Music Festival*. Hoffnung wondered whether his drawings could be brought to life with appropriate music. Various composers and musicians were approached with the idea, which not only seemed feasible, but proved very popular.

The first Hoffnung Music Festival was held in the Royal Festival Hall on November 13 1956. The event sold out in less than two hours; however, those lucky enough to own a television set could have switched on to BBC-TV around 8pm to see forty-five minutes of the concert transmitted live. Sadly, given the primitive state of TV at the time, it is unlikely this broadcast was even recorded, let alone retained for posterity; a shame, since the Hoffnung concerts had a large component of visual humour as well as the musical buffoonery. The show was however preserved in sound by the technicians from Columbia, with an LP released before Christmas 1956.

The items in the Hoffnung concerts fall into two main categories. One involves the practice of using irregular instruments, such as length of garden hose with a mouthpiece from a brass instrument, or vacuum cleaners (in *A Grand Grand Overture*, a piece dedicated to President Hoover), or a bizarre combination of outlandish sounds. The other method is that of allusion, as demonstrated in the *Concerto Popolare*, a medley of well-known classics which keep metamorphosing into each other (with occasional bursts of *Pop Goes The Weasel* or *Roll Out The Barrel*).

The concert was successful enough to warrant a further excursion into funny music, with the Hoffnung Interplanetary Music Festival taking place on November 21 and 22 1958. It once again sold out (such was the demand that a further two performances took place in February 1959). Theatregoers were offered a reprise of some of the old jokes in new settings, plus a good stiff look at atonal music (in a lecture by Hoffnung and John Amis), and *Let's Fake An Opera*, a single work combining all the operas you are ever likely to want to hear. Once again Columbia Records was on hand for posterity's sake.

The Hoffnung Vintage Music Festival, to comprise the best items from the previous two concerts, was planned for November 26 and 27 1959, but was cancelled following the creator's untimely death. The performance eventually took place on October 31 1960 as a tribute, and included a few new items, such as a version of Saint-Saens' *Carnival Of Animals*.



In an attempt to carry on the Hoffnung tradition, the Hoffnung Astronautical Music Festival came about on November 28 1961. Although there was no direct input from Hoffnung himself, the items retained the air of non-seriousness he had worked so hard to introduce into classical music. This time Columbia engineers recorded the proceedings in stereo.

The three recordings of the Hoffnung concerts have been re-issued several times, including a box set in 1974 released during EMI's craze for electronically simulated stereo that only served to make the records unlistenable. Thankfully a CD release in 1989 restored the recordings to good old-fashioned mono.

Also released in 1989 was a CD set of *The Hoffnung Festival Of Music*, which took place on February 12 and 13 1988. This tribute concert saw some old favourites, a few new works, and some, like *Orchestral Switch* (from 1956), which had been omitted from the original LPs.

The concerts contain many examples of Gerard Hoffnung's wit, but they contain precious little of the man himself, aside from a short lecture on the tuba from 1956, and the *Punkt Contrapunkt* lecture from 1958. However, a recording was made of Hoffnung's address to the Oxford Union in 1958 (and issued on a 10" LP by Decca) which demonstrates his suburb timing and skill at manipulating an audience.

The performance, just under thirty minutes in length, contains many classic bits, including letters to the Ministry of Pensions (“Sir, this is to notify you that I have given birth to twins in the enclosed envelope...”), advice to foreign tourists at the Festival of Britain (“You will oblige your chambermaid by hanging your mattress out of the window every morning.” “All London brothels display a blue lamp.” “Have you tried the famous echo in the reading room of the British Museum?”) and the letters in fractured English from Tyrolean landlords (“I am honourable to accept your impossible request. Unhappy it is, I here have not bedroom with bath. A bathroom with bed I have.” “Standing among savage scenery, the hotel offers stupendous revelation. There is a French widow in every bedroom... affording delightful prospects.”). Of course the most famous routine was the legendary Bricklayer story. Although not original, Hoffnung gives this classic yarn its best rendition ever by slowing the pace to a crawl, his exquisite timing wringing a laugh with almost every sentence.

Although Gerard Hoffnung had made many broadcasts on BBC Radio during the 1950s, by the time BBC Records was formed two decades later, it appeared that most of his talks had been wiped shortly after transmission. In particular, it was hoped that some of the fifty plus improvised interviews with Charles Richardson might have survived. These ad-lib segments were recorded for broadcast to North America, and later heard by British listeners on *Saturday Night On The Light*. Luckily, one of the engineers in New York had made tape copies of a dozen of the chats, and these were issued on *The Importance Of Being Hoffnung*.

It was the thankless task of Canadian born Charles Richardson to try to discuss various topics with Hoffnung; Richardson is alternately inquisitive and exasperated as Hoffnung refuses to give straight answers and strays from the point at hand. But in these diversions come some masterpieces of comedy that border on the surreal. In *Pets*, Gerard recalled his cat, which would sit at the dinner table, a serviette around its neck, and hold a lighted candle until the meal was over, because “he was full of convention.” In the course of *A Working Day*, Hoffnung related how he would, if it was raining, go for a walk round and round the dining table for several hours; and recalled the occasion he discovered he’d left his pipe behind and had to walk all the way back: “It was in the same room, too, but that wouldn’t have been the right thing...”

A few more chance discoveries appeared on a subsequent LP two years later. *Timeless Hoffnung* included a re-issue of the Oxford Union speech, almost intact save for four tiny cuts to remove stumbled half-words and some new treasures. These included a few broadcasts recorded by Hoffnung at home, a round from the panel show *One Minute Please* (a predecessor to the long-running *Just A Minute*, which featured Hoffnung as a regular panelist), and some of his letters read by his widow Annetta and the deviser of both *Minute* shows, Ian Messiter. Most of the material on these two BBC LPs was re-released on the double LP *Hoffnung* which, although it claims to be a re-issue of the originals, in fact has several items missing, and another (*The Film Fan*) edited down, in order to make space for a further newly-discovered home recording.

Two albums of spoken word items, and three featuring his concerts, all dating from some forty years ago may be a small legacy, but the quality of the items on these discs ensures that the humour of Gerard Hoffnung will be known and admired for years to come.

The Hoffnung Music Festival Concert

Columbia LP 33CX 1406 (1956), Angel 35500

A Grand Grand Overture/Concerto For Hose-Pipe And Strings/Concerto Popolare/‘Surprise’ Symphony/Speech By Gerard Hoffnung/Mazurka No.47 In A Minor/Lochinvar/Variations on ‘Annie Laurie’

The Hoffnung Interplanetary Music Festival

Columbia LP 33CX 1617 (1958), Angel 35800

A Hoffnung Festival Overture/Metamorphosis On A Bed-Time Theme/Sugar Plums/The Famous Tay Whale/Concerto For Conductor And Orchestra/Punkt Contrapunkt/The United Nations/Waltz For Restricted Orchestra/Let’s Fake An Opera, or, The Tales Of Hoffnung

The Hoffnung Astronautical Music Festival

Columbia LP 33CX 1785/SAX 2433 (1961), Angel 35828

Festival Anthem/Leonora No.4/Duet from The Barber Of Darmstadt/Ballad Of County Down (mostly in D major)/Excerpt from Belshazzar’s Feast/Horroratorio/Mobile For Seven Orchestras

Hoffnung’s Music Festivals

HMV 3LP box set SLS5069 (1974), EMI 2-CD set CMS 7 63302 2 (1989)

Reissues of the above three LPs.

The Hoffnung Festival Of Music

Decca 2-CD set 444 921-2 (1989)

Tuning & Announcement/A Hoffnung Festival Fanfare/A Grand Grand Overture/Concerto For Hose-Pipe And Orchestra/The Ballad Of County Down/The Famous Tay Whale/Quasimodo e Giulietta: Aria - Act 9, Scene 12/The Cougher/Leonora Overture No. IV/Lochinvar/Concerto Popolare/The Concert Master/Concerto d’Amore For Violin And Orchestra/Overture: ‘The Heaving Bagpipe’/Haydn’s ‘Surprise’ Symphony/Metamorphosis On A Bedtime Theme/Orchestral Switch/Disconcerto For Piano And Orchestra

Gerard Hoffnung At The Oxford Union

English Decca 10" LP LK 1330

The Importance Of Being Hoffnung

BBC Records LP REB 21M (1969)

Charles Richardson interviews: Childhood/Hobbies/Pets/The Housekeeper/Sport/The Moon/Travel/Broadcasting/A Working Day/Dieting/The Cinema/At Home

Timeless Hoffnung

BBC Records LP REB 87M (1970)

Oxford Union Speech - “Life Begins At 38” (December 1958)/Some Letters (Annette Hoffnung and Ian Messiter, from *Woman’s Hour*, October 1970)/My Life (*Woman’s Hour*, December 1953)/The Film Fan (*Talking About Films*, December 1955)/Blowing Up Balloons (*One Minute Please*, August 1952)/Tuba (*In Town Tonight*, November 1952)

Hoffnung

BBC Records 2LPs REF 157M, double cassette ZBBC 1062* (* retitled **Hoffnung - A Last Encore**)

Charles Richardson interviews: Childhood/Hobbies/Pets/The Housekeeper/Sport/The Moon/Travel/Broadcasting/A Working Day/Dieting/The Cinema/At Home/Oxford Union Speech - “Life Begins At 38” (December 1958)/My Life (*Woman’s Hour*, December 1953)/The Film Fan (*Talking About Films*, December 1955)/Talking About Music (*Music Club*, November 1954)

ACROPOLIS NOW

by Matthew K. Sharp

IN the early 1980s, “wog” was still a dirty word. However, a group of young actors of Greek ancestry were determined to reclaim the word for their own and remove its sting, by presenting a comic revue that lampooned, without spite, the mannerisms of Greek-born migrants and their Australian born offspring. Thus was created the highly successful **Wogs Out Of Work**, which, contrary to its title, kept writer/performers Nick Giannopoulos, George Kapiniaris and Simon Palomares very much in work.

With local comedy slowly but surely making a return to television in the mid 80s, it seemed appropriate to try and transfer the stage triumph to the small screen. A pilot episode was made for Crawford Productions in 1987, but, with typical cautiousness, it took until 1989 for the Seven Network to take the plunge and order a series.

The eponymous cafe, the Acropolis Now, is a trendy coffee shop run by Jim Stephanidis (Nick Giannopoulos) whilst his father is back in the old country. Jim is vain, and not encumbered with a massive intelligence; running the cafe comes a poor second to chasing girls and his beloved Monaro car.

Fortunately, he has help in business matters from Rick Martinez (Simon Palomares), who plays the straight man to Jim (presumably because he is Spanish rather than Greek - as a rule, the Greek characters get the lion's share of the comedy), and Memo (George Kapiniaris), the waiter who refuses to respect his boss, with good reason.

Also featured in early episodes are the dipsomaniac Greek chef Manolis (George Vidalis), and his more sober replacement, ex-shearer's cook Skip (Simon Thorpe), one of only two Anglo-Saxon regulars. The other is Liz (Tracey Callendar), who provides an unwilling love interest for Jim.

Of absolutely no help at all in running the cafe is Jim's cousin Effie, played by Mary Coustas. Loud of mouth and big of hair, Effie soon became the most popular character, and for a while, her catchphrase, “How embarrassment!” appeared to be everywhere.

The very first episode is enlivened by the presence of Warren Mitchell (famous for his portrayal of Alf Garnett in the BBC comedy series **Till Death Us Do Part**, and also a gallery of continental types in numerous other British shows) as Jim's father Kosta Stephanidis. Kosta had arrived in Australia twenty-three years previously, and through hard work had built the Cafe Acropolis up from nothing. It was, however, an old-fashioned establishment, and when Kosta decided to visit his homeland and leave Jim in charge, Jim leapt at the chance to modernise the whole place, throw out the old regulars, and try to attract a trendy young crowd.

Originally it was planned to have Kosta return at the end of the series and close the cafe down in disgust; when the show proved popular enough to warrant a second series, this idea was quietly shelved, and Kosta remained in Greece as an unseen malevolent force from afar, occasionally threatening to sell the cafe or return to Australia.

The comedy in the series, like many of its contemporaries, relied a great deal on “dumb” humour, malapropisms, and

general mangling of the English language. Plots of episodes tended towards either simple farce, or having one character begin to behave abnormally, a problem which must be solved to return to the status quo before next week.

It was simple but effective, thanks to engaging characters, and the fact that the show wasn't flogged to death. Unlike other sitcoms of the era, which produced 35 to 40 episodes a year, **Acropolis Now** limited itself to only thirteen in each series, giving the writers the opportunity to put in a little more effort. The show also received the very rare distinction for an Australian sitcom of having some of the episodes released on video.

By the end of the second series, Simon Palomares decided to move on (although he continued to contribute scripts to the series), and so his character was written out. To cover his departure, Kosta loses ownership of the cafe to an Italian Mafia boss in a card game, and installs his nephew, Alfredo (Nick Carrafa) to take charge. The character was still basically the same - the straight man financial brains behind the business - and thus the balance was retained.

A similar replacement occurred when Tracey Callendar elected to leave at the conclusion of series three; Nicki Wendt stepped into the breach as Suzanna, and immediately became Jim's new paramour.

If there is an overriding theme to the final series, it is that of romance. Several new characters were introduced to act as love interest to the regulars. Despina Hatzipadopoulos (played by Georgie Parker) was an old flame of Memo's, who re-entered his life after ten years. Loud and domineering, she was alternately the love of his life and the bane of his existence. Meanwhile, Lars Larson (Simon Wilton), a Swedish backpacker with a fetish for Greek women, fell for Effie and embarked upon the seemingly impossible task of trying to convince her that she also loved him. However, it was Jim who had the biggest problems when it came to matters of the heart, as the series charted his unwilling advance towards the altar, with the complication that he'd managed to propose to two women, neither of whom, he discovered almost too late, he particularly cared to marry.

And so, after five series and 63 episodes, **Acropolis Now** came to an end. Like all Australian sitcoms, the show has been repeated in timeslots specifically chosen to make sure that nobody will see it.

The wog franchise moved back to the theatres, where it continued to draw large crowds. Like that other much-loved Greek comedy character, Mark Mitchell's Con the Fruiterer, Effie has continued to have a life outside the series which spawned her, hosting various comedy specials for the Seven Network and making a notable contribution to the Norman Gunston saga.

It does seem that a lot of the stigma of being a “wog” has disappeared. How much of that can be attributed to a mere sitcom is debatable, but in the interests of multiculturalism, then it must be about time we had a sitcom set in a South-East Asian restaurant. Any takers?



Episode Guide

Series One

Old Bar... New Bar (Aug 9 1989)

When Kosta Stephanidis returns to Greece, his son Jim decides to freshen up the Cafe Acropolis.

The Proxy Blues (Aug 16 1989)

The impending arrival of a proxy bride (Zoe Carides) sends Jim into a panic.

Easter, Greek Style (Aug 23 1989)

Memo undertakes the traditional fast before Easter, but finds the others less than willing to join him.

Bucklovers (Aug 30 1989)

Jim is chosen as best man at the wedding of his cousin.

Key To Her Heart (Sep 6 1989)

Jim and Liz find themselves trapped inside the cafe after a new security system is installed.

It's Not Unusual (Sep 13 1989)

Jim hires entertainer Con Jones to promote the cafe.

It's Academic (Sep 20 1989)

When Ricky reveals an incident from his past, he finds out who his true friends are.

The Martinez Enquiry (Sep 27 1989)

With the cafe losing money at an alarming rate, Ricky decides the solution is an economy drive.

The Trouble With Mothers (Oct 4 1989)

Memo is certain he can win the prestigious waiters' race.

Three Skips And A Joey (Oct 11 1989)

The arrival of a young pregnant woman at the cafe raises some awkward questions about fatherhood.

Writer's Block (Oct 18 1989)

Liz becomes infatuated with Epsilon, a Greek poet, and decides to take up his offer of a study tour of Greece.

Series Two

Jobs For The Girls (Aug 16 1990)

Jim is so convinced that Effie and Sophie (Sheryl Munks) couldn't hold down a job that he is willing to put money on it.

St Memo's Fire (Aug 23 1990)

After taking part in a religious festival, Memo feels he has been called by God to become a priest.

Cappuccino Catastrophe (Aug 30 1990)

Rick finds the cafe in chaos when he returns from holiday, and has to reorganise the books for a visit from the bank inspector.

Ms Acropolis (Sep 6 1990)

Effie is sure she will be the winner of the inaugural Ms Acropolis competition.

My Sister Aphroroula (Sep 13 1990)

Memo decides it is time his sister was married, and is willing to palm her off onto anyone - even Jim.

Shakespeare Was A Greek (Sep 20 1990)

The cafe becomes a theatre when Jim stages a Green version of Romeo And Juliet to prove a point to Liz.

Carmen, I'm Too Bizet (Sep 27 1990)

As a favour to an old friend, Rick adds the role of babysitter to his hectic lifestyle.

Black Ain't Black (Oct 4 1990)

The new weekend waitress generates excitement at the cafe.

Double Or Nothing (Oct 11 1990)

Liz is so sure she can resist Jim's advances on a date that she makes a bet with Effie.

Olives Ain't Olives (Oct 18 1990)

Kosta decides to sell the cafe to prop up his ailing olive plantation, so Jim turns to the richest Greek of all.

Ring Of Confidence (Oct 25 1990)

When Liz receives a ring from Jim, she assumes it is a proposal of marriage.

The Taxman Cometh (Nov 1 1990)

Rick has trouble preparing the books for an impending tax audit because they are written in Greek.

Ricky Sings The Blues (Nov 8 1990)

An offer to join a jazz group causes Rick to decide once and for all whether he wants to work at the cafe.

Series Three

Teenage Mutant Ninja Greeks (Feb 14 1991)

Memo tries to fob her off his unmarried sister to a soccer star.

A Fistful Of Cabana (Feb 21 1991)

After Kosta loses the cafe in a game of cards, Jim finds himself stuck with a new boss - the nephew of a Mafia don.

Acropolis Law (Feb 28 1991)

When a new hair care product reeks havoc with Effie's pride and joy, she takes legal action against the manufacturers.

Throw Memo From The Plane (Mar 7 1991)

Memo's mother is worried because he isn't married yet, and sends an uncle to Australia to investigate the matter.

The Kid (Mar 14 1991)

Memo meets an old flame, and Jim is accused of being a bad influence on his young cousin Foti.

Midnight Espresso (Mar 21 1991)

Liz is arrested after an environmental protest, but when Jim tries to help her, he's the one that ends up behind bars.

The Goddess (Apr 11 1991)

Memo falls for a hairdresser and turns to Jim for advice.

On The Waiterfront (Apr 18 1991)

The Greek Waiters' Union is against women waiters, and ends up going on strike when Effie forces the issue.

Harry Who Didn't (Apr 25 1991)

Jim dices with danger when his name is romantically linked to the girlfriend of the bouncer at the nearby Vibrations disco.

Back In The USSR (May 2 1991)

Jim is convinced that Uri (Rhys Muldoon), a Russian student frequenting the cafe, is a member of the KGB.

The Best Of Enemies (May 9 1991)

When a rival cafe-owner tries to recruit Liz, Jim is prepared to go to any lengths to retain her.

Snow Job, Part One (May 16 1991)

Jim plans a skiing holiday with Memo and Alfredo.

Snow Job, Part Two (May 23 1991)

The ski trip turns sour due to the substandard accommodation and the absence of snow.

Series Four

Oh Suzanna! (Feb 13 1992)

Jim's hiring policy relies more on lust than qualifications.

Crimes Of Fashion (Feb 20 1992)

When Effie thinks she has been crossed by Suzanna, she plans the ultimate vengeance - death by hair-care products.

The Phantom Of The Acropolis (Feb 27 1992)

Effie becomes an exorcist when the cafe appears to be haunted.

Twenty-One Today (Mar 5 1992)

Effie's plans to throw a 21st birthday party for Sophie involve a certain amount of subterfuge to get past a disco bouncer.

Full Metal Jerks (Mar 12 1992)

The cafe takes on a military aspect after Memo receives his call-up papers from the Greek army.

The Letter (Mar 19 1992)

The discovery of a letter leads the boys to think that the writer has a secret infatuation for one of them.

Wheel Of Shame (Mar 26 1992)

Memo tries to clean up on a game show, and Suzanna reveals that she was voted Miss Charger 1987. (With Gerry Connolly)

Four Eyes (Apr 2 1992)

After an eye test, Jim must wear glasses or give up driving.

Devil In Disguise (Apr 9 1992)

Effie helps Suzanna when she has trouble with an old rival.

Desperately Seeking Effie (Apr 30 1992)

Jim takes advantage of Effie's amnesia.

The King And I (May 7 1992)

Memo finds an image of the face of Elvis Presley in a block of ice and the cafe is inundated with fans of the King.

Deaf Jammed (May 14 1992)

Whilst pretending to be deaf, Jim thinks he has uncovered a plot to kill him.

The Last Temptation (May 21 1992)

Alfredo finds religion after a serious accident.

Series Five

Dream Baby (Aug 12 1992)

Jim is worried after he dreams he is married to Suzanna.

Love (Aug 19 1992)

Suzanna's parents are keen to meet their son-in-law to be, but Jim is less than enthusiastic.

Hair Razors (Aug 26 1992)

Effie has enough trouble after smashing Jim's Monaro without having to deal with the love-mad Swede Lars Larson.

The Other Man (Sep 2 1992)

Memo attempts to take the upper hand in his relationship with Despina after he hears she has been flirting with another man.

The Lars Supper (Sep 9 1992)

Lars finally realises his attempts to woo Effie are in vain, but Jim and Memo are too busy to console him.

Mum's The Word (Sep 16 1992)

When his mother arrives at the cafe, Jim tries to prevent her from finding out about Suzanna.

Coward's End (Sep 23 1992)

With Suzanna off to Cairo, Jim finds a new love. Memo is in trouble after forgetting Despina's birthday.

The Battle Of The Sexists (Sep 30 1992)

Memo finally proposes to Despina, and is surprised when she turns him down.

Torn Between Two Lovers (Oct 7 1992)

Jim proposes to Suzanna and Julia, and is horrified when both accept. Memo takes Despina to the Greek Waiters' ball.

Stupidstition (Oct 14 1992)

Memo is worried when a fortune teller sees trouble for Despina.

Confession Of A Hair Gel Goddess (Oct 21 1992)

Effie finally admits that she loves Lars, and Jim has trouble keeping his two fiancées from meeting.

Here Come The Brides, Part One (Oct 28 1992)

With nuptials pending, Jim discovers that he doesn't love Suzanna or Julia.

Here Come The Brides, Part Two (Nov 4 1992)

The day of Jim's wedding arrives, with a surplus of brides, and an absence of groom.

Video

Acropolis Now

Crawford Classics

Contains episodes 2, 3 and 4 of series one.

BACK ISSUES

LAUGH #1

Barry Humphries/Jack Benny On Television/Monty Python On Disc/The Young Ones/Band Waggon

LAUGH #2

Steptoe & Son/Not Only... But Also/The Marx Brothers On Disc/Police Squad/George Wallace/Craig Ferguson On Disc

LAUGH #3

The Goodies/Roy Rene, 'Mo'/Tom Lehrer/The 'Doctor' Movies/Eddie Cantor
The above three issues are now out of print, but photocopies are available at the same price.

LAUGH #4

Norman Gunston/The 'Doctor' TV Series/Bob Newhart On Disc/Not The Nine O'Clock News/Fred Allen

LAUGH #5

The Black Adder/Take It From Here/Victor Borge/Yes, What?/Abbott & Costello

LAUGH #6

Lenny Henry/Dad's Army/Jimmy Durante/John Clarke/Steve Martin

LAUGH #7

Ronnie Barker/Stan Freberg/Billy Connolly/Graham Kennedy

LAUGH #8

The Amnesty Concerts/Danny Kaye/Britcoms Down Under/Jasper Carrott/Phyllis Diller

LAUGH #9

Paul Hogan/The Honeymooners/Allan Sherman/The Rag Trade/Beyond Our Ken

LAUGH #10

Sid James on TV/Shelley Berman/The Burkiss Way/Flanders & Swann/1980s Aussie TV Comedy

LAUGH #11

Mae West/Spike Milligan On TV/On The Buses/The Mavis Bramston Show/"Weird Al" Yankovic/Much-Binding-In-The-Marsh

LAUGH #12

Peter Cook/Burns & Allen/Rising Damp/My Name's McGooley, What's Yours?/The Goon Show On Record

LAUGH #13

Marty Feldman/Round The Horne/At Last! The 1948 Show/Burns & Allen 2/Dick Bentley/Allen & Rossi

LAUGH #14

George Burns/Rutland Weekend Television/Steven Wright/The Naked Vicar Show/Life With The Lyons

LAUGH #15

Rik Mayall & Adrian Edmondson/Kingswood Country/Don Adams/Whack-O!

LAUGH #16

Bob Hope & Bing Crosby/Please Sir!/Max Miller/Willie Rushton/Sledge Hammer/Kevin Bloody Wilson

LAUGH #17

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