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LAUGH

The Comedy Magazine

Issue 21 2000



Inside:
Eric Sykes
Flip Wilson
Ward Leopold
Victoria Wood
To The Manor Born

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plus

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Contents

Flip Wilson	3
Eric Sykes	6
Victoria Wood	14
Ward Leopold	18
To The Manor Born	20

FLIP WILSON

by Peter Tatchell

THE 1960s was a breakthrough decade for black comedy performers on U.S. television. The door had already opened for singers like Nat King Cole, Harry Belafonte and a number of musical groups, and eventually the major networks signed such names as Bill Cosby for the drama series *I Spy*, Diahann Carroll as the lead in the sitcom *Julia*, and comics like Redd Foxx for regular appearances on the many tonight shows and musical comedy hours then populating the schedules. Undoubtedly the most successful black comedian of the era however was Flip Wilson, who eventually succeeded in hosting his own top-rating variety programme.

Born Clerow Wilson in Jersey City in 1933, he and his seventeen brothers and sisters were orphaned when he was eight. The rest of his childhood was spent at reform school before joining the air force, where he entertained his fellow servicemen with jokes and humorous routines, and gained the nickname "Flip" (for his flippant use of glib and mock-preentious dialogue).

By the mid-1950s Wilson was working as a bellhop and occasional hotel comedian, using the adult type of material prevalent in the acts of his more-successful contemporaries. Eventually he phased out the sex and drug references and relied on more mainstream routines to get him exposure with a wider audience. As his early LP recordings show, the sixties Flip Wilson was in tune with the hip generation and liberation, and had relegated the more traditional dialect tones of his standup to the characters of preacher Reverend Leroy and the sassy, streetwise Geraldine Jones. Geraldine was inspired by the ladyfriend of a buddy back in his service days, and an early incarnation can be heard as Queen Isabel of Spain in Flip's famous Christopher Columbus routine.

Wilson's big television break came in 1965 when Redd Foxx recommended him on-air to Tonight Show host Johnny Carson, and Flip was invited to appear soon after. It was the first of many return engagements, which led to a guest-hosting stint when Carson vacationed, and a plethora of other spots on specials and variety shows. Most notable of these were appearances on the first two editions of Rowan And Martin's *Laugh-In* in early 1968, and a further four guest shots over the following twelve months.

N.B.C. executives liked what they saw and gave Wilson his own one-hour special in September 1969, hoping some of the magic from the *Laugh-In* phenomenon would carry on in the hour after Dan and Dick departed. The show was an enormous hit, the high spot being Flip and guest Jonathan Winters (both in drag) engaging in a battle between their alter egos of Geraldine Jones and Maude Frickert.

The special convinced the network to star Flip in a weekly music and comedy hour the following season, and *The Flip Wilson Show* debuted on Thursday September 17, 1970 for a lengthy run.

From the start, the programme was a popular mix of leading names from the music world, tv favourites and lesser known standup comedians or double acts. Flip owned half the show, and saw to it that friends from the nightclub circuit (like George Carlin, Robert Klein, Stiller & Meara and Burns & Schreiber)



were given national exposure. Redd Foxx (soon to enjoy sitcom success with *Sanford And Son*) was invited along by way of thanks for the help he'd given Wilson with Johnny Carson five years before.

Just about every major black musical artist (past and present) was included in the roster of guest stars, from legends such as Louis Armstrong, Lena Horne and Ella Fitzgerald to more recent names like Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder and The Jackson Five. Network television had given Flip the venue ... and he was more than happy to share the success around.

The show was a winner in the ratings being the second most popular show on the air (a spot it maintained the following season as well) and won Emmy awards for best musical variety series and outstanding writing achievement at the May 9 1971 presentations. It was a major breakthrough for a black comic from the the backstreets of New Jersey, and one whose main character saw him appearing as a woman on a regular basis. In Britain, comedians in drag had long been a tradition, but on American television only Milton Berle had enjoyed any real success with the device.

The Flip Wilson Show enjoyed a four year run and nearly a hundred editions, after which N.B.C. backed him in half a dozen specials. He was also a regular guest on just about every other comedy special the network aired at the time.

By the 1980s things had slowed down a little with Flip retreating to live appearances. In 1984 he hosted a short-lived revival of the 1950s stunt show *People Are Funny* (again on N.B.C.) and the following year C.B.S. tried to come up with a clone of the then hugely successful *Cosby Show*. They cast Wilson as the lead in *Charlie And Company*, a sitcom with a similar family setting, but even the mid-season addition of Della Reese as an antagonistic relative couldn't save it from cancellation after only eighteen episodes.

It was the last roll of the dice in what had been an incredible success story. Flip Wilson died of liver cancer in November 1998 and Miss Geraldine Jones took her wig and miniskirt and left the stage.

Television

The Flip Wilson Show (NBC 60 min)

September 22 1969

with guests Jonathan Winters, Arte Johnson, Andy Williams, Jackie DeShannon and Bob Hope

The Flip Wilson Show (NBC 60 min)

Season 1: September 17 1970 to April 1 1971 (26 editions)

Sep 17 David Frost, James Brown, The Muppets

Sep 24 Roy Clark, Bobby Darin

Oct 1 Roger Miller, The Temptations, Lily Tomlin, Redd Foxx

Oct 8 Perry Como, Charlie Callas, Lola Falana

Oct 15 Raymond Burr, The Muppets, Sundays Child

Oct 22 Louis Armstrong, Charlie Callas, Pat Morita

Oct 29 Bill Cosby, Gina Lollobrigida

Nov 5 Robert Goulet, Robert Klein, Lola Falana

Nov 19 Arte Johnson, Moms Mabley, Marcel Marceau

Nov 26 Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Pride, Bobby Darin

Dec 3 Connie Stevens, John Byner, Stevie Wonder

Dec 10 Lena Horne, Tony Randall

Dec 17 Sid Caesar, B.B. King, Bobby Darin

Dec 24 Burl Ives, Sha Na Na

Jan 7 Bing Crosby, The Supremes, David Steinberg

Jan 14 Steve Lawrence, Roberta Flack, Zero Mostel

Jan 21 Muhammad Ali, Bobby Darin, Lily Tomlin

Jan 28 Bill Cosby, Nancy Wilson, Claudine Longet

Feb 4 Joe Namath, Johnny Mathis, George Carlin

Feb 11 Art Carney, Barbara Feldon

Feb 18 David Frost, Aretha Franklin, Charlie Callas

Feb 25 Don Rickles, Ray Charles, Leslie Uggams

Mar 4 Diahann Carroll, Tim Conway, Robert Klein

Mar 11 Lena Horne, Ray Stevens, George Carlin

Mar 18 Gaylord & Holiday, Lily Tomlin

Apr 1 Tim Conway, Sandy Duncan

Season 2: September 16 1971 to March 16 1972 (26 editions)

Sep 16 Lucille Ball, Ed Sullivan, The Osmonds

Sep 23 George Gobel, Joan Rivers, Mahalia Jackson

Sep 30 Raymond Burr, Ruth Gordon, Stevie Wonder

Oct 7 Ruth Buzzi, Tim Conway, Erroll Garner

Oct 14 Pat Boone, George Carlin, Sugar Ray Robinson

Oct 21 David Frost, The Supremes, Willie Tyler & Lester

Oct 28 Melba Moore

Nov 4 Lily Tomlin, Dr. David Reuben, Hudson & Landry, The Jackson Five

Nov 11 Diahann Carroll, Dom DeLuise, The Muppets

Nov 18 Andy Griffith, Tim Conway, Clara Ward Singers

Nov 25 Sid Caesar, Carl Reiner, Lena Horne

Dec 2 Phyllis Diller, Tony Randall, Billy Eckstine

Dec 16 Petula Clark, Roy Clark, Redd Foxx

Dec 23 Melba Moore, Marty Feldman, Jimmy Osmond

Dec 30 Carol Channing, David Steinberg

Jan 6 Dan Blocker, Kay Ballard, Ray Charles

Jan 13 Redd Foxx, Tim Conway, Bobby Darin

Jan 20 Dom DeLuise, George Carlin, Aretha Franklin

Jan 27 Johnny Cash, June Carter, Jim Brown

Feb 3 Phil Silvers, Barbara Feldon, B.B. King

Feb 10 Sandy Duncan, Jim Nabors, Slappy White

Feb 17 Roy Clark, Barbara McNair, Stiller & Meara

Feb 24 Joe Namath, George Carlin, Miss Black America

Mar 2 Sammy Davis Jr., Lily Tomlin

Mar 9 Lee Marvin, Ruth Buzzi, Chi-Lites

Mar 16 Bing Crosby, Tim Conway, Melba Moore

Season 3: September 14 1972 to March 15 1973 (25 editions)

Sep 14 Jack Benny, Pearl Bailey, George Carlin, The Muppets

Sep 21 Tim Conway, The Fifth Dimension

Sep 28 Don Knotts, Melba Moore

Oct 5 Ruth Buzzi, The Supremes, Burns & Schreiber

Oct 12 Paul McCartney, Bill Russell, Stiller & Meara

Oct 26 David Steinberg, Diana Sands, The Jackson Five

Nov 2 Carol Channing, Ed Asner, Donny Hathaway

Nov 9 Don Adams, Roscoe Lee Browne, Staple Singers

Nov 16 Burt Reynolds, Tim Conway, Roberta Flack

Nov 23 Frank Gorshin, Joan Rivers, The Temptations

Nov 30 Raymond Burr, Dom DeLuise, Gladys Knight

Dec 7 Dionne Warwick, Tony Randall, Burns & Schreiber

Dec 14 Johnny Cash, June Carter, Bill Russell, Albert Brooks

Dec 21 Tim Conway, Kris Kristofferson, Rita Coolidge, Slappy White

Jan 4 Jim Nabors, Barbara McNair, James Coco

Jan 11 Andy Griffith, Roscoe Lee Browne, Curtis Mayfield

Jan 18 Howard Cosell, Marty Feldman, Sandy Duncan, Taj Mahal

Jan 25 Sammy Davis Jr., Ed Sullivan, Marilyn Michaels

Feb 1 Ray Charles, Phyllis Diller, The Committee

Feb 8 Diana Sands, Helen Reddy, Dom DeLuise, Kreskin

Feb 15 Roy Clark, George Carlin, Melba Moore

Feb 22 Ed McMahon, Rich Little, Cicely Tyson

Mar 1 Joe Namath, Tim Conway, Papa John Creach

Mar 8 Ruth Buzzi, The Supremes, Burns & Schreiber

Mar 15 Richard Pryor, Don Knotts, Oscar Brown Jr.

Season 4: September 20 1973 to March 21 1974 (19 editions)

Sep 20 Buddy Hackett, Ruth Buzzi, Richard Pryor

Sep 27 William Windom, Sandy Duncan, Monty Hall, The Pointer Sisters

Oct 4 Ralph Edwards, Richard Pryor, Nate Purefoy

Oct 11 Helen Reddy, Redd Foxx, Joan Rivers

Oct 25 Harry Belafonte, Burns & Schreiber

Nov 1 Robert Goulet, Carol Lawrence, Slappy White

Nov 15 Lee Grant, Hank Aaron, Gladys Knight

Nov 29 Tim Conway, Richard Pryor, Romark

Dec 6 Leonard Nimoy, Ed McMahon, Charlie Callas

Dec 13 Stiller & Meara, Aretha Franklin

Dec 20 Burns & Schreiber, The Fifth Dimension

Dec 27 Anthony Newley, Jack Klugman, Roscoe Lee Browne

Jan 3 Ted Knight, The Pointer Sisters

Jan 10 Bobby Sandler, Roy Clark, Melba Moore

Feb 7 Steve Lawrence, Richard Pryor

Feb 21 Dennis Weaver, O.J. Simpson

Feb 28 Redd Foxx, Don Adams, McLean Stevenson

Mar 7 Lena Horne, Tony Randall, Bob & Ray

Mar 21 Perry Como, Charlie Callas, Lola Falana

Flip Wilson specials (all 60 minutes, on N.B.C.)

Oct 18 1974 (*titled Flip Wilson ... Of Course*)

Peter Sellers, Lily Tomlin, Richard Pryor

Dec 11 1974 Paul Williams, Diahann Carroll, Freddie Prinze

Feb 27 1975 Helen Reddy, William Conrad, Sammy Davis

May 7 1975 Cher, Richard Pryor, McLean Stevenson

Oct 15 1975 (*titled Travels With Flip*)

Muhammad Ali, Loretta Lynn

Nov 11 1975 (titled *The Flip Wilson Comedy Special*)
George Carlin, Ruth Buzzi, The Pointer Sisters

Flip Wilson's Salute To Football (60 min)
c. 1970s *details unknown*

People Are Funny (30 min)
N.B.C. March 24 1984 (9 episodes)

Charlie And Company (30 min)
C.B.S. from September 18 1985 (18 episodes)

Bibliography

On Stage Flip Wilson
by Thomas Braun (Creative Education, Mankato, Minnesota, 1976)

Discography

Flip Wilson's Pot Luck
Scepter LP 520 (1964)
(reissued as **The Best Of Flip Wilson** Scepter LP CTN 18011,
Funny And Live At The Village Gate
Springboard LP SP 4004 and Richmond CD NCD 2167, and
Live At The Village Gate Varese Sarabande CD VSD 5872)
*The Smoker / The Audience / Equality / The President / The
Army And Leroy Jenkins / The Cure / On The Subway / Questions
And Answers / Ray Charles Greatest Fan / Vital Statistics
How To Be A Matador / Where I Come From / George's
Funeral / On The Train / The Drinker / The Expectant Father
At The Airport / The Old Woman / Black Bart / Lulu*
(highlights from the above disc are featured on ...
Pissed Off! Phoenix LP 10 PHX 360
*Wriggers / Racial Stand / Private Jenkins / Wooden Belly
Button / The Ray Charles Fan / Cadillac Owners / The
Matador*, plus seven Richard Pryor tracks)

Flip Wilson
unlabeled EP SK1
*Where I Came From / George's Funeral / On The Train
Questions And Answers / The Old Woman / Black Bart / The
Army And Leroy Jenkins*

Flippin' - The Very Funny Flip Wilson
Liberty / Minit LP 24012, Imperial LP 91551 (1968)
(reissued as **Flipped Out** Sunset LP SUS 5297)
tracks not itemised

Cowboys And Colored People
Atlantic LP SD 8149
(also issued as **Watch Out!** Atlantic LP 588 138)
*Cowboys And Colored People / Midget / Riot Suit / David
And Goliath / Ugly People / Staying On Too Long
Christopher Columbus / Kids / Cheap Hotel / Church On
Sunday / Big Hand / Confidential Survey*

Cowboys And Coloured People
Atlantic EP 45-EP-1000 SP
*Riot Suit / Staying On Too Long / Confidential Survey
Cowboys And Coloured People*

You Devil You
Atlantic LP SD 8179 (1968)
*Twenty Minutes Of Silence / Herman's Berry / I Wanted To Be
A Singer / The Millionaire / The Joey Bishop Show / Ugly
Baby / Days Of The Knights / The Gardener / I'm Not Flip
Wilson / Lulu / The Shadow / Dr. Freddie / Trala / Land Of
Opportunity / Paid To Die / Ugly Girl / The Bat*

You Devil You
Atlantic EP 45-EP A-1008
*The Gardener / The Millionaire / Ugly Baby / I Want To Be A
Singer / The Joey Bishop Show / The Shadow / Dr. Freddie*

The Devil Made Me Buy This Dress
Atlantic LP LD 1000 (1972)
*Great Quotations / The Devil Made Me Buy This Dress / Miss
Johnson / The Great Motor Bike And Tennis Shoe Race, Honey
The Go-Rilla / Monologue Number One: Wardrobe Lady
Part 1 + Drive-In Movie + Lemonade Stand + Golf Story
Monologue Number Two: Wardrobe Lady Part 2 + Doctors
Have More Fun / Ice / Ruby Begonia / Monologue Number
Three: Seeing Ed Eat A Chittlin' On Network Television +
The Pet Shop*

The Devil Made Me Buy This Dress
Little David EP X-50
*Great Quotations / The Devil Made Me Buy This Dress / Ruby
Begonia / Ice*

Geraldine - Don't Fight The Feeling
Atlantic LP LD 1001 (1972)
*Geraldine Honey / The Bunny Club (with Bing Crosby) / Don't
Fight The Feeling / The Perfect Secretary (with Ruth Buzzi
and Tim Conway) / Complaint Department (with Phyllis Diller,
Billy Eckstine and Tony Randall) / Killer / Chicken Delicious
(with Jim Brown)*

Killer / Don't Fight The Feeling
Little David 7" single LD 721

The Bunny Club / The Perfect Secretary
Little David 7" single PR 173

Flip - The Flip Wilson Show
Little David LP LD 2000
*The Flip Wilson Show / Muhammad Ali / Geraldine Meets
David Frost / Haunted House / The Blues / Creamed Chipped
Beef / Reverend Leroy*

The Flip Wilson Show
Little David EP X-51
Geraldine Visits David Frost / The Blues

Berries In Salinas / There Ought To Be A Law
Little David 7" single LDS 8113 (1975)

Toot, Toot, Tootsie Goodbye (both sides)
Little David 7" single 7-99858 (1983)

The Sullivan Years - Comedy Classics
TVT CD 9432-2 (1991)
*features two Ed Sullivan Show monologues (from January 8
1967 and January 11 1970)*

SYKES

by Mark McKay

UNTIL overtaken by *Last Of The Summer Wine* in 1992, *Sykes* held the record for the longest running sitcom in British television history. Unusually, it also maintained its popularity — with ITV on strike during the final series, more than twenty-two million viewers tuned in to the domestic antics of TV's most unlikely siblings.

It was performances in Denis Norden-penned RAF revues which gave the young Eric Sykes his first taste of show business. After the war he landed a job with a repertory company in his birthplace Oldham, and then as stage manager at Accrington. Although keen to pursue a career in acting, he soon discovered the work was not forthcoming. Instead he turned his hand to writing — initially for his old RAF commander, Bill Fraser, and later for an up-and-coming comic, also recently demobbed from the services and now making a big splash on the wireless, Frankie Howerd.

Eric's sketches for Frankie in *Variety Bandbox* scored a great success, and led to an introduction to businessman and ventriloquist, Peter Brough, and his blazered schoolboy dummy, Archie Andrews. In June 1950, the first episode of *Educating Archie* was broadcast, with a script by Sykes and his new writing partner, Sid Colin. The show was eventually to run for ten years, although Eric bowed out after the fourth series in 1954.

It was around this time that Eric became a regular listener to *The Goon Show*, and voiced his appreciation to chief Goon Spike Milligan. The admiration turned out to be mutual, and the two began to collaborate on the scripts. Together with Alan Simpson and Ray Galton they formed a co-operative company called Associated London Scripts, with offices above a greengrocer's shop in Shepherd's Bush. Eighteen months later there were thirteen writers on the payroll and collectively they were responsible for a sizeable chunk of the BBC and ITV comedy output.

By 1956 Eric had turned his attention to television, both in a writing and performing capacity. He joined the Goons in their first TV series, *The Idiot Weekly, Price 2d* and later teamed with Peter Sellers in *The Arthur Ploughshare Show*, part of ATV's season of *Val Parnell's Saturday Spectaculars*. Sykes also hosted a number of other editions as well.

In the late 1950s Eric found a new performing partner in *Educating Archie* alumnus, Hattie Jacques. The last ITMA recruit before its abrupt ending in 1949, Hattie had a fondness for old music hall songs, which she would deliver with gusto on stage at the Players' Theatre. A talented comic actress, her career was blossoming — on radio as Grizelda Pugh in *Hancock's Half Hour*, and on film in a series of matronly roles with the rest of the *Carry On* gang.

Eric and Hat appeared together in the London Palladium revue *Large As Life*, which starred Harry Secombe and Terry-Thomas, and in assorted TV specials. In January 1960 the *Radio Times* cover heralded their new five-part sitcom, written by Eric's Associated London Scripts colleague, Johnny Speight and produced by the habitually enthusiastic Dennis Main Wilson. Called *Sykes And A...*, the title varied each week according to the storyline.



The original premise had the pair playing a husband and wife couple, but Sykes decided it would be less restrictive if they became brother and sister. As if that weren't incredible enough, given Eric's lean cadaverous figure and Hattie's generous proportions, they were made twins.

The naive but lovable siblings shared a home in suburbia at 24 Sebastopol Terrace, relying heavily on each other to sort out their domestic difficulties. Next door lived a supercilious bespectacled bachelor, Mr. Charles Fulbright Brown, played by Richard Wattis. Forever disdainful of Eric (or 'Sykes' as he invariably called him), the immaculate Mr. Brown earned Hattie's unquestioning respect and fidelity. The local bobby was the work-shy Constable Turnbull (Deryck Guyler), known to all and sundry as 'Corky'. Primarily controlled by his stomach, this ancient copper put in regular appearances at the Sykes residence, ever hopeful of enjoying a free nosh-up from the kitchen.

The first series ended on February 26, with *Hancock's Half Hour* taking over its time-slot for subsequent weeks. After a short break, the team returned for another run in August. Now Eric was writing his own scripts (supplemented by a couple each from colleagues Spike Milligan and John Antrobus) and the programmes were being offered for overseas transmission. They soon built up a following in Australia and New Zealand.

Over the next five years another seven series were made, although sadly most of these episodes no longer exist. Richard Wattis pulled out after the third season (according to the story, Mr. Brown had decided to emigrate), but Eric and Hattie's popularity endured. In 1962 they contributed to the variety

cavalcade **Christmas Night With The Stars**, and the following year were asked to appear at the Royal Variety Performance. Held at the Prince of Wales theatre, this was arguably the best royal show to date, boasting an all-star line-up which included Steptoe and Son, Flanders & Swann and The Beatles.

The abundance of work opportunities offered to TV's newest double-act led them into other media. They turned up briefly on radio in a series which saw Eric as a fledgling constable in the police force with Deryck Guyler as his superior officer. They also ventured into the Decca studios to record a largely improvised LP, but the results were disappointing. Too many of the tracks proved to be merely self-indulgent drivel.

Meanwhile back on the box, the 1965 episode *Sykes And A Nest Egg* marked the end of an era. After nearly sixty half-hours, Eric had decided to call it quits. He was unhappy that the Beeb had scheduled his programme up against **Coronation Street** on ITV, and departed to embark on other projects.

During the war Eric had suffered an ear injury which, left unchecked, was gradually deteriorating. In 1951 he was rushed to hospital for an emergency mastoid operation. This left his right ear almost completely deaf, but on a more positive note, he married the Canadian nurse who had helped him on the road to recovery. A decade later he was again undergoing surgery, this time to overcome deafness in the other ear.

These hearing problems were beginning to affect his work and no doubt influenced his ambition to produce a silent movie. Back in 1964, Eric had spent four months on the script of one episode titled *Sykes And A Plank*. Regarded at the time as a TV comedy classic, he now set to work on a big screen adaptation. With next-to-no dialogue and a multitude of famous faces, **The Plank** showed the hilarious antics of two workmen (Eric and Tommy Cooper) as they attempted to transport a wooden beam across London. The experiment was repeated again in 1970 with **Rhubarb**, the story of a police inspector (Sykes) enlisting the help of his constable (Jimmy Edwards) to beat the vicar (played by Harry Secombe) at a round of golf.

By the early seventies a trend of resurrecting old television series for the modern colour era had begun. Following in the footsteps of **Steptoe And Son** and **Whack-O!**, Eric resolved to revive his sixties show for a new audience (a hefty tax bill providing some encouragement). Renamed simply **Sykes**, the initial editions were merely remakes of earlier programmes. Older viewers welcomed back its genteel puritanical values which were in sharp contrast to Johnny Speight's **Till Death Us Do Part**, which had also made a comeback, amid a swarm of controversy, the previous night.

Although the production values were noticeably superior, other changes were minimal. The setting had altered slightly — Eric and Hat were now living in an end-of-terrace semi in East Acton — but old friends Corky and Mr. Brown still visited regularly. Joan Sims popped up in a few episodes as Madge from the bread shop, hopelessly and inexplicably devoted to Eric. On occasion guest stars helped to brighten up the stories, amongst them Jimmy Edwards (Eric's partner in the long-running theatrical phenomenon, *Big Bad Mouse*), golf pro Tony Jacklin and, by now an international film star, Peter Sellers (reprising a role originally taken by Leo McKern in 1961).

The show once again became a favourite with viewers in Britain and abroad. Each year thereafter, BBC1 screened another series of programmes, all introduced with the catchy

trumpet theme-tune. One of these, *An Engagement*, was even adapted to a stage play (which toured under the title *A Hatful of Sykes*).

After Richard Wattis's death in 1975, Joy Harington joined the cast as new neighbour Miss Rumbelow, a colonel's daughter who had spent much of her life in India. Eventually original stories started creeping in — usually involving some grandiose scheme devised by Eric into which Hattie is reluctantly drawn.

Unfortunately time has not been kind to **Sykes**. Seen today, most of the episodes appear very slow-moving and consequently rather dull. Eric and Hat's simplicity is also less appealing to today's sophisticated audiences, and regrettably there are no jokes to fall back on, since all the humour is in the situation.

On the other hand, the short silent films which Eric made for Thames TV are still good for a giggle. The first of these was yet another remake of *Sykes And A Plank* in 1979, this time with Arthur Lowe as his fellow builder and cameos from a host of seventies comic talent. Next came an updated version of **Rhubarb**, with Bob Todd assuming the role of the vicar. This was followed by a brace of original comedies: *It's Your Move*, featuring Sykes and Tommy Cooper as a pair of bumbling removal men helping a recently married couple to settle into their new home, and *Mr. His Late*, the misadventures of a firm of undertakers faced with transporting a coffin from the top floor of a tower block.

However not all the telemovies were successful. *If You Go Down In The Woods Today*, the tale of a scoutmaster and his cubs embroiled in a woodland police surveillance operation was conspicuously light on laughs, and *The Big Freeze*, starring Eric and Bob Hoskins as hapless plumbers called to a home for retired actors, ended up being made by a Finnish TV company after a distinct lack of enthusiasm from their British counterparts.

On Christmas Day 1979, **This Is Your Life** paid tribute to Eric in a star-studded half-hour show. With contributions from Spike Milligan, Harry Secombe, Jimmy Edwards, Terry-Thomas, Tommy Cooper, Frankie Howerd, Zsa Zsa Gabor and golfing partner Sean Connery, this became one of the most memorable editions ever made.

It seemed fairly certain that 1980 would see yet another series of **Sykes**, but fate intervened. Hattie Jacques succumbed to a sudden and fatal heart attack on 6th October, aged only 56. Eric was deeply saddened by the news and in his tribute he tried to explain their special relationship: "she was like a real sister to me." He had always spoken in glowing terms of her natural comic abilities, and was particularly proud that in all the years of writing for her, he had never made reference to her size.

During the past decade Eric has become a familiar face to theatre-goers all over the country. He toured extensively with Johnny Speight's *The 19th Hole* (a play based on Eric's Central TV series exploiting his passion for golf), co-starred with Peter Bowles in Moliere's *The School For Wives*, and more recently joined Julia McKenzie and John Gordon-Sinclair in Alan Bennett's surreal *Kafka's Dick*.

Despite recent rapidly deteriorating vision, he has also found time to turn out a couple of humorous novels, *UFOs Are Coming Wednesday* and *Smelling Of Roses*. Happily, after fifty years in the business Eric Sykes OBE shows no signs of throwing in the towel.

Television

Sykes

Starring Eric Sykes, Hattie Jacques, Richard Wattis (series 1–3 & 10–12), Deryck Guyler, Joy Harington (series 14–16)

Scripts by Eric Sykes unless otherwise specified

* indicates shows which no longer exist

Series 1

BBC 29 January to 26 February 1960 (5×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Telephone* (by Johnny Speight)*
2. *Sykes And A Burglary* (by Johnny Speight)*
3. *Sykes And A New Car* (by Johnny Speight)*
4. *Sykes And An Uncle* (by Johnny Speight)*
5. *Sykes And A Lodger* (by Johnny Speight)*

Series 2

BBC 11 August to 15 September 1960 (6×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Movie Camera**

Eric acquires a home movie camera with cigarette coupons and drives everyone crazy with his film-making.

2. *Sykes And A Library Book* (by John Antrobus)*

Eric has some library books which are twelve years overdue, so to avoid a hefty fine he tries to sneak them back.

3. *Sykes And A Holiday* (by Spike Milligan)

Mr. Brown arranges a working exchange holiday on the French Riviera for Eric and Hattie, but they end up yearning for their usual Bog-On-Sea.

4. *Sykes And An Egg* (by Spike Milligan)*

Mr. Brown bets Eric he won't be able to save money by hatching eggs to get chickens.

5. *Sykes And A Brave Deed**

When he returns home drenched after fishing, Hattie assumes Eric is the hero who rescued a girl from drowning.

6. *Sykes And A Cheque Book* (by John Antrobus)*

Eric needs business references before he can start paying his bills by cheque.

Series 3

BBC 4 January to 8 February 1961 (6×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Window**

With the Sykes house one of the few not to have had its windows smashed, suspicion falls on Eric.

2. *Sykes And A Salesman**

Eric's attempts at selling encyclopaedias door-to-door meet with little success.

3. *Sykes And A Fancy Dress**

Eric and Hattie receive an invitation to Mr. Brown's fancy dress ball.

4. *Sykes And A Bath*

With the builders in, Eric is forced to bathe at Mr. Brown's house. But when he gets his toe stuck in the tap, the entire bath must be removed.

5. *Sykes And A Marriage**

After Hattie's advert in a magazine Lonely Hearts column leads to trouble, she sets her sights on Mr. Brown instead.

6. *Sykes And An Ankle*

Eric and Hattie are obliged to wait hand and foot on Mr. Brown, who is bedridden with a sprained ankle.

Series 4

BBC 14 April to 19 May 1961 (6×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Mission**

Eric and Hattie open a soup kitchen for derelicts but things soon get out of hand.

2. *Sykes And A Stranger* (with Leo McKern)*

The everyday humdrum is upset when a rough sailor turns up on the doorstep seeking Hattie's hand in marriage.

3. *Sykes And A Cat*

Eric drops through a skylight when he makes a late night search for Hattie's kitten Tiddles on a neighbour's roof.

4. *Sykes And A Bandage**

Eric's trip to pay off his final motor bike instalment is jeopardised when he agrees to help Hattie practise first aid.

5. *Sykes And A Suspicion**

Eric disguises himself as a pillar box to spy on a neighbour he believes is acting strangely.

6. *Sykes And A Surprise**

Eric & Hattie's dinner party is thrown into chaos when a car crashes through their front wall.

Series 5

BBC 30 January to 20 March 1962 (8×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Gamble*

Eric is under the impression he's one of the Mavericks but his constant betting is eating into the housekeeping money.

2. *Sykes And A Job*

Joining Hattie at work in the local factory, Eric is forced to step up his low washer production rate.

3. *Sykes And A Boat*

To cure his hypochondria, the doctor has ordered Eric to take a holiday on the water, but practising his nautical technique is driving Hattie crazy.

4. *Sykes And A Journey*

Eric and Hattie's trip back to London isn't helped when they try to exchange their train tickets.

5. *Sykes And An Elephant*

Aunt Gladys hears the story behind the elephant head on the wall, and how Eric once managed to lose a pachyderm.

6. *Sykes And A Rolls*

Eric has landed the job of chauffeur to Lady Bangor.

7. *Sykes And A Haunting*

Eric and Hattie are trapped in a pair of handcuffs found amongst the effects of their late Uncle Edward, the escapologist.

8. *Sykes And A Dream*

Hopelessly in love with his beautiful lady doctor, Eric dreams of winning her admiration as a variety of dashing, heroic characters.

Christmas Night With The Stars*

BBC 25 December 1962 (95mins)

Eric and Hattie appeared in a short segment

Series 6

BBC 21 February to 11 April 1963 (8×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Fog**

After learning he is beneficiary in a will, Eric remembers wandering into another house during a heavy fog.

2. *Sykes And A Phobia**

Eric has managed to get his head stuck in the railings of his bed.



3. *Sykes And A Camping**

To win a bet with the milkman, Eric spends the night in a tent.

4. *Sykes And A Picture*

Hattie has misgivings when Eric offers to put up a picture and do a spot of plastering.

5. *Sykes And A Mouse**

The Sykes household is host to a rodent and Eric and Hattie have differing views about whether it should be destroyed.

6. *Sykes And A Walk*

The exercise bug has bitten Eric and now he sees himself as a candidate for the Olympics.

7. *Sykes And A Referee**

Eric has been chosen to referee the Sebastopol Rangers football match, and having placed bets on a victorious local team, all his friends expect him to ensure they win.

8. *Sykes And A Pub**

Helping friends out for an evening, Eric and Hattie soon find that running a public house is not all beer and skittles.

Series 7

BBC 25 February to 7 April 1964 (7×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Box*

details unknown

2. *Sykes And A Plank*

After damaging a friend's floorboard, Eric and Hat fetch a replacement from the timber yard, but manage to lose it in transit.

3. *Sykes And A Search**

Eric is determined to locate the Daily Globe's mystery woman and win a prize.

4. *Sykes And A Following*

As driver and clippie on the number 136 bus, Eric & Hat provide a service like the airlines.

5. *Sykes And A Menace**

Eric is not looking forward to the forthcoming visit of young Amanda Cornbatch.

6. *Sykes And A Log Cabin* (with Ronnie Barker)

Eric & Hattie find they are sharing their weekend of self-sufficiency at a primitive shack in the country.

7. *Sykes And A Band**

A new lodger who is learning to play the cornet takes up residence in the Sykes house.

Series 8

BBC1 30 October to 4 December 1964 (6×30mins)

1. *Sykes And Two Birthdays**

Eric isn't overjoyed when his sister gives him yet another pen on their birthday.

2. *Sykes And A Hypnotist*

An evening at a nightclub ends in pandemonium when a cabaret hypnotist leaves his subjects under the influence.

3. *Sykes And A Protest**

Hattie is a less-than-enthusiastic supporter when Eric stages a sit-down protest in the street.

4. *Sykes And A Bird**

Hattie leaves home when Eric refuses to get rid of his new pet dove.

5. *Sykes And A Cold War* (with Dick Emery)

A couple in a caravan park are not pleased when Eric and Hattie arrive as neighbours.

6. *Sykes And A Gold*

Eric has his heart set on an Olympic gold medal.

Series 9

BBC1 5 October to 16 November 1965 (7×30mins)

1. *Sykes And A Mountain**

details unknown

2. *Sykes And A Deb**

Hattie finds it incredible that an attractive debutante sees Eric as her ideal man.

3. *Sykes And A Business**

Eric and Hattie take charge of a roadside cafe.

4. *Sykes And A Golfer* (with Peter Alliss)

Driven to distraction by Eric's golfing obsession, Hattie decides to learn how to play.

5. *Sykes And A Big Brother**

Eric sees a drab future for wage-earners like Hattie and him.

6. *Sykes And A Uniform*

Eric and Hat's evening excursion to the cinema is thwarted by sundry uniformed officials.

7. *Sykes And A Nest Egg**

When Hattie invites her new poor American boyfriend home, Eric hides his money in his telescope.

Christmas Night With The Stars*

BBC1 25 December 1971 (80mins)

Eric and Hattie appeared in a short segment

Series 10

BBC1 14 September to 28 December 1972 (16×30mins)

1. *Burglary*

Mr. Brown suggests that Sykes hasn't yet been burgled because he has nothing of value but Eric maintains would-be intruders are deterred by his savage guard dog.

2. *Uncle* (with John Le Mesurier)

Mr. Brown is appalled by Eric's behaviour at the golf club punch party, but all is forgiven when he learns the identity of Sykes' uncle.

3. *Walk*

Eric has been in training for a fifty mile walk from London to Brighton, the first step in his quest for Olympic team selection.

4. *Menace*

Due to play host to ten-year-old terror Amanda, Eric prepares for an onslaught of childish pranks.

5. *Boat*

Mr. Brown allows Eric to take his new boat out on the river, under the impression Sykes is an experienced naval man.

6. *Stranger* (with Peter Sellers)

The everyday humdrum is upset when a rough sailor turns up on the doorstep seeking Hattie's hand in marriage.

7. *Football* (with Joan Sims & Frank Bough)

Eric has been chosen to referee the Sebastopol Rangers football match, and having placed bets on a victorious local team, all his friends expect him to ensure they win.

8. *Job* (with Jimmy Edwards)

Joining Hattie at work in the local factory, Eric is forced to step up his low washer production rate.

9. *Ankle*

Eric and Hattie are obliged to wait hand and foot on Mr. Brown, who is bedridden with a sprained ankle.

10. *Mouse*

The Sykes household is host to a rodent and Eric and Hattie have differing views about whether it should be destroyed.

11. *Dream*

Hopelessly in love with his beautiful lady doctor, Eric dreams of winning her admiration as a daring flying ace, suave playboy, heroic fireman and gun-slinging cowboy.

12. *Marriage*

After Hattie's advert in a magazine Lonely Hearts column leads to trouble, she sets her sights on Mr. Brown instead.

13. *Cat*

Eric drops through a skylight when he makes a late night search for Hattie's kitten Tiddles on a neighbour's roof.

14. *Journey*

Returning home from their Scottish holiday with Mr. Brown, Eric and Hat travel to London on the Glasgow night sleeper.

15. *Lodger*

Neighbourliness is stretched to its limits when Mr. Brown stays with Eric and Hattie while his house is being decorated.

16. *Cafe*

Eric and Hattie take charge of a transport cafe, transforming it into a stylish roadhouse. But the customers do not approve of the changes.

Series 11

BBC1 10 September to 17 December 1973 (15×30mins)

1. *An Engagement*

The morning after his boozy army reunion, Eric receives a visit from a beautiful young aristocrat who claims to be his new fiancée.

2. *Bus*

As driver and clippie on the number 266 bus, Eric & Hat provide a service like the airlines.

3. *Spy Ring*

Eric and Mr. Brown are convinced the new neighbours are Russian spies. They carry out surveillance with Eric hiding in a street pillar box.

4. *Golf* (with Tony Jacklin)

Driven to distraction by Eric's golfing obsession, Hattie decides to learn how to play. Soon she is giving expert tips to Tony Jacklin.

5. *Rolls*

Eric has landed the job of chauffeur to Lady Dorothy, but on the first outing to a church fete he is involved in a crash.

6. *Peeping Tom*

The mysterious blurred face Hattie has seen from the kitchen window is identified as Eric with his head stuck between the garden railings.

7. *Fancy Dress*

An invitation to Mr. Brown's fancy dress ball sees Hattie dressed as a policewoman and Eric as Julius Caesar.

8. *Window Smasher* (with Joan Sims)

With the Sykes house one of the few not to have had its windows smashed, suspicion falls on Eric. Denying any culpability, he is sent to Coventry by the other residents.

9. *Gamble*

Gripped by the gambling bug, Eric manages to lose his house to a minor mafioso who transforms it into a casino.

10. *Uniform*

Eric and Hat's evening excursion to the cinema is thwarted by sundry uniformed officials.

11. *Bird*

Hattie leaves home when Eric refuses to get rid of his new pet dove, Muriel. Corky discovers Hat's disappearance and jumps to conclusions.

12. *Protest*

Incensed over the plans for a large apartment block across the street, Eric and Hat stage a protest.

13. *Salesman*

Eric has decided to become a super salesman but initial efforts in his own street are less than encouraging.

14. *Haunting*

Eric and Hattie are trapped in a pair of handcuffs found amongst the effects of their late Uncle Edward, the escapologist.

15. *Nest Egg*

When Hattie invites her new poor American boyfriend home, Eric hides his £300 nest egg in his telescope.

Series 12

BBC1 17 October to 5 December 1974 (8×30mins)

1. *The Stolen Bentley* (with Anthony Steel)

While Eric and Hattie are upstairs preparing for an evening with the golf club president, a motor car crashes into their living room. Then the owner turns up to claim it.

2. *Holiday In Bogsea*

Whilst at the seaside, Eric and Corky compete in a newspaper 'Find the Lady' contest.

3. *The Pub*

Helping friends out for an evening, Eric and Hattie soon find that running a public house is not all beer and skittles.

4. *The Band* (with Bernard Bresslaw)

A new lodger who is learning to play the cornet takes up residence in the Sykes house.

5. *Two Birthdays*

After receiving a dilapidated car as a birthday present from Eric, Hattie sets out to get her driving licence.

6. *A Bandage*

Eric's trip to pay off his final motor bike instalment is jeopardised when he agrees to help Hattie practise first aid.

7. *Log Cabin*

Eric & Hattie find they are sharing their weekend of self-sufficiency at a primitive shack in the country.

8. *The Fog*

After learning he is beneficiary in a will, Eric remembers wandering into another house during the heavy fogs of 1959.

Series 13

BBC1 24 October to 12 December 1975 (not 21 Nov) (7×30mins)

1. *Commercial*

Eric enrolls in a drama school and takes on an agent after appearing in a glue TV advert.

2. *Skiing*

Whilst on holiday in the Bavarian alps, Corky bets the locals that Eric can ski down the Olympic Run unscathed.

3. *Caravan*

A feud erupts between Eric and Corky when they find themselves neighbours in a country caravan park.

4. *Reporter*

Newspaper office-boy Eric causes a commotion when he is given the task of interviewing a publicity-shy celebrity.

5. *Marriage* (with Joan Sims)

Eric wants to go into a working arrangement with Madge from the doughnut shop, but she wants a more intimate partnership.

6. *Night Out* (with Joan Sims)

When Hattie leaves Eric on his own for a night, he runs into problems with women.

7. *Christmas Party*

Eric and Hattie spend Christmas at Corky's with his friends and relations.

Series 14

BBC1 11 November to 30 December 1976 (8×30mins)

1. *Home Movies*

Eric runs into trouble with the law when he and Hattie direct Corky in *A Day In The Life Of A Policeman*.

2. *Fishing*

Eric and Hattie run into trouble with an unexploded mine when they join a disreputable fishing expedition.

3. *Lodgers*

With his wife coming home from hospital, Corky enlists Eric and Hattie's help to clean up after his Pakistani lodgers.

4. *Holiday Camp*

On holiday with the Turnbells, Eric upsets his camp teammates by refusing to join in the activities.

5. *Inventions*

Eric decides to become an inventor.

6. *Flashback*

Eric recalls his fishing holiday in Inverness which has left him sceptical of the Loch Ness monster's existence.

7. *Squatters* (with Roy Dotrice)

Returning home from holidays, Eric & Hattie find a dirty old tramp has taken up residence and looks like he plans to stay.

8. *Bath* (with Gordon Kaye)

With the builders in, Eric is forced to bathe at the home of his neighbour, Miss Rumbelow. But when he gets his toe stuck in her tap, the entire bath must be removed.

Christmas Special

BBC1 22 December 1977 (30mins)

The Christmas Wishes (with Sylvia Peters & Jimmy Edwards)

A Christmas fairy brings Eric his idol, Sylvia Peters. But when Hattie asks for Paul Newman, Jimmy Edwards arrives instead.

Series 15

BBC1 4 January to 8 February 1978 (6×30mins)

1. *The Hypnotist*

Corky's wedding anniversary at the 88 Club ends in pandemonium when a cabaret hypnotist leaves his subjects under the influence.

2. *Picket Line*

After receiving a £43 greengrocer's bill, Eric organises a mass demonstration to protest about rising prices.

3. *Football Match*

Determined to take an afternoon off work in order to see the big match, Eric stages a road accident outside his office.

4. *Decorating*

Corky bets Eric £5 that he can't have a wall papered and a coat rack attached by the time he comes off duty.

5. *End Of The World* (with Joan Sims)

Hattie persuades Eric to join the crowd up on Shepherd's Hill awaiting the prophesied apocalypse.

6. *Television Film* (with Hugh Paddick)

A BBC drama producer asks Eric and Hattie for permission to film a play outside their front door.

Series 16

BBC1 5 October to 16 November 1979 (7×30mins)

1. *The Drop Out*

A friend's long-haired nephew comes to stay but seems to be spending all his time in the cellar boiler room.

2. *Fanny-By-Gaslight*

Worried that Hattie is overworking herself, Eric tricks her into thinking she's having a breakdown.

3. *The Stay-At-Home Holiday*

Hattie remembers the time she and Eric lost their luggage prior to setting out on holiday.

4. *Bad Medicine*

While suffering from a stomach virus, Eric and Hat are prescribed tablets which, they discover, cause a loss of co-ordination.

5. *The Insurance Money*

Eric and Hattie are hiding in the South of France while the police and the insurance company are under the impression that Eric has been swept out to sea following a cliff-top misadventure.

6. *Six Million Dollar Sykes* (with John Junkin)

After an altercation in the pub with Billy Big Knuckle, Eric dreams he's been taken to hospital and rebuilt with mechanical parts.

7. *BBC Honours Sykes* (with Henry McGee & Les Dawson)

After twenty years of shows, Eric and Hattie are granted an audience with the head of the BBC.

Other series and specials

Dress Rehearsal (BBC)

31 March 1956 (60mins)

Opening Night (BBC)

22 August 1956 (60mins)

Eric Sykes Presents Peter Sellers (ATV)

5 and 12 January 1957 (2×45mins)

Closing Night (BBC)

7 September 1957 (60mins)

Val Parnell's Saturday Spectacular (ATV)

various editions in 1957 and 1958

Gala Opening (BBC)

7 March 1959 (60mins)

Eric Sykes Says Wish You Were Here (BBC)

Switzerland/Stockholm (17 August and 7 September 1963)

Big Bad Mouse (BBC1)

12 December 1966 (40mins)

Sykes Versus ITV* (ABC)

26 November 1967 (60mins)

Curry And Chips (LWT)

21 November to 26 December 1969 (6×30mins)

with Spike Milligan, Kenny Lynch, Norman Rossington

Sykes And A Big, Big Show (BBC1)

26 February to 2 April 1971 (6×30mins)

Shipwreck*/Concorde*/Guest/Submarine*/Western*/Britain's First Moon Shot*

with Hattie Jacques and Ian Wallace



Sykes — With The Lid Off (Thames)

7 July 1971 (60mins)

Big Bad Mouse (Thames)

26 December 1972 (90mins)

The Eric Sykes Show (A Few Of Our Favourite Things) (Thames)

8 June 1977 (60mins)

Charley's Aunt (Yorkshire)

29 December 1977 (75mins)

Eric Sykes Special (Thames)

31 December 1978 (60mins)

The Plank (Thames)

17 December 1979 (30mins)

The Likes Of Sykes (Thames)

1 January 1980 (60mins)

Rhubarb Rhubarb! (Thames)

15 December 1980 (30mins)

If You Go Down In The Woods Today (Thames)

29 April 1981 (75mins)

Eric Sykes — One Of The Great Troupers (BBC2)

10 December 1981

The Eric Sykes 1990 Show (Thames)

14 April 1982 (60mins)

It's Your Move (Thames)

18 October 1982 (30mins)

Mr. H Is Late (Thames)

15 February 1988 (30mins)

The Nineteenth Hole (Central)

5 June to 17 July 1989 (7×30mins)

with John Quayle, Garfield Morgan, Ronnie Brody

The Big Freeze (Finnish TV)

1993 (48mins)

Radio

It's A Fair Cop (BBC Light Programme)

22 May to 10 July 1961 (8×30mins)

Starring Eric Sykes, Hattie Jacques, Deryck Guyler, Leonard Williams, Dick Emery

Scripts by John Junkin and Terry Nation

Books

Eric Sykes Of Sebastopol Terrace

by Eric Sykes (M & J. Hobbs/Michael Joseph h/back 1981)
novelisations of TV episodes, with chapter titles:

Postmen (from *Uniform*)/Circumstantial Evidence (*Bird*)/
Burglary/The Vicar/The End Is Nigh (*End Of The World*)/
The Football Match/Mr. Brown/The Last Bus Home (from
Uniform)/The Last Time I Saw Bogsea (*Holiday In Bogsea*)/
The Marriage

The Great Crime Of Grapplewick

by Eric Sykes (Macmillan h/back 1984, Virgin p/back)

UFOs Are Coming Wednesday

by Eric Sykes (Virgin h/back & p/back 1995)

Smelling Of Roses

by Eric Sykes (Virgin h/back & p/back 1997)

Records

Doctor Kildare/Bedtime Story

Decca 7" single Y7092

Eric And Hattie And Things!!!!

Decca LP LK 4507 (1962)

*Doctor Kildare/At Home/Cockles And Mussels/Penny Forum/
Au Clair De La Lune/I Love Paris/Interview/Bedtime Story/
We Go Together/Many Happy Returns*

Cassette

Sykes And...

BBC Radio Collection double cassette ZBBC 1873 (1996)

features edited soundtracks of four episodes:

A Lodger (10/15)/*A Spy Ring* (11/3)/*An Engagement* (11/1)/
A Nest Egg (11/15)

Videos

Sykes (BBC Video BBCV 7021) (1984)

features *Golf* (11/4)/*Stranger* (10/6)/*Squatters* (14/7)

Comedy Classics Of The 60's

(Watershed Video WSP 1054) (1991)

includes an extract from *Sykes And A Cat* (4/3)

Sykes And A Bath (BBC Video BBCV 4815) (1992)

features *Sykes And A Bath* (3/4)/*Sykes And An Ankle* (3/6)/
Sykes And A Haunting (5/7)

The Golden Years Of TV Comedy 1975

(BBC Video BBCV 5785) (1996)

includes *Skiing* (13/2)

British Comedy Legends — The Very Best Of Eric Sykes

(Pearson New Entertainment Video PNV 1023) (1996)

features clips from *Sykes* and other shows

Comedy Greats — Eric Sykes

(BBC Video BBCV 6936) (2000)

features an edited version of *BBC Honours Sykes* (16/7) (with
excerpts from earlier episodes), *Sykes And A Plank* (7/2) and a
few *Sykes* outtakes

The Plank (Rank Video RCC 3072)

the cinematic production with Tommy Cooper

Eric Sykes Silent Comedy Classics (Thames Video TV 8126)

contains Thames television productions of *The Plank*, *Rhu-
barb Rhubarb*, *It's Your Move*, *Mr. H Is Late*

Such Is Sykes (Thames Video TV 8138) (1991)

contains *The Eric Sykes 1990 Show*

How To Cheat At Golf (Ilc Video SWV 0010) (1991)

The Plank/Rhubarb Rhubarb (Thames Video TV 9950)

the Thames television productions

It's Your Move/Mr. H Is Late (Thames Video TV 9992)

The Big Freeze (Quantum Leap Video QLG 5047)

Films

1954: *Orders Are Orders*

1956: *Charley Moon*

1959: *Tommy The Toreador*

1960: *Watch Your Stern*

1961: *Very Important Person
Invasion Quartet*

1962: *Village Of Daughters
Kill Or Cure*

1963: *Heavens Above!*

1964: *The Bargee
One Way Pendulum*

1965: *Those Magnificent Men In Their Flying Machines
Rotten To The Core
The Liquidator*

1966: *The Spy With A Cold Nose*

1967: *The Plank*

1968: *Shalako*

1969: *Monte Carlo Or Bust!*

1970: *Rhubarb*

1972: *The Alf Garnett Saga*

1973: *Theatre Of Blood*

1983: *The Boys In Blue*

1984: *Gabrielle And The Doodleman* (TV)

1986: *Absolute Beginners*

1993: *Splitting Heirs*

Thanks to Peter Tatchell and Brian Allanson
for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

VICTORIA WOOD

by Peter Tatchell

A PART from being a woman and not being dead, Victoria Wood has a lot in common with Noel Coward. A composer, lyricist, writer of sketches and plays, and a performer who sings and acts, she's done the lot. Coward was called "the master" but perhaps it would be unkind to refer to Ms. Wood as "the mistress". After twenty years on stage and television, she's currently the top female comedy performer in Britain, renowned for her versatility as well as her humour.

Victoria was born in Lancashire in 1953 and grew up with a flair for music and drama which led to a course in theatre arts at Birmingham University. Her early attempts at performing original compositions resulted in a successful appearance on the talent show **New Faces** in the mid-1970s followed by a starring role in the short-lived ATV series **The Summer Show** (with other winners Lenny Henry and Marti Caine). There was also regular radio work on such shows as **Start The Week**.

In early 1976 she was signed as a regular for a season of BBC1's **That's Life** (writing and performing a topical song each week) but found the experience limiting rather than educational. Spending the next couple of years performing in summer season and cabaret (at one time, in support of Jasper Carrott) she met husband-to-be, magician Geoffrey Durham. Wood also contributed sketch material to the revue **In At The Death** which, apart from exploring a new area of expertise, saw her working for the first time with actress Julie Walters.

Soon after, her dramatic skills came to the fore when she wrote a play titled **Talent** (aired by ITV on August 5 1979). Victoria co-starred with Walters in the production, to such acclaim that the pair repeated their characterisations a year later in a follow-up called **Nearly A Happy Ending** (ITV June 1 1980), and a stage production called **Good Fun**.

Some months later Wood and Walters teamed in a self-titled sketch programme (aired on New Year's Day, 1981) which spawned a seven-part series in early 1982. Victoria had also written a third dramatic offering **Happy Since I Met You** (starring Walters and Duncan Preston) and taken part in a radio series **The Little And Large Party**, both in mid-1981. In September that year she was invited to take part in the fourth Amnesty International all-star fundraiser **The Secret Policeman's Other Ball** and contributed a selection of songs.

A more substantial vehicle for Wood's burgeoning talents was the solo stage presentation **Lucky Bag**, which she performed in October 1983. The show was a mixture of musical items and an increasing amount of standup material. Her repertoire now included songs, jokes and sketches (not to mention full-length plays) and the BBC was keen to welcome her back to the Television Centre with series utilising her many talents.

Every line of **Victoria Wood (As Seen On T.V.)** was scripted by Victoria herself, as she mixed standup, songs, mockumentaries and satires of television programming. Years of writing and performing on the medium had provided Wood with a repertory company of support players, and the series also featured her friend Julie Walters (now an Oscar winner), Duncan Preston, Celia Imrie, Susie Blake (as the snobbishly neurotic continuity announcer) and Patricia Routledge as the redoubtable Kitty, a Hyacinth Bucket in embryo.

Regular characters included Joan and Margery (feuding daytime tv presenters), Gail and Carl (the I.Q.-deficient courtship couple from up north) and the splendidly dotty ensemble from *Acorn Antiques*, an ongoing segment which sent up the plots and production techniques found in the world of soap operas. Walters all but stole the show as the gloriously frumpy Mrs. Overall.

The series was a delight, attracting vast audiences, critical acclaim and along the way some B.A.F.T.A. awards. A followup season (plus a Christmas special) were quickly commissioned by the Beeb and Victoria Wood found, after ten years of trying, she'd become a household name.

Despite the success of the venture, Victoria found sketch writing very draining and resisted offers for more. Instead, she went back to live appearances (including an engagement at the London Palladium and later at the Royal Albert Hall), appeared on charity fundraisers for the Oncology Fund (CH4 December 23 1986) and Comic Relief (BBC February 5 1988), and was the subject of L.W.T.'s **An Audience With ...** format in late 1988. Other notable productions at the time included giving birth to a daughter and a son.

She was back at the B.B.C. at the end of 1989 for a new self-titled series, not sketches this time, but a Comedy Playhouse approach featuring six sitcom storylines or playlets. It would be her last tv work for several years (apart from an ITV airing of one of her stage performances **Sold Out** in early 1992) before agreeing to write and star in a couple of Christmas specials for the B.B.C.

Victoria Wood's All Day Breakfast (in 1992) was a return to the **As Seen On T.V.** mixture of songs, standup and sketches (including a new swipe at soap operas called *The Mall*) while **Victoria Wood Live In Your Own Home** (1994) was more of a solo stage show with a couple of character sketches breaking up the standup and songs. In between, she created a new telemovie vehicle for herself and Julie Walters titled **Pat And Margaret** (BBC1 September 11 1994), about the contrasting lifestyles of two sisters.

Other 1990s commitments included more work for Comic Relief (recording a single, *The Smile Song*, in 1991 and reporting from Africa for the 1995 telethon) and taking British Rail to task in an edition of **Great Railway Journeys** in September 1996. That month Wood was also thought notable enough to be profiled by **The South Bank Show**.

Then, in late 1998, she returned to the B.B.C. to expand her talents into a new arena ... the sitcom. **Dinner Ladies** brought back her old team (Duncan Preston, Celia Imrie and occasionally Julie Walters) in a format that centred on the joys and tragedies in the everyday lives of workers in a factory canteen. The series was a triumphant return to the small screen with some cleverly drawn characterizations, including Walters coming up with yet another monstrous creation as the mother-from-hell (along the lines of Mrs. Overall meets **Ab Fab's** Patsy Stone). A further batch of programmes was screened a year later, but Wood has declared them to be the final instalments of the saga. Again she wants to move on.

As the new century dawns, we await with eager anticipation the next stage of Victoria Wood's illustrious career and ponder what the talented artist will do next.

Television

THE SUMMER SHOW

ITV August 2 to 30 1975 (5 x 45 min)

THAT'S LIFE

BBC1 January 26 to May 23 1976

WOOD AND WALTERS

Special: ITV January 1 1981 (30 min)

Series: ITV January 1 to February 21 1982 (7 x 30 min)

included sketches Skin Care, The Woman With 740 Children, Young Love, Dotty On Women's Lib, Toddlers, The Practice Room and Groupies

VICTORIA WOOD — AS SEEN ON T.V.

Series 1: BBC2 January 11 to February 15 1985 (6 x 35 min)

1 Radio Interview (*standup*) / Bunbury Home (*advert*) / **In The Office** / Wilde Visits Dickens / All In The Game (*song*) **Acorn Antiques (ep 1)** / Video Box / A Fairly Ordinary Man **Margery And Joan #3** / Shopping (*musical number*)

2 Strange Man In Bed (*standup*) / Cheap 'N' Handy (*advert*) **Turkish Bath** / Playbox / Knock On Your Knocker (*song*) Young Love / **Acorn Antiques (ep 2)** / **Kitty #1: Keeping Young** / Pissed Off With Love (*song*) / Swim The Channel **The Reporter**

3 Swimming Pool (*standup*) / Doorbells (*advert*) / **Shoe Shop** / Paul And Jane / **Service Wash** / Anti-Mugging Spray / Brass Band Love Song / Transvestite / Video Box **Acorn Antiques (ep 3)** / Piano Shop / To Be An Actress Pause For Thought

4 Phone Call From Fashion Magazine (*standup*) / Doctor's Surgery #1 / **Cosmetic Surgery** / Witherslack's Bits And Doings / **Young Love #2** / I'm Tired (*song*) / Doctor's Surgery #2 / **Acorn Antiques (ep 4)** / Kitty: Agony Aunt Letters / **On Campus** / Doctor's Surgery #3 / Motivation Class

5 Coventry (*standup*) / Happy With Your Wash? (*advert*) **Supermarket Checkout** / Divorce / **Margery And Joan #1** **Acorn Antiques (ep 5)** / **Giving Notes** / Just An Ordinary School / Say Goodbye (*song*)

6 Parties (*standup*) / Boring Library Books / Cafeteria **Film Classic** / **Kitty #3: Running Buffet** / Library #2 **Acorn Antiques (ep 6)** / **Young Love #3** / **Dandruff Commercial** / Whither The Arts?

Series 2: BBC2 November 10 to December 15 1986 (6x35m)

1 Babies (*standup*) / Bicycle Clips (*advert*) / **Spaghetti 1930s Hollywood Musical** / Country Living / **Acorn Antiques (ep 7)** / **Mr. Right** / Barry And Freda (*song*) / Late News

2 Blood Donor, Plays (*standup*) / Shoplifting (*advert*) Bingo / Spanish Opera / **He Didn't #1** / **Acorn Antiques (ep 8)** / **Kitty #2/1: The Producer** / Say Who You Are? / The Good Old Days (incl. Music Hall Song) / **Today In Hospital** Fireside Tales: Welsh

3 Transportation (*standup*) / Pregnant / **The Trolley** / The Second Mrs. Constable / **Margery And Joan #2/3** / **Acorn Antiques (ep 9)** / I Just Don't Care (*song*) / Billy / Fireside Tales: Scottish

4 Adolescence (*standup*) / When The War Is Over / **No Gossip** / **Kitty #2/2: Supernatural** / **Acorn Antiques (ep 10)** Crush (*song*) / **He Didn't #3** / **Medical School** / A Very Funny Young Man Indeed

5 **The Builders (standup)** / Countrywide Local / **Chocolates? Partly Political Broadcast** / **Margery And Joan #2/4** / **Acorn Antiques (ep 11)** / Sitting On The Prom (*song*) / Sex Survey Flatmates

6 Old Moore's Almanac (*standup*) / **Tattoo Parlour** / **Acorn Antiques (ep 12)** / Winnie's Lucky Day / Count Your Blessings (*song*) / Soup Of The Day

Special: BBC2 December 18 1987 (40 min)

included sketches **Dr. Who**, **Self Service** and **The Making Of Acorn Antiques**, and the song At The Chippy

(**Bold text indicates item featured in script books**)

AN AUDIENCE WITH VICTORIA WOOD

ITV December 10 1988 (60 min)

with songs *It Would Never Have Worked* and *Barry And Freda*

VICTORIA WOOD

November 16 to December 21 1989 (6 x 30 min)

Mens Sana In Thingummy Doodah / *The Library Over To Pam* / *We'd Quite Like To Apologise* / *Val De Ree Staying In*

VICTORIA WOOD — SOLD OUT

ITV April 25 1992 (65 min)

includes *standup* about pregnancy testing, school reunion and wife-swapping, plus the songs *Saturday Night*, *It's Too Late Now* and *Reincarnation*

VICTORIA WOOD'S ALL DAY BREAKFAST

BBC1 December 25 1992 (50 min)

includes *The Mall (serial)*, *Time (standup)*, *Real Life (song)*

PAT AND MARGARET

BBC1 September 11 1994 (85 min)

VICTORIA WOOD — LIVE IN YOUR OWN HOME

BBC1 December 25 1994 (50 min)

Standup interspersed with the character sketches Madeline and Fattitude, and the songs I'm Feeling In The Mood Tonight, The Paradise Where Dreams Come True, Go With It, Bum To The World and Barry And Freda

SOUTH BANK SHOW

ITV September 15 1996

DINNERLADIES

Series 1: BBC1 November 12 to December 17 1998

(6 x 30 min)

Monday / *Royals* / *Scandal* / *Moods* / *Party* / *Nightshift*

Series 2: BBC1 November 25 1999 to January 27 2000 (not Jan 6, but extra edition Dec 24)

(7 x 30 min + 3 x 40 min*)

Catering / *Trouble* / *Holidays* / *Fog* / *Gamble** / *Christmas* Minnellium** / *Christine* / *Gravy* / *Toast*

PARKINSON

BBC1 March 24 2000 (60 min)

includes the songs *Andrea*, *Dinnerladies Theme* and *Barry And Freda*



Discography

THE SECRET POLICEMAN'S OTHER BALL

Springtime / Island lp HABA 6003, Island 2cd ESDCD 152
Had It Up To Here / What We Find / A Song For Princess Di** (* extra tracks only on 2cd version)

LUCKY BAG

V.C.L. / P.R.T. lp VCLP 1 (1983)

Opening / Put It Out Of Your Mind* / Playtex Discontinued* / Thinking Of You / Funny How Things / Keeping Fit* / Don't Do It / What We Find / Fourteen Again / Love Song / Depressed* / Dear God* / Brontes* / Had It Up To Here / School Debate* / Bastards / Music And Movement / Northerners* (* standup)

VICTORIA WOOD LIVE

E.M.I. / Columbia lp / cd CDP 7 91356 2 (1988)

Happy To Be Here (Where Was It Again?) / It Would Never Have Worked / Hospital* / Holidays* / Sex* / Barry And Freda* (* standup)

VICTORIA WOOD (THE BEST OF VICTORIA WOOD - AS SEEN ON T.V.)

B.B.C. double-cassette ZBBC 1263 (1991), cd ZBBC CD 1263
Radio Interview (standup) / Doorbells / Spaghetti / Medical School / Acorn Antiques (ep 1) / Kitty: Keeping Young / Cosmetic Surgery / He Didn't #1 / Babies (standup) / Barry And Freda / Transport (standup) / Turkish Bath / Country Life / So Pissed Off With Love / Acorn Antiques (ep 2) / Kitty: Agony Aunt / In The Office / Hotel Reception / He Didn't #3 / Parties (standup) / Weather Check / Coventry (standup) / Self Service / Ad Talk / Service Wash / Crush / Kitty: Running Buffet / Young Love #2 / The Reporter / Dandruff Commercial / Adolescence (standup) / Old Moore's Almanac (standup) / Supermarket Checkout / Giving Notes / Acorn Antiques (ep 7) / Kitty: The Supernatural / Young Love #3 / No Gossip / Builders (standup) / Shopping

The Stonk (*Hale and Pace*)/The Smile Song (*Victoria Wood*)
London 7" single LON 296 (1991)

JUST A MINUTE: SILVER MINUTES

B.B.C. double-cassette ZBBC 1364 (1992)

contains extracts from Victoria's contributions to the show

VICTORIA WOOD ENCORE

B.B.C. double-cassette ZBBC 1893, cd ZBBC CD 1893 (1996)
includes standup and sketches from VICTORIA WOOD (AS SEEN ON T.V.) :

Phone Call From Fashion Magazine (standup) / Pre-War Yorkshire Drama / Library / Tea Shop / Film Classic / Self Help / Dirty Book / Dandruff Commercial / Whither The Arts? / Pregnant / The Trolley / I Just Don't Care / Blood Donor and Plays (standup) / Mr. Right / Bingo / Bio-Pic / I'm Choked / The Partly Political Broadcast / Winnie's Lucky Day / The Good Old Days (incl. Music Hall Song) / Acorn Antiques (ep 12) / Billy / Sex Survey / The Old Days / Schoolgirl / A Very Funny Young Man Indeed / Count Your Blessings / Time (standup) / Real Life

and from VICTORIA WOOD'S ALL DAY BREAKFAST : commercials / The Mall / Exercises

VICTORIA WOOD - LIVE 1997

Penguin single-cassette ISBN 0 14 086766 X (1997)

includes dialogue about cellulite and Christmas with relatives, plus the character sketch Fattitude and the song Barry And Freda

REAL LIFE - THE SONGS

Ovation / Pearson New Entertainment cd OMCD 1212 (1997)
Baby Boom / It Would Never Have Worked / Andrea / Reincarnation / Love Song / Pam / Real Life / Music And Movement / Litter Bin / Crush / Saturday Night / Go With It / Alternative Tango / Barry And Freda

DINNERLADIES

B.B.C. double-cassette ISBN 0563 553065 (2000)

soundtracks from the TV series:

Monday / Royals / Moods / Party

Radio

THE LITTLE AND LARGE PARTY

BBC Radio 2 March 29 to May 17 1981 (8 x 30 min)

Bibliography

LUCKY BAG:

THE VICTORIA WOOD SONG BOOK

(Methuen, London. 1984)

contains Don't Get Cocky / Living Together / Thinking Of You / Funny How Things Turned Out / Don't Do It / What We Find / Fourteen Again / Love Song / Nasty Things / The Song Of The Lonely Girl / I've Had It Up To Here / Bastards / Music And Movement / Northerners

UP TO YOU, PORKY:

THE VICTORIA WOOD SKETCH BOOK

(Methuen, London. 1985)

thirty-five sketches, from the stage show LUCKY BAG and the tv series WOOD AND WALTERS and VICTORIA WOOD (AS SEEN ON T.V.)

BARMY:

THE SECOND VICTORIA WOOD SKETCH BOOK

(Methuen, London. 1987)

twenty-eight sketches (and twelve episodes of Acorn Antiques) from VICTORIA WOOD (AS SEEN ON T.V.)

MENS SANA IN THINGUMMY DOODAH

(Methuen, London. 1990)

contains the six thirty-minute scripts from the 1989 series VICTORIA WOOD:

Mens Sana In Thingummy Doodah / The Library / We Would Quite Like To Apologise / Over To Pam / Val De Ree / Staying In

PAT AND MARGARET

(Methuen, London. 1994)

contains the script of the telemovie

CHUNKY

(Methuen paperback, London. 1996)

omnibus edition of Up To You Porky, Barmy and Mens Sana In Thingummy Doodah plus three (previously unpublished) sketches from Victoria Wood: Live In Your Own Home.

THE FUNNY SIDE OF VICTORIA WOOD

by Bruce Dessau

(Orion, London. 1997)

DINNERLADIES - FIRST HELPINGS

(Methuen paperback, London. 1999)

scripts of the six season one episodes

Videography

THE SECRET POLICEMAN'S OTHER BALL

Columbia / Tri-star Video CVR16917

includes I've Had It Up To Here

VICTORIA WOOD (AS SEEN ON T.V.)

B.B.C. Video BBCV 4246, BBCV 5838

Radio Interview (standup) / Bunbury Home (advert) / In The Office / Film Classic / Margery And Joan: Double Glazing / Dirty Book / Brass Band / A Fairly Ordinary Man / Acorn Antiques (eps 2 and 3) / Kitty: Keeping Young / Library / Shoe Shop / Swim The Channel / Shopping / Weather Check.

Horoscope (standup) / Doorbells (advert) / Turkish Bath / Vegetarian Health Food / Knock On Your Knocker / Young Love #1 / Anti-Mugging Spray / To Be An Actress / Close Up / Supermarket Checkout / Kitty: Running Buffet / Acorn Antiques (eps 5 and 6) / Giving Notes / Whither The Arts?

MORE VICTORIA WOOD (AS SEEN ON T.V.)

B.B.C. Video BBCV 4309

Transport (standup) / Spaghetti / Coronation Street / The Second Mrs. Constable / The Making Of Acorn Antiques / Kitty: The Producer / Winnie's Lucky Day / Margery And Joan: Holidays / The Trolley / At The Chippy.

Adolescence (standup) / McOnomy / He Didn't #1 / Kitty: The Supernatural / Acorn Antiques (ep 11) / Mr. Right / Soup Of The Day / Anorak Song / Ad Talk / Self Service / Acorn Antiques (ep 12) / Barry And Freda

AN AUDIENCE WITH VICTORIA WOOD

4 Front Video/CastleVision 0858863 / GV0257

VICTORIA WOOD SOLD OUT

Virgin Video 0465363

MENS SANA IN THINGUMMY DOODAH

B.B.C. Video BBCV 4843

Mens Sana In Thingummy Doodah / The Library / Over To Pam

WE'D QUITE LIKE TO APOLOGISE

B.B.C. Video BBCV 4844

We'd Quite Like To Apologise / Val De Ree / Staying In

VICTORIA WOOD'S ACORN ANTIQUES

B.B.C. Video BBCV 4969

LIVE IN YOUR OWN HOME

B.B.C. Video BBCV 5379

expanded version of the television special

VICTORIA WOOD LIVE 1997

Ovation Entertainment Video OV1211

PAT AND MARGARET

B.B.C. Video BBCV 5629

DINNERLADIES - Volume 1

B.B.C. Video BBCV 6930

Monday / Royals / Scandal

DINNERLADIES - Volume 2

B.B.C. Video BBCV 6931

Moods / Party / Nightshift

WARD LEOPOLD

by Matthew K. Sharp

QUESTION: How can a man who was a radio pioneer and frequent broadcaster and producer, a writer for the stage, and a recording comedian with a dozen discs to his credit, disappear almost completely from the history of entertainment? Answer: He was an Australian.

The few people who remember Ward Leopold these days connect him with the **Here's Hooley** series of records, which mercilessly parodied the radio industry. Virtually nothing else was known about him. Thankfully, a little background information has now come to light on this highly inventive man.

The first recorded trace of Ward Leopold is in 1923, when he appeared on experimental wireless broadcasts in Melbourne. His first actual job in radio came in 1929 on Sydney radio, where he presented a programme singing and accompanying himself on the guitar. Later he wrote and produced plays for radio and the Little Theatre group, and ran a production agency assisting music groups in being recorded.

By 1940, Leopold had obviously had enough of the over-commercialisation of radio, and expressed his concerns on record. **Here's Hooley** was released that year on Columbia's budget label Regal-Zonophone, and promptly caused a furore by being banned from airplay - presumably on the basis that no-one would be able to tell the parody from the real thing. The controversy, though, ensured sales, and the disc was re-issued several times during the 1940s and 50s, ultimately being transferred to a new-fangled microgroove LP in 1958.

Amongst the glorious inanities from 1940 were plugs for Miracle cigarettes (*"Try one and see what you think. Try two and see if you can think."*) and Barker's Microscopic Liver Pills (*"...and if you haven't got a microscopic liver, buy the larger pills."*); an episode of Inspector Scoot, in which the inspector, disguised as a vacuum cleaner of unknown make, solves the mystery of the one-armed piccolo player; and of course endless timecalls (nothing has changed in 60 years). The recording was voiced almost entirely by Leopold, augmented by a few sound effects and snippets from other records - for example, a bizarre bugle call which would recur in many of the **Hooley** discs was lifted from a 1932 Ray Noble track, *Tan-Tan-Tivvy Tally-Ho!*

During World War Two, Ward served in an anti-aircraft unit. In 1942, he wrote the comic song **Wouldn't It?**, detailing the grumbles of army life, and joined Jack Lumsdaine on the recording, providing a variety of character voices.

After being discharged from the army in 1944, Leopold returned to acting in both Sydney and Melbourne, became a talent scout for an advertising agency, and took on radio production jobs. In 1948 he was appointed as the ABC's New South Wales variety producer, taking responsibility for light entertainment programmes broadcast nationally.

Nine months at the ABC (or, as it was referred to on one **Here's Hooley** disc, the "Australian Broadcasting *Dumb-ission*") must have done something to Ward Leopold, for by mid-1949, he was back in the Columbia studios creating another satiric concoction - **Here's Hooley Too**. Time had not mellowed Australia's radio stations, however; like its predecessor, the new disc was promptly banned from broadcast.



This time around, the targets included dopey soap operas, and the difficulties of giving timecalls over the national network. The Marathon Quiz had prizes such as three silver rabbit traps, a steam piano, a left-handed lawn-mower, a two-way moustache cup and a St Kilda tram. There was also a parody of the annoying habit of interrupting programmes to announce the start of horse races. Looking the most insignificant place for a race to be coming from, Ward chose the Victorian country town of Manangatang. (Further races came from Alaska, Mars and Heaven.) *"They're racing at Manangatang"* briefly entered the Australian vernacular, and the sketch inspired the inhabitants to hold the Manangatang Cup.

Fortunately for satire-lovers, Ward Leopold returned to the recording studios on a semi-regular basis, and in 1951 produced the series masterpiece, **Here's Hooley - Jubilee Edition**. Quite what the Jubilee was celebrating is unclear (although the fiftieth anniversary of federation is a good bet), but in the ensuing onslaught of gags, it doesn't really matter. Perhaps you might like to buy a Whack-O Dehydrated House (*so easy to built a dog could knock it over*) or Whack-O Soap (*"Whack-O Soap - made of cement, lasts as long as cement - You can mix a lemon squash with it, You can fix an old galosh with it, If you're stuck you can even wash with it, Whack-O for Whack-O Soap"*). Then there was the Whack-O bra (*"If you don't know whether you should put on some tight clothes and be loose, or slap on some loose clothes and get tight, just wear a Whack-O bra. It never gets dirty unless you do."*) Live broadcasts were sent up as the network crossed to Canberra for a slight technical delay; and there was a telling comment on race relations during the coverage of the Jubilee: *"The concourse is literally black with people - white people, of course."*

Such were the financial rewards of being a recording artiste that in 1951 Leopold became a sales representative for T.A.A. for several years before resuming his career as a writer/producer on commercial radio in Sydney, as well as free-lance acting. At the same time he continued to make records, with a **Coronation Edition** of **Here's Hooley** (1953), presenting the crowning of the King of Talent Contests - Barb Dwyer, last of

the hillbillies (no relation to Bob Dyer at all, obviously); plus an interview with Professor Shoosh, who invented swimming pools in the Sahara by air-mailing dehydrated water.

In November 1954, Leopold turned his gaze to the future in two ways on two records. The first was a preview of the impending new medium television on **Television Can Be Fun**, including a nude production of Hamlet and an archaeological dig to find the first episode of *Blue Hills*.

The other disc took a science fiction bent, and presented the first landing of alien life on earth - the incompetent space-man **Baseface, the Space Ace**, with his fearsome cry of "Yoo-Hoo!" and armed with the deadly Stratos Spear. Having conquered Earth and Mars, Baseface returned a year later (albeit with a slightly different voice) to deal with Venus and the Moon. Fans of **The Goon Show** may like to note that the sound of Baseface's ship, the Nux Vomica, is the donkey-with-wind sound effect used several months later by Spike Milligan to represent Fred the Oyster.

The mid-fifties opened a new avenue for Leopold - children's records. He contributed words and music to **The Golden Dog** (Columbia 2x78rpm KOX-1002/3 in 1955) and also performed on **Handy Andy, The Little Axe**. Meanwhile, he produced **Who's For Cricket** with long-time collaborator Max Osbiston; and recorded two unreleased sides, **Chase The Ace** and **The Rise And Fall Of Lady Fitzmalcolm**.

In late 1957, Ward entered the age of the microgroove with **TV Or Not TV**, detailing the trials and tribulations of a commercial producer trying to find the right singing advertisement. In the end, the result is so poor he gives it to his competitors. Columbia also delved into the archives to re-release the first four **Here's Hooley** records on a 10-inch LP.

The 'It' Parade, made in 1960, was Ward Leopold's final recording, and also one of his best. Set in the year 2000 A.D., the disc features a competition to find the best advertisement. Ward himself is, of course, the man who gives you the 'its'. Amongst the contenders are the Doover vacuum cleaner ("*it eats and it sleeps and it screams*") and new Lungs ("*decide if you'll have a cigarette or lungs*"). There was also the late late movie - a film so old that it passed away before being telecast.

The sleeve notes of previous releases had made references to the fact that Leopold had been making satiric records long before Stan Freberg became famous. On **The It Parade**, Ward went one step further and directly parodied Freberg, using an imitation of Freberg's adenoidal teenage voice from **The Old Payola Roll Blues**, released the previous year. "*Who was that?*" asks Ward. "*Stan Freberg,*" he is told. "*Stan Freberg? Freberg??*" ponders Leopold, trying to place the name. Given that **The It Parade** includes a search for the abominable snowman and a send-up of censorship reminiscent of Freberg's **Elderly Man River**, it's no wonder Leopold is pretending he's never heard of him.

At this point, Ward Leopold disappears into showbiz oblivion. The ultimate fate of Australia's premiere satirist is unknown. Any rediscovery is hindered by the fact that all of the post-1953 recordings are virtually impossible to find these days, and those that are available are only on old 78s. Nevertheless, for aficionados of Australian comedy, the Ward Leopold oeuvre is well worth hunting out.

• The author thanks Frank Van Straten and the ABC Document Archives for their assistance in researching this article. If anyone has further information about Ward Leopold, please contact Matthew K. Sharp at kirseval@mira.net, or via the editorial address on page 2.

Discography

(All tracks by "Ward Leopold and Company" unless noted.)

Here's Hooley (Ward Leopold)

Regal Zonophone G30081 (12" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, mid-1940

* Issued on CD "Stars of Australian Stage & Radio - Volume 2", Larrikin Entertainment LRH 430 (1996)

Wouldn't It? (Jack Lumsdaine and Ward Leopold) /

Digger (Jack Lumsdaine)

Regal Zonophone G24561 (10" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, March 9th 1942

* Tracks issued on CD "Wish Me Luck: Australian War Songs: 1939-1945", Castle Communications PCD 10194 (1995)

Here's Hooley Too (Ward Leopold, assisted by Lyndall Barbour, John Bushelle and Max Osbiston)

Regal Zonophone G30082 (12" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, mid 1949

Here's Hooley - Jubilee Edition (Ward Leopold, assisted by Max Osbiston and Babs Mayhew)

Regal Zonophone G25322 (10" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, October 28th 1951

Here's Hooley - Coronation Edition

Regal Zonophone G30083 (12" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, early 1953

Television Can Be Fun

Columbia DO-3671 (10" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, November 24th 1954

Baseface, The Ace Of Space

Columbia DO-3681 (10" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, November 24th 1954

Who's For Cricket (Ward Leopold, with Max Osbiston) /

Oui Oui (Ward Leopold, with Oscar Gingelbusger, piano)

Columbia DO-3700 (10" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, February 1st 1955

Baseface, The Space Ace - No. 2.

The Conquest Of Venus / The Conquest Of The Moon

Columbia KO-1023 (10" 78 rpm disc)
Recorded Sydney, November 22nd 1955

Here's Hooley - TV Or Not TV (Ward Leopold, with John

Mellion, June Salter and the Pat Kennedy Trio)

Columbia SEGO 70017 (7" EP)

Recorded Sydney, October 21st, 1957

Here's Hooley

Columbia 33OS 7572 (1958) (10" LP)

A compilation of the first 4 "Here's Hooley" 78s on one LP

The "It" Parade (Being Any Good TV Station In AD 2000)

(Ward Leopold, with Moya O'Sullivan, Judy Farr, John Tait, Ted Husband and Max Osbiston)

Columbia SEGO 70051 (7" EP)

Recorded Sydney, mid 1960

Ward Leopold may also be heard on the children's record:

Handy Andy, The Little Axe (Ward Leopold, with Ray Hartley and Frank Waters)

Columbia KO-1025 (10" 78rpm disc)

Recorded Sydney, June 26th 1956

TO THE MANOR BORN

by Mark McKay

WHEN romance and comedy are combined it is often at the expense of the latter. *To The Manor Born* proved a refreshing exception — a delightfully enchanting British sitcom with clever, witty scripts. And despite being set in a bucolic upper class world of hunt balls and gymkhanas, its appeal was universal, evinced by record viewing figures.

The premise was quite literally close to home for jobbing BBC radio scriptwriter Peter Spence, who by the mid-1970s had already penned sketches for Ronnie Barker (*Lines From My Grandfather's Forehead*), Kenneth Williams (*Oh, Get On With It!*) and Roy Hudd (*The News Huddlines*). Just outside the Somerset village in which he lived, financial woes forced a recently bereaved widow to bid farewell to her stately home, relocating instead to a small lodge on the same estate. Meanwhile an affluent businessman moved into the mansion and proceeded to make extensive alterations before her very eyes.

Though essentially a tragic situation, Spence saw its inherent comic potential and hatched out a situation comedy treatment for radio. It was decided to record a pilot programme and the actors chosen for the lead roles were Penelope Keith and Bernard Braden. Keith was at the time a logical choice to play the snobbish, self-confident lady of the manor, her portrayal of Margo Leadbetter, snooty neighbour of Tom and Barbara Good in BBC-TV's *The Good Life*, firmly entrenched in the public mind. Braden, the veteran Canadian radio comedian and TV presenter, played the upstart *nouveau-riche* American entrepreneur.

The recording was made at the Paris theatre in Lower Regent Street but it was never broadcast. Instead the project was quickly snapped up by television (Miss Keith allegedly being instrumental in effecting this transition) and Spence decided to turn the American *parvenu* into an Englishman of Eastern European parentage. This change would enable some sexual tension to creep into the stories (apparently it was thought romance with an American was quite impossible).

The first episode begins with the funeral of Marton Forbes-Hamilton, late owner of Grantleigh manor and without an heir to carry on the line. Marton's demise leaves his widow Audrey (Keith) surprisingly cheerful, until she discovers his earthly departure has left her bankrupt and that consequently the manor house and its thousand-acre estate must be put up for auction. Aghast that four hundred years of heritage is in jeopardy, Audrey sets about raising the necessary capital, defiantly declaiming "We've been here through wars, plagues, floods, famine and Labour governments."

It seems that every foreign nationality is represented at the auction. The sight of gentlemen in Middle Eastern robes and headdresses is all too much for Audrey: "If we're not careful, we'll find this place rebuilt stone by stone in Abu Dhabi". But in the event, both Audrey and the Arabs are outbid and the property passes into the possession of Richard De Vere, self-made millionaire and chairman of multinational Cavendish Foods. Unhappy that Grantleigh has been bought by "a grocer", she consoles herself that at least he's British.

But a rude shock is in store for Mrs. Forbes-Hamilton in the second instalment. Having taken up residence all of two



hundred yards away in the Old Lodge, Audrey is visited by Mrs. Polouviccka, an elderly Czechoslovakian woman who introduces herself as Richard's mother. It transpires that Richard (or Bedrich, as she still knows him) is not English after all — rather half Czech and half Pole. Audrey reflects, "Foreigners are all very well in their place, but why does it have to be my place?"

The smooth, hard-headed De Vere was portrayed by 42-year-old Peter Bowles, and proved a refreshing change from the rogues in TV thrillers he'd been used to playing (and to which he was later to return in the series *Perfect Scoundrels*). In fact Bowles had mistakenly turned down the role of Jerry Leadbetter in *The Good Life*. Had he accepted, it is unlikely that he would have been chosen as Penelope Keith's love interest in this very different new series.

De Vere's domineering mother, Maria Jaroslava Vladimira Martinka Polouviccka (shortened by Audrey to the more succinct "Mrs. Poo") was played by Daphne Heard. Despite an extensive career in repertory theatre and the Old Vic, she had never attempted a foreign accent before. The "all-purpose, middle-European accent" and mannerisms she adopted were so effective that many viewers thought she was the genuine article.

Location filming took place on the picturesque Cricket St. Thomas estate, where the real-life incident which inspired the show had taken place. The remaining scenes were recorded in London before a studio audience. This method of production provoked a fairly obvious continuity blunder in the first edition, with the set designer's verdant exteriors at odds with the snow-covered landscapes on film!

In subsequent episodes, Audrey maintained a vigilant and critical eye on the manor. From her vantage point at the Old Lodge, and with the aid of a sharp set of binoculars, very little escaped her notice. She saw abstract sculptures erected on the lawns, modern renovations, ancient trees felled and even DeVere's purchase of a helicopter, all of which not surprisingly met with her disapproval.

Plans to thwart the new lord of the manor's schemes were put into action with the help of Audrey's mousy best friend Marjory (Angela Thorne) and geriatric butler/chauffeur, Brabinger (John Rudling), whose duties were later taken by Old Ned, the farm labourer (Michael Bilton). But in spite of their circumstances, Audrey and Richard shared a mutual admiration and either was liable to change allegiance to save the other's face.

By the third series, their love-hate relationship had melted, but Audrey's pride would never allow her to marry DeVere while he was squire of Grantleigh. A sensational set of occurrences in the final couple of episodes helped them out of this impasse. Richard finds himself short of capital to finance a refrigeration plant in the Argentine and is forced to sell the manor.

After a mere three years, the great hall is once again the setting for an auction. However, the death of Audrey's rich Uncle Greville (the black sheep of the family) has left her with enough money to buy back her family house. To celebrate she and Marjory organise a big 'welcome home' party, to which Richard and his mother are naturally invited.

Now with no danger of appearing mercenary, Audrey drops the bombshell to the milling guests that she intends to marry Richard. The moment Mrs. Poo had been hoping for had finally arrived. Twenty-four million viewers tuned in to see the much anticipated wedding, which inevitably brought the show to an end.

Penelope Keith and Peter Bowles teamed up once more in the mid-1980s Thames sitcom, *Executive Stress*. In this series they played a husband and wife both holding senior positions in a publishing firm, but company non-fraternisation rules forcing them to keep their marriage secret. Although it ran for three seasons, it failed to make much of an impact with the public.

Early 1997 *To The Manor Born* returned to its originally intended medium for a ten part radio series. Although now a little older, Penelope Keith and Angela Thorne had little trouble slipping into their old roles, but unfortunately Peter Bowles was not joining them. His part was taken by veteran actor Keith Barron. Peter Spence adapted six of his original TV screenplays and wrote four new stories, even supplying Richard with a rival for Audrey's affections in the ultimate edition.

The tremendous success of shows like *The Darling Buds Of May* and more recently *Monarch Of The Glen* demonstrate the nation's appetite for romantic light comedy in pleasant rustic settings is still strong today. Like those other perennial classics, *Fawlty Towers* and *Dad's Army*, repeats of *To The Manor Born* seem destined to delight for many more years to come.

Clearly this was a view shared by the people at Warner Holidays, who last year bought the Cricket St. Thomas manor and opened it to the public as a luxury guesthouse. With prices starting at £30 per night, even Old Ned can now afford to live at Grantleigh manor. Generations of fforbes-Hamiltons must surely be turning in their graves.

Television

Starring Penelope Keith (*Audrey fforbes-Hamilton*), Peter Bowles (*Richard DeVere*), Angela Thorne (*Marjory Frobisher*), Daphne Heard (*Mrs. Polouwicka*).

Scripts by Peter Spence & Christopher Bond (3/7).

Some episode titles are taken from the LP or radio shows. Others are unofficial.

Series 1

BBC1 30 September to 11 November 1979 (7×30mins approx.)

1/1 30.9.79 **Grantleigh**

Audrey fforbes-Hamilton is forced to sell Grantleigh Manor to the *nouveau riche* Richard DeVere.

1/2 7.10.79 **All New Together**

Now ensconced in the Old Lodge, Audrey reprimands Richard for failing in his estate duties.

1/3 14.10.79 **The Rhythms Of The Earth**
(aka **Sabbath Duties**)

Audrey persuades Richard to read the lesson in church.

1/4 21.10.79 **Nation's Heritage**

To thank Audrey for helping him purchase a horse, Richard presents her with a surprise gift.

1/5 28.10.79 **The Hunt Ball**

DeVere grants permission for the summer hunt ball to be held at the Manor and asks Marjory to organise it.

1/6 4.11.79 **Holidays**

Audrey announces that she is going on holiday to Spain, but secretly stays at home.

1/7 11.11.79 **A Touch Of Class**

The Manor is host to a film crew making a commercial for tonic water.

Special

BBC1 25 December 1979 (30mins)

SP 25.12.79 **The Christmas Crib**

Audrey and Richard have both provided cribs for the church and the rector must choose a winner.

Series 2

BBC1 5 October to 9 November 1980 (6×30mins)

2/1 5.10.80 **Farm Manager**

DeVere appoints a new farm manager to help make the estate viable and Ned takes over as Audrey's butler.

2/2 12.10.80 **The Spare Room**

Richard is pleasantly surprised when Audrey's old horse schoolfriend comes to stay.

2/3 19.10.80 **Antique China**

When Richard's ancient Egyptian vase is stolen, Audrey comes under suspicion.

2/4 26.10.80 **The Tramp**

Audrey and Richard discover they've both been providing an itinerant farm labourer with food and wages.

2/5 2.11.80 **The Honours List**

The conservancy association protest against DeVere's planned destruction of his hedgerows.

2/6 9.11.80 **Vive Le Sport**

Audrey suffers back trouble and Richard goes into training for a skiing holiday in Switzerland.

Series 3

BBC1 18 October to 29 November 1981 (7×30mins)

3/1 18.10.81 **The New Scout Hut**

Instead of sponsoring the scout raft race, DeVere donates them a new hut.

3/2 25.10.81 **The Closure Of Marlbury Station**

When Richard hears that Marlbury railway station is due to close, he decides to buy the site for a new supermarket.

3/3 1.11.81 **Helicopters And Horses**

While DeVere is now travelling by helicopter, Audrey also has a new mode of transport — a horse from the riding school.

3/4 8.11.81 **The Bee-Eater Bird**

Audrey's new interest in beekeeping attracts a rare bird to Dingle Bottoms.

3/5 15.11.81 **A Wife's Prerogative**

Audrey agrees to act as Richard's wife to help him secure a perfume contract.

3/6 22.11.81 **The Refrigeration Plant**

Richard faces liquidity problems with his plans to purchase an Argentinian refrigeration plant, so Audrey asks her uncle to help him out.

3/7 29.11.81 **The Wedding**

With the death of Audrey's uncle, Richard is forced to sell Grantleigh. Then Audrey discovers she is the main beneficiary of Uncle Greville's will.

Radio

Starring Penelope Keith (*Audrey fforbes-Hamilton*), Keith Barron (*Richard DeVere*), Angela Thorne (*Marjory Frobisher*). Scripts by Peter Spence (episodes 3, 5, 8 & 10 are new stories, the remainder are adapted from the TV shows).

R2 25 January to 29 March 1997 (10×30mins)

1 25.1.97 **The Rhythms Of The Earth**

Audrey persuades Richard to read the lesson in church.

2 1.2.97 **The Grapevine** (based on **Holidays**)

Audrey announces that she is going on holiday to Spain, but secretly stays at home.

3 8.2.97 **What's In A Name**

Audrey asks Richard for a reference when she applies for a personnel manager job with a food distribution company.

4 15.2.97 **Vive Le Sport**

Audrey suffers back trouble and Richard goes into training for a skiing holiday in Switzerland.

5 22.2.97 **Sons Of The Fathers**

Afraid that she may be the last of the fforbes-Hamiltons, Audrey consults the family archive in the hope of finding a long lost relative.

6 1.3.97 **A Wife's Prerogative**

Audrey agrees to act as Richard's wife to help him secure a perfume contract.

7 8.3.97 **The Spare Room**

Richard is pleasantly surprised when Audrey's old horsey schoolfriend comes to stay.

8 15.3.97 **An Englishman's Home**

Having just installed new security equipment, DeVere refuses to host a public music festival at Grantleigh.

9 22.3.97 **The Honours List**

The conservancy association protest against DeVere's planned destruction of his hedgerows.

10 29.3.97 **Plenty More Fish**

Audrey's relationship with her new naval boyfriend, Commander Jeremy French-Livesey, faces competition from an unexpected quarter.

Books

To The Manor Born

by Peter Spence (Arrow pbk, St. Martin's Press hbk 1979)
novelisation of the first TV series with one original story:
Grantleigh/All New Together (extracts)/The Rhythms Of The Earth (extracts)/Nation's Heritage/Holidays/A Touch Of Class/
The Lord Lieutenant's Gala

To The Manor Born Book 2

by Peter Spence (Arrow pbk 1980)
novelisation of the second TV series with one original story:
The Christmas Crib/The Honours List/The Tramp/Antique
China/The Spare Room/The Pilgrims' Way/Vive Le Sport

Recordings

To The Manor Born

BBC Records LP REB 395 (1980)
soundtrack excerpts from the first TV series:
Grantleigh/All New Together/Sabbath Duties/Nation's Her-
itage/Holidays/A Touch Of Class

To The Manor Born

BBC Radio Collection double cassette ZBBC 1958 (1997)
six complete episodes from the radio series:
The Rhythms Of The Earth/The Grapevine/The Honours List/
The Spare Room/Vive Le Sport/A Wife's Prerogative

Videos

To The Manor Born Series 1 Part 1 (Episodes 1 to 4)
BBC Video BBCV 5353 (1994), Acorn Video AV0147 (1999)

To The Manor Born Series 1 Episodes 5 to 7
Acorn Video AV0148 (1999)

To The Manor Born Series 2 Episodes 1 to 3
Acorn Video AV0162 (2000)

To The Manor Born Series 2 Episodes 4 to 6
Acorn Video AV0163 (2000)

To The Manor Born Series 3 Episodes 1 to 3
Acorn Video AV0179 (2000)

To The Manor Born Series 3 Episodes 4 to 7
Acorn Video AV0180 (2000)

To The Manor Born Vols. 1 to 6
(BBC Video BC 2756, BC 2757, BC 0309, BC 0310,
BC 2000021, BC 2000022) (US only)
featuring all the TV episodes on six videos
(available individually or together as **The To The Manor Born
Complete Gift Set** (BC 2000025))

- For further information visit the *To The Manor Born International Appreciation Society* on the worldwide web at homepages.which.net/~roger.still

BACK ISSUES

LAUGH #1

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

LAUGH #2

Steptoe & Son/Not Only But Also/Marx Bros./Police Squad/George Wallace etc

LAUGH #3

The Goodies/Roy Rene, 'Mo'/Tom Lehrer/The 'Doctor' Movies/Eddie Cantor

Issues 1 to 3 are now out of print, but photocopies are available at the same price.

LAUGH #4

Norman Gunston/Doctor on TV/Bob Newhart/Not The Nine O'Clock News

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

Amnesty Concerts/Danny Kaye/Aussie Britcoms/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/Goon Show

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

WC Fields/St. Trinian's/Joyce Grenfell/Mother & Son/Family Ties/Woody Allen

LAUGH #18

Terry-Thomas/Radio Active/KYTV/The Jack Benny Program/Gerard Hoffnung/The 2000 Year Old Man/Acropolis Now

LAUGH #19

Rowan And Martin's Laugh-In/ITMA/Man About The House, George And Mildred, Robin's Nest/George Carlin/Hey Dad!

LAUGH #20

Frankie Howerd/Up Pompeii!/George Formby/All Together Now/Jonathan Winters

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