

Editor's Chin-wag

We hope you enjoyed the November issue of the newly refreshed *The Insider*. We appreciate those of you who took time to write us. A few readers made great suggestions for future stories. But alas, I was hoping to hear from more of you. Please, don't be shy – write me, let me know what you think, what you would like to see covered.

Many thanks to those who shared their thoughts. I will say it again; this publication is designed to be about you, the viewer.

Since our last issue, there have been some significant releases of classic Britcoms in video, so be sure to check out the latest in the DVD and collectibles section of this issue.

We are still working to secure interviews with some of the great producers and writers of the Britcoms we all love. For example, Steven Moffat and Sue Vertue (both of *Coupling*), I am still gunning for you! Happy reading, all.

N. Scott Jones, Editor

"Give me strength!"

Funnyman Lenny Henry Delivers in Latest PBS Pledge Special

Traditionally staid and reserved British banter? Not here. Documentary style production and dry scripting? Nope. High energy and entertaining presentation of some of Britcoms' best actors? You betcha! Written by Michele Street, co-produced by some of PBS' best and deftly hosted by the witty and energetic Lenny Henry, *The Funny Blokes of British Comedy* provides a refreshing and, yes, entertaining look at some of British comedy's funniest actors.

Filmed last year and due for broadcast during pledge drives at America's PBS stations in the first quarter of 2005, *Funny Blokes* will reward viewers with an insider's look at Britain's best male comedy actors.



Well produced, great interview segments and deftly handled by Henry, 'Funny Blokes' provides insights on some of Britcoms' funniest men.

One of the real treats of the piece, is that you get to hear from some actors we have revered for years, but haven't heard from in quite some while. It is an intriguing journey with behind the scenes insight while getting to see, and hear, what these talented actors are like today.

And with no offense intended to previous hosts of Britcom pledge specials, Lenny Henry brings a unique energy and wit that makes this possibly the most engaging show of its type in recent memory. It has substance, it entertains, and it has pace. Henry keeps the viewer engaged as you transition across shows, actors and vignettes of some of the most popular Britcoms airing in America. The solid writing and post production work make it fresh and a delight to watch.

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A Brief Editorial View

Having spent my fair share of time manning the phones for pledge drives at my local PBS station, I have grown to have a great respect for the volunteers and station staffs that make it all go. It takes a driven spirit and special caring to dedicate one's spare time or career to a non-profit organization of any kind.

Many is the time I have answered a pledge call to discover an irate viewer complaining about the pledge breaks, the redundancy of the pledge specials or whatever has hacked them off that particular day. Prior to my involvement as a volunteer at my local station, I too would heave the occasional groan when I saw the phone number at the bottom of the screen upon tuning in.

In today's highly competitive world for viewer share and revenue needed to sustain the enterprise, our non-profit PBS stations have an un-level playing field when compared to commercial television. It is a constant battle to seek and retain the funding necessary to provide quality programming - LIKE BRITCOMS - for viewers like YOU.

In market after market, PBS stations provide great program schedules on shoestring budgets and through the good graces of their volunteers and corporate partners. With their all too similar budget limitations, these dedicated souls work selflessly to produce quality pledge specials like 'Funny Blokes.'

I say all this in the hope that on the given day you run across a pledge break in your market, you might pause and have appreciation for those who have worked hard to bring us great programming year after year.

N. Scott Jones, Editor

*The Insider welcomes all correspondence, story ideas and requests for contributed articles. Send letters via e-mail to Editor N. Scott Jones at bbcinsider@comcast.net or by snail mail to: The Insider, c/o Olivia Savu, BBC Worldwide Americas, 747 3rd Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. **The Insider** reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think!*

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News, Trivia & Naughty Bits



British Viewers Pick Their Favorite Britcoms in Nationwide Poll

During the second half of 2004, British viewers e-mailed, voted online and text messaged their choices for their favorite Britcoms. A field of more than 100 shows was available for voting. How do you think their choices compare to America's favorites? Here are the top 10 with the vote totals received:

1. **Only Fools and Horses** - 342,426
2. **Blackadder** - 282,106
3. **Vicar of Dibley** - 212,927
4. **Dad's Army** - 174,138
5. **Fawlty Towers** - 172,066
6. **Yes Minister** - 123,502
7. **Porridge** - 93,902
8. **Open All Hours** - 67,237
9. **The Good Life** - 40,803
10. **One Foot in the Grave** - 31,410

Trivia Bits - Did You Know?

- One of the most popular Britcoms airing in America, *Are You Being Served?*, did NOT make the Top 10 favorites of British viewers. It ranked 20th.
- Mrs. Slocombe's full name is Mary Elizabeth Jennifer Rachel Yiddell Abergavenny Slocombe.
- Although the pilot of *AYBS* was made in color on videotape (see the "BBC Colour" credit at the end), the only copies that exist today are from a black and white kinescope film.



ViewerPoints: From and For Viewers Like YOU

Still 'Waiting for God'?



Does the food ever get any better? Will Tom and Diana ever tie the knot? Does Harvey ever get a heart...or a brain? Could Geoffrey Ballard ever qualify for House Invaders? A look at the characters and funny happenings at Bayview.

No. This program is not just for the AARP set. It is, in fact, a charmingly funny and witty statement on the adventures of two geriatric delinquents as they pass their time railing against a world where the young are revered and the elderly are held in contempt. Their trials and adventures serve up laughs that readily surpass the quality of food served at their retirement establishment.

This engagingly hearty comedy is set in the fictional Bayview Retirement Village, an old people's estate of luxury bungalows and apartments. In one such dwelling lives the former photo-journalist Diana Trent, a formidable, acid-tongued, bloody-minded, belligerent individual whose motto in life is 'If you're angry you know you're still alive.' And Diana has plenty to be angry about. Though in full possession of her faculties and with a razor-sharp mind, people refuse to see beyond the aging exterior and treat her accordingly. They presume her aggression and stinging ripostes to be the rambling eccentricities of a miserable old biddy unable to fend for herself, not realizing that it is born of the frustration at their appalling misconception.

Newly installed in the apartment next to Diana's is Tom Ballard, a gentler, optimistic soul who counters the vagaries of life by living in a fantasy world of his own making. His delusions make him something of a subversive and soon he is spreading unrest in the community hall, the meeting place and dining room for the Bayview residents. Much to the chagrin of Bayview's manager - the morose but ambitious Harvey

Bains - Diana views a kindred spirit in her neighbor and soon the two are inseparable, presenting a united front and delivering double jeopardy for all who get in their way. Other regular characters in the series are Tom's weak but well-meaning and terribly boring son Geoffrey (and DIY guy) with his nymphomaniac, dipsomaniac, harridan of a wife, Marion, and Harvey's doting secretary, Jane.

The series is replete with sub story-lines that often produce amusing situational comedy. Notable is the chastened and virginal Jane's delusional notion that she can somehow woo the affections of the spineless and shallow Harvey Bains - Bayview's overseer. Charming vignettes occur throughout the series such as Basil's (played by veteran character actor Michael Bilton) latent virility and motivation to bed the female residents of Bayview.

The Marion and Geoffrey Ballard pairing offers up some funny, if depressing, commentary on a love match made in hell. Her goal, besides consuming Valium and alcohol, is to encourage the passing of father-in-law Tom in the hopes of someday inheriting whatever he has. Quite supportive of Bains' draconian view of treatment of the aged, she seeks at every turn to protect her "interests" (copping the lolly) and is certain in her disdain of Diana as a threat to her one day reaping financial benefit. Geoffrey, while protective of his father, seems resigned to the fact he is married to a gold-digging tart.

In the fourth series, Tom and Diana move in together, delightfully scandalizing everyone by 'living in sin' and continuing to wage their war against an uncaring society. The rest of the main players have their own agendas also - Geoffrey tries to leave the awful Marion; Jane spends her years 'trying to fine-tune the less charming sides' of Harvey's character; and Harvey suffers endless frustrations in his attempts to join a local golf club.

Waiting For God has many incredibly delicious moments, mostly from Stephanie Cole who spat out Diana's venomous barbs with relish. As Tom, Graham Crowden was a good sidekick and the pair conjured up many a laugh between them. But the rest of the regulars were somewhat two-dimensional and seemed almost to come from another, less classy sitcom. The boring Geoffrey, well, bored; Marion was too hideous to be remotely real; Harvey was unbelievably vacuous and self-centered; and poor Jane was far too weak-willed and dim to evoke any sympathy. This last part was played by Janine Duvitski, who also had to deal with Victor Meldrew in *One Foot in the Grave* where she played Pippa, a character similar to Jane on the surface but one much more satisfyingly drawn.

The series had a successful run with 47 episodes that aired on the *BBC* from 1990 through 1994. In the United States, the show continues to enjoy regular rotation in the British comedy line-ups of many a *PBS* station. The charm and wit of this well-written and well-acted show can certainly sneak up on you. While the topic and substance of growing old can make some of us baby-boomers squirm, one can only hope to be as vibrant, alive and adventuresome as the dynamic duo of Tom Ballard and Diana Trent. They seemed to invariably get their come-uppance in all they undertake.

If your *PBS* station has not aired this charming British comedy, it is well worth the rent. Their guile and tenacity will draw you in to sharing the ups and downs they experience as they navigate the senior years of their lives.

Editor's Note: The BBC's Comedy Homepage – located at www.bbc.co.uk/comedy - is an excellent source of information on this and other beloved Britcoms. Portions of this piece were well-written and redacted from the BBC's coverage of 'Waiting for God.'



ViewerPoints In The Post



*We just got the magazine today, it is awesome!
Thank you!*

Cindie and Eleanor, in Pennsylvania

*I thoroughly enjoyed my first copy of *The Insider*, you set the Thames on fire! Keep up the great work; I look forward to the next issue.*

Neil, in Texas

I have two suggestions for future articles, "Goodnight Sweetheart" and Nicholas Lyndhurst.

Daniel, in Wisconsin

I thoroughly enjoyed your November issue. How do I get future issues?

Katherine, in New Jersey



Test Your BritQuotient!

- In an episode of *Fawlty Towers*, Basil says "this is a hotel, not a borstal." Know what a 'borstal' is?
- In the *Gourmet Night* episode, what is the name of the Greek chef who ends up incapacitated?
- In *The Anniversary* episode, what is the Fawlty's anniversary date?

Submit your answers to bbcinsider@comcast.net or read them here in the next issue of *The Insider*.

ViewerPoints: Contributions

A Hallowed English Tradition: Afternoon Tea

By Sheela Kadam

Editor's Note: *Sheela Kadam is a native of England and co-owner of The British Emporium, an English food and gift shop in Grapevine, Texas. You can visit them on the Web at www.british-emporium.com. She and her partner Alexandra Evans are dedicated and frequent volunteers at Dallas PBS station KERA.*

If you've visited Britain or love watching British comedies, you've probably figured out that across the pond, everything stops for tea. And what better way to start the day or to have a break than with a nice cup of tea and a sit down. Is that the kettle whistling?

What a pretty teapot! Milk? Sugar? One lump or two? Would you like a biscuit? Ah...tea...so much more civilized than coffee! Like many other Brits, on average I drink 4 cups of hot tea a day. But when I arrived in America, I had no idea what a rigmarole it would be to order my usual 'cuppa'. At a restaurant in Texas, upon placing my usual drink order, "I'll have tea please", the waitress promptly brought me a huge vase of iced tea, containing a week's supply of ice, garnished with a monster lemon slice shmushed into the rim and accompanied by a side of various packets of sugar/chemical substitutes. Now this is a real shock to the system when all one is used to getting when ordering tea is HOT tea served in a dainty cup & saucer, a charming little jug of milk and a bowl full of sugar cubes with a dainty set of sugar-tongs. It's usually much too cold to drink icy tea in England - (ch-ch-cheers, mate!)

In fact, one of the reasons why we Brits drink so much hot tea is to stay WARM. And back in England, the glasses are much smaller, teaspoons are miniscule and ice cubes are still undergoing wartime rationing - in most cases, you're lucky to get two! I politely informed the waitress that I actually wanted hot tea, not cold. The waitress cheerfully offered to put it on the coffee burner to 'warm it up'. An hour later, and by the time the ice-cubes had defrosted, I was presented with another vase, this time filled with tepid, stewed black army tea. I patiently explained that I wanted boiling hot tea. I finally got a microwaved teabag-on-a-string in a mug of warm water but sans milk. So I asked for milk for the tea. She came back with a vase of milk with a straw in it....well, I think you get the picture.

And tea is supposed to be relaxing!! At this stage, I took great comfort from picturing my counterpart - an unsuspecting American tourist in deepest England, ordering tea in a provincial teashop, expecting iced tea of course, and ending up staring at a cup of hot tea containing two lonely, fast melting cubes of ice (and having no idea how lucky she was to get two).

We Brits do love and revel in our teatime, a time-honored and beloved institution. We confess, at times, we can get quite snobby about our tea rituals, and will insist on doing tea the proper way - but only because it comforts us so, and makes us feel at home wherever we are in the world. We are always on the search for teatime treats when abroad - often with comical results. I've heard of fellow Brits buying bagels for the first time and wondering why the 'doughnuts' are so chewy; attempting to order tea sandwiches in an American deli, then desperately trying to look elegant whilst holding an enormous cucumber sub with both hands and being surprised to discover that American scones are really English Rock Cakes (yes, there really is such a thing).

It's certainly worth remembering that every culture has its own idea of how to serve tea. Order tea in France, and you'll get it thrown at you, order it in Morocco, and you'll get a hot, sweet minty beverage, order it in Tibet and you'll get tea flavored with butter, salt & yak's milk. You may think it's yuk, but the natives think it's yum! And here in America, unless you are lucky enough to live near a large community of expat Brits, you'll probably have a hard time finding an authentic English-style tearoom offering a proper Afternoon Tea. Particularly now that cafe culture has gone mainstream - the same can be said in England, where cafes are beginning to outnumber teashops. Visiting my home town in the South of England last year, I found cafes on every corner - but was hard pressed to find a good, old fashioned tearoom.

Over the years, many rituals, superstitions & old wives tales have evolved. Did you know that reading tealeaves is an art? Apparently, I'm supposed to be meeting a tall, dark & handsome stranger this week - but so far, no-one's shown up. Reading soggy tealeaves at the bottom of one's teacup is a peculiarly British habit (have you ever seen any Americans reading their coffee-grounds at Starbucks?)

(Continued on page 18)

Special Feature: Where are they now?

Meet the cast of...



Are You Being Served?

*Skirts are up and bras are down...a glass of water for Mr. Grainger... staying late wreaks havoc on my pussy (Mrs. Slocombe's cat)...Mr. Humphries, are you free?...these and other examples of double entendre and banter form the backbone of one of the most successful British comedies ever. The writers and actors of this hilarious and timeless comedy created characters and comic situations that arguably could outlive us all. What gives the program its staying power is the actors' character development that made them, well, uniquely *them*. The series is profiled in a related story on Page 9. Here, we take look at the celebrated actors and actresses who captured the hearts of millions with their antics at Grace Brothers department store.*

JOHN INMAN AS MR. HUMPHRIES

Born: June 28, 1935, Preston, Lancashire, England

Other roles: JOHN INMAN was just thirteen when he first appeared at the South Pier in Blackpool, his home town. Since then he has never looked back, with innumerable appearances on television, in cabaret and stage productions all over Britain and overseas and with starring roles in London's West End. His West End debut came in the musical *Ann Veronica* at the Cambridge Theatre, followed by seventeen months at the famous Windmill Theatre after which John starred as Lord Fancourt Babberley in the production of *Charley's Aunt* at the Adelphi Theatre in the Strand. Summer seasons have also been an important element in John's varied career. His favorite show is pantomime, of which he has done over 40, and he is firmly recognized as the best dame in the business. He has appeared in six Royal Variety Performances, before most of the members of the Royal Family. In spite of his world tours, he still returns home each Christmas for his pantomime appearances. *Are You Being Served?* is shown on American television from coast to coast with huge success, which makes John a truly International star.

Something you may not know about him: He is cousin to actress Josephine Tewson (Elizabeth in *Keeping Up Appearances*)

You can see him now: Doing panto and Christmas specials in the UK.

Seek out: *The Best of 'Are You Being Served?'* A compilation of the show's funniest moments set around the story line of Mr. Humphries' mother writing a book. Yes, he plays both Mr. Humphries *and* his own mother.

MOLLIE SUGDEN AS MRS. SLOCOMBE

Born: July 21, 1922, Keighley, Yorkshire, England

Other roles: She has had a long and varied career on British TV screens. Born in 1922 in Yorkshire, she first made an impact in the comedy series *Hugh and I* in 1962. She began the 1970s in the Carla Lane series *The Liver Birds*, a comedy about young women in Liverpool. In it she played Nerys Hughes mum, Mrs. Hutchinson. With her domineering style, talk show host Vanessa Feltz once described Mrs. Hutchinson as: "Hyacinth Bucket (Patricia Routledge's famous role in *Keeping Up Appearances*) before her time." From 1973-74 Sugden had a bit, but pivotal, part as Nellie Harvey in the long-running soap *Coronation Street*.

In 1978 she was also in the short-lived science fiction spoof *Come Back, Mrs. Noah* as a middle-aged housewife accidentally sent into orbit. Written by Jeremy Lloyd and David Croft, the role of Mrs. Noah was written especially for Sugden. Despite only running for six episodes, it still turns up occasionally on PBS prompting Sugden to receive letters from America wondering when they'll make more!

Comedy isn't her only craft, and her drama credits are solid and include *Maggie* in 1964, the 1970 production of *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, and Mrs. Goddard in 1972 mini-series *Emma*.

In 1983 she appeared in *That's My Boy, My Husband and I* in 1987, and in 1996 reprised her role as Mrs. Hutchinson in the revival of *The Liver Birds*. Ill health at the time somewhat diminished her on-screen impact, but Mollie Sugden is a trooper and her tremendous contributions and memorable characters guarantee her a place in the hearts of British comedy fans forever.

WENDY RICHARD AS MISS BRAHMS

Born: July 21, 1946, Middlesbrough, Cleveland, England

Other Roles: Wendy's first big break came when Sammy Davis Jr. asked her to appear in his show "Sammy Meets the Girls". This led to small parts on shows like "Dixon of Dock Green" and finally a number one hit single "Come Outside" with Mike Sarne. "Harpers Bizarre" followed and whilst filming this Wendy had a chance meeting with Michael Caine and Johnny Speight who recommended her for a part in the "Arthur Haynes Show". The Beatles film "Help" followed, but unfortunately Wendy's scene ended up on the cutting room floor. Next was "Doctor in Clover" and another step up the ladder. Work began to flood in and Wendy found herself working on BBC's first soap opera "The Newcomers". This went out live, twice a week, and earned her many useful contacts and friends. Small parts in "Dad's Army" and "Up Pompeii" followed. Wendy next went to the big screen with a small part in "On the Buses" and then, her next big break, "Gumshoe", starred Albert Finney and Wendy received rave reviews for her portrayal of Anne Croft. American fans will know Wendy best as Miss Shirley Brahms in the comedy series "Are You Being Served?". This was a long running series, but Wendy still managed to fit in more work with "Carry On Girls", more episodes of "Dad's Army" and appearances on various radio shows. Constantly working Wendy managed to perform in pantomimes and "Grace And Favour", a spin off from "AYBS" before her longest running part was created. British fans know Wendy best as Pauline Fowler in "EastEnders". This soap was first screened in 1985 and Wendy's career is still going strong!

TREVOR BANNISTER AS MR. LUCAS

Born: August 14, 1936, Durrington, Wiltshire, England

Other Roles: Various characters and guest appearances including, but not limited to: *Keeping Up Appearances: Angel Gabriel Blue* (1990), *The Tomorrow People* (1975), *Doomsday Gun* (1994), *Hostage* (1992), *Au Pair Girls* (1972), *Doomwatch* "Public Enemy" (1971), *The Avengers Something Nasty In The Nursery* (1967), *Object Z* (1965) and *Object Z Returns* (1966).

Great Mr. Lucas Moment: Multiple great moments in the "Dear Sexy Knickers" episode.

FRANK THORNTON AS CAPTAIN PEACOCK

Born: January 15, 1921, Dulwich, London, England

Other roles: Extensive including the recurring role of Herbert Truelove in the current run of *Last Summer of Wine*. Some the more notable include *The Reg Varney Revue*, *Some Matters of Little Consequence*, *The Gordon Peters Show* and dozens of others,

Great Captain Peacock Moment: He develops a painful boil on his posterior and the entire staff finds out from the head of the sports department. They make wisecracks at his expense until he confesses. Ducks out of a fight with the sports department head when challenged to settle the dispute over the sport's guy's indiscretion in passing rumors about the affliction.

NICOLAS SMITH AS MR. RUMBOLD

Born: March 5, 1934, Banstead, Surrey, England

Other Roles: Limited. (2001) Plays Duncan, the King Of Scotland in "Macbeth" and Baptista in "The Taming Of The Shrew", alongside **Elisha Gazdowicz**, at the Nottingham Shakespeare Festival.

Something you might not know about him: He is father of actress **Catherine Russell**.

ARTHUR BROUGH AS MR. GRAINGER

Born: In 1905 in Petersfield, Hampshire, England

Other Roles: Predominately *AYBS* along with numerous parts in repertory theater productions over more than 50 years in England.

Something you might not know about him: He passed away in May, 1978 in Kent, England.

Great Mr. Grainger Moment: When Mr. Humphries tries to teach him moves from the stage production number *Mammy*; and anytime he tried to eat soup (oftentimes you can tell those moments tickled fellow cast members by the looks on their faces as they tried not to laugh). **Second great moment:** An entire episode where Mr. Grainger has a case of the "gastrics" and can't complete a sentence without having to run for the gents restroom.



Series Profile: A Look At 'Are You Being Served?'



A Department Store and Staff Like No Other

Hardcore fans of the classic British comedy *Are You Being Served?* (AYBS) are surely dancing in the streets with the recent release of a second round of episodes on DVD. One thing is for certain, once you are hooked, you can never get enough. First produced and aired in the UK from the early 70s through the 80s, and premiering on PBS stations in the mid 80s, it stands the test of time.

The mark created by the actors, writers and producers of AYBS on the British comedy scene is truly indelible. Over the course of its run, unforgettable characters and terribly witty comedy lines came to be the hallmark of a series that is the Britcom equivalent of the Energizer Bunny.

How many American viewers over the last twenty years have tuned into their local public television station, watched a time capsule of a 70s London department store and asked *What's this?* Many who paused for more than a minute became engrossed in the dialog, captivated by the actors and wound up fervent fans.

AYBS' most widely recognized character is surely the light-loafed and sexually ambiguous Mr. Humphries, portrayed by the talented and endearing John Inman. In many interviews, Inman has said he patterned his character after a department store worker he once met in real life – most notably the bouncy walk. By any measure or method, Wilberforce Clayborne Humphries is uniquely Inman's. Perpetually connected to his mother and confidante to his colleagues, he is always ready to lend a hand, especially if it involves measuring a gentleman customer's inside leg.

Mr. Humphries' high-pitched "I'm free," whenever summoned by a colleague for assistance became a loved trademark of the show. From playing a palm reader to advisor to comforter to bridegroom to cook, there is nary a role Mr. Humphries did not work to perfection during the program's impressive ten year run.

Second only to Mr. Humphries is the remarkable character of Mrs. Slocombe, played by Mollie Sugden. Sweet sometimes and cantankerous often, this frustrated divorcee' adds fireworks and laughs in all her memorable scenes. Often the butt of jokes by her co-workers, Mrs. Slocombe and her friend Mrs. Axelbee are in perpetual search for male companionship at their local pub.

During the run, viewers mused as to what color hair Mrs. Slocombe would sport in each episode. Pink, blue, green, purple – you never knew what color hair would adorn her head. In interviews, Mollie Sugden said she came up with the idea to make the character more interesting. She also confided there wasn't much money for props in the early days so she struggled with colored powder to get the color in her hair. She laughs as she recalls picking up her children from school after a taping with her hair in a horrible colored mess. Sugden was relieved that, as the show gained popularity, budget became available for colored wigs!

Some of the show's funniest moments can be attributed to the trials and tribulations of Mrs. Slocombe both in the work place, and in her personal life. Central to her soul is her beloved cat Tiddles who, depending on the episode is alternatively male or female. Her "pussy" as she refers to her pet, is the source of some of the show's most hilarious one-liners.

Series writers David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd readily admit their naughtiness in playing up the double entendre and discussion of Mrs. Slocombe's pussycat. They will also admit that the dialog was quite racy for its time.



Photo: Central cast of *Are You Being Served?*

Lines like “this coming in early is playing havoc on my pussy” or “it was so cold in my flat my pussy was frozen and I had to hold it in front of the fire to thaw it out” were examples of how the storyline played in numerous episodes. One of the funniest bits occurred when Mrs. Slocombe is summoned last minute to an after work conference. Worried about the feeding of Tiddles, she calls her neighbor Mr. Akbar and asks him to look in her letterbox, and if he should see her pussy, would he please drop a sardine on the mat.

Additional characters include Mr. Lucas, (played by Trevor Bannister), the junior salesman on the Men's Counter who cannot seem either to sell an item if his life depended on it or to complete a date without interruptions from his mother or the parents of his companion. The regimental Captain Peacock (portrayed by Frank Thornton) believes that he is both the ladies man and the “captain” of the 4th floor of Grace Brothers. Miss Brahms (portrayed by now MBE Wendy Richard) is the Ladies' Junior who is busy fending off multiple male co-worker advances, most notably those of Mr. Lucas and oft-times Captain Peacock. Mr. Grainger (played by the late Arthur Brough) is the grouchy and sometimes dawdling Senior Salesman on the Men's counter who would be very happy to have the Ladies Department vacate the floor. The cast would evolve over the years to introduce a selection of new characters and new pecking orders.

In the early going the show tended to focus on the character of Mr. Lucas but Mr. Humphries and Mrs. Slocombe soon dominated the screen time with their great lines and character portrayals, and eventually the character of Mr. Lucas left the show. Mr. Rumbold (well acted by Nicolas Smith) and young Mr. Grace (played by the late Harold Bennett) added additional flavor to the shows.

Are You Being Served? aired in the UK for ten seasons (from 1972-1985, skipping two years). A total of 69 episodes were produced, many of which are now available on video and DVD. The series spun off into an Australian version of *Are You Being Served?*, which ran for two seasons, *Are You Being Served? The Movie*, a couple of stage productions, songs, a few books about the series and the people behind it and even an attempt at an American version of the show!

In the early 90s, a number of the original cast members reunited for *Are You Being Served? Again* (or *Grace and Favour* as it was inexplicably titled in the U.K.). This spin off series for the first time took them out of Grace Brothers and put them to work as the staff of a quaint hotel in rural England left to them by Mr. Grace as their retirement investment. *AYBS? Again* ran for two short seasons. A total of twelve episodes.

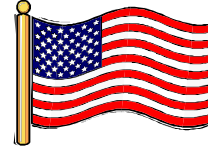
The body of work provided by these loveable characters and talented band of actors continues to “grace” television airwaves around the globe. In most markets where Britcoms are broadcast by PBS stations, you will likely find this irresistible mainstay in the lineup.

For those seeking to become acquainted with the British comedy genre, this is a great place to start. For veteran Britcom viewers who might not have explored them, you are missing out on a great run of British humor. No matter how you “serve” it up, you will find yourself “free” to laugh it up time and again with the iconic characters and superb scripting of *Are You Being Served?*.

Editor's Note: Research for parts of this column came from an excellent AYBS web site profiled in the LaughLinks section of this issue,. It is an excellent web site on the show and its creators are credited for their contribution to this column.



New DVD/Video Releases



'Allo 'Allo: Series 1 and 2

Meet René, the most wanted man in occupied France. Women want his body. The Resistance want his brain. And the Nazis want his sausage. In a small café in Nouvion, France, this harassed proprietor is having a difficult war. With the German Army in residence at the bar, René is risking his neck to aid the Resistance by hiding two British airmen and a radio transmitter upstairs. As if this wasn't enough, René has also got involved in hiding a priceless painting in a garlic sausage, which even now is being sniffed out by the Gestapo. But René's real problem is his wife, Edith, and what she will do to him when she finds out about his simultaneous affairs with the café's sexy waitresses! The release includes the episodes: *The British Are Coming (Pilot)*; *The Fallen Madonna*; *Pigeon Post*; *Saville Row to the Rescue*; *The Execution*; *The Funeral*; *Red Nick's Colonel*; *The Dance of Hitler Youth*

In release Series 2, scheduled for release for mid-March, 2005, René is having a difficult war. He is not frightened by the Gestapo; he is not frightened by the French Resistance. But his wife Edith scares the living daylights out of him! And now that he has been shot dead and is posing as his own twin brother, it appears he may have to woo her all over again and even remarry her in order to gain back his café, which he left to her in his will. But he has also promised to marry Yvette and Maria, his two sexy waitresses. Throw in three large garlic sausages, one of which contains "The Fallen Madonna with the Big Boobies," one of which contains a forgery of said painting, the last is an actual sausage, and you have a very difficult war indeed! Includes the episodes: *Six Big Boobies*; *The Wooing of the Widow Artois*; *The Policeman Cometh*; *Swiftly and with Style*; *The Duel*; *Herr Flick's Revenge*; *Klinkerhoffen In Control* These series will also be offered as a boxed set.

Coupling: Boxed Set & Complete Fourth Season

The boxed set and the single Fourth Season are now available for your viewing pleasure. The boxed set of the funny, critically acclaimed and laugh packed series offers every episode from all four seasons. Four times the sex, hilarity, provocation ... and sex! Dubbed "The Viagra of sitcoms," "Seinfeldian" and "Laugh-out-loud funny," the BBC comedy series *Coupling* is a huge stateside hit thanks to its hip take on male/female relationships.

In the Complete Fourth Season DVD, you get all six episodes. **9 ½ Minutes** . . . 9 ½ minutes. One bar. Three different points of view. **Night Lines** . . . The late night phone call that simply will not end. **Bed Time** . . . Since the dawn of time, men and women have been falling in love, and men have been trying to get home straight afterwards. **Circus of the Epidurals** . . . The ghost of Lesbian Spank Inferno haunts Steve and Susan's birthing class. **The Naked Living Room** . . . Can a man win the heart of a woman when his apartment is a little "unedited"? **9 ½ Months** . . . Susan is in labor, Jane is naked and Sally opens a box labeled "Sally, don't look in this box."

As Time Goes By: The Complete Series 7

A second chance at love...and laughter. Once upon a time, a dashing young British Army officer and a lovely student nurse fell deeply, magically in love. Then he was shipped off to Korea and they lost contact with one another. Forty years later, fate brings them together again... with delightful results. This release comprises all seven episodes form one of America's favorite Britcoms.

You can find or pre-order these new releases at www.bbcamerica.com.



Special Feature

Reader Poll: "Where Are They Now?"

Which favorite actor would YOU like to hear about?

While the response to our "contest" of sorts for the "Royal Doulton with hand-painted periwinkles (umm...from my personal collection) was sparse, some solid reader suggestions did emerge. Once again, to those who took time to write *The Insider*, heartfelt thanks are offered.

While it may seem old hat, *The Insider* editors believe the reader suggestion to explore a "Where Are They Now" angle on some of our favorite Britcom stars has merit. This notion was confirmed having spent some time recently with Andrew Sachs, and hearing what he has been up to (*The Insider*, November 2004 issue).

In keeping with our editorial focus on making this publication reader-centric, we are soliciting *your* input for the top three stars to cover for this article in an upcoming issue. If you have that panging sensation to know what the likes of Rowan Atkinson, John Cleese, Mollie Sugden or any actor is up to today, we want to hear from you. Simply e-mail your nominations to bbcinsider@comcast.net – and we will do all the work.

If there are other topics or issues you would like to see covered, we want to hear them as well. We once again offer you, our readers, the opportunity to take pen in hand and have your own articles published here, subject to editorial review and space availability. You *know* you want to. In the meantime, we will be working diligently to develop interesting features and articles for upcoming issues.



Wanted: Update on My Favorite Britcom Star

What happened and what are they up to now?



**Send your nominations for
"Where Are They Now?" to
bbcinsider@comcast.net**

Some British Delights

An Eclectic Collection of Classic British Recipes

Annette's Traditional English Trifle

Ingredients

Two butter pound cakes (think *Sara Lee*)
3 T. brandy per pound cake loaf
2 cups prepared white chocolate pudding
2 cups prepared chocolate pudding
1 cup each blackberries and raspberries
½ cup walnuts
1 8 oz. whipped cream

Preparation

In large trifle bowl or other dish, cut first cake into bite-sized pieces and drizzle with half of brandy. Layer with half of white chocolate pudding, half of chocolate pudding, half of walnuts and half of berries. Add second cake cut into bite-sized pieces, drizzle with remaining brandy and repeat layers. Refrigerate for three to 24 hours before serving. The longer it sits, the better it gets. Top with whipped cream before serving. Serves about 12 generous portions.

Neil's Groovy Lentil Casserole

Editor's note: A humorous take on The Young Ones. For vegetarian version, omit hamster.

Serves 4 hungry students

Ingredients

1 lb cooked Lentils
1 cup vegetable Stock
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped carefully
1 cup chopped vegetables (good karma, man!)
1 teaspoon hot curry powder (or more if you want to blow Rick's socks off)
Vyvyan's hamster

Preparation

1. Thank ingredients for letting us eat them.
2. Place lentils and vegetable stock in a large, clean casserole dish if you can find one.

3. Heat oil in a skillet. Sauté onions & vegetables with curry powder until vegetables are soft.
4. Add to lentils. Cover and bake at 350°F for 30-40 minutes.
5. Take care when handling pot, it's heavy, man. Serve over brown rice or with whatever bread is hanging out in the larder that's not too green-looking.

Note: For extra flavor, spill contents of casserole over dining room floor before scraping up and serving to hungry students - they'll eat anything.

Mollie Sugden's Lemon Meringue Pie

Mollie says her late husband William Moore married her for this pie!

Ingredients

10 oz. caster sugar (superfine)
Pinch of salt
3 eggs
½ lb. butter
1½ oz. cornflour (cornstarch)
Juice and rind of one lemon
½ pint boiling water

Preparation

Line two 8-inch flan tins with short crust pastry. Prick all over with a fork and bake blind*.

Beat the yolks of the eggs with corn flour, salt, 6 oz. of the sugar and the rind and juice of the lemon and mix thoroughly.

Pour on the boiling water, stirring all the time, then put into a saucepan and cook gently for a few minutes. Stir in the butter until it is melted and combined, then pour into the pastry cases.

For the meringue, beat the whites of eggs with 4 oz. of the sugar and spread over the top of the lemon pies leaving it in fairly rough peaks. Then bake in a moderate oven (350°) until slightly brown.

**Bake blind: baking an unfilled pastry crust by weighting it with rice, beans, baking beads, etc., to keep the crust from shrinking.*





BritCom LaughLinks

John Cleese Official Site

<http://www.thejohncleese.com>

An eclectic site to say the least; but what would one expect from THE John Cleese? There is a character that obviously nipped JC at the post in registering the URL www.johncleese.com, hence THE. It clearly is a commercial site that will cost you little less than \$50 a year if you want full access. In preview mode, you can partake in a fanciful journey of Cleese's career accomplishments and personal interests, Python, Fawlty – it's all there. Individual accomplishments are there as well. Also present are glimpses of his personal interests, such as wines, exotic animals and the like. For die-hard Cleese fans, it may be worth the price of admission. The site is graphic rich, interesting to navigate, but clearly designed for the more hardcore fan.

Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks

Are You Being Served? Forever

<http://www.minki.net/aybs>

One of the best "indie" sites I have seen on a show. Its content is robust and resourceful. If you love the show, its characters and background, this is a site truly worth the visit. In addition to useful information, there are several links to other sites for those who just can't get enough of the Grace Brothers' fare. FAQs, forums, images and all, if the fit isn't perfect for you – we certain it will ride up with wear!

Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks

The Great British Kitchen

<http://www.greatbritishkitchen.co.uk>

Looking for a great resource for traditional British cooking? Here's a site: "A major resource for all those in the UK and around the world who are enthusiasts for British cooking, its past traditions and future potential. Most of the 1,210 recipes here are indeed traditional and, taken together, define the legacy of British Cuisine. But of course cooking and recipes are ever-changing, no more so than with British cooking, which has always been hugely influenced by other cultures, many of which are now part and parcel of our contemporary cuisine. Our overriding interest, then, is not that everything in the Kitchen should be the pre-War idea of British, important though that foundation is, but to share and enjoy the rich diversity of the culinary life that is readily found in the British Kitchen today (wherever in the world that Kitchen may be!)."

Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks

English Tea Party Ideas and Recipes

<http://www.joyofbaking.com/EnglishTeaParty.html>

A lovely resource if you ever fancy putting on a proper English tea party. Authentic recipes, great history lessons and all the background on the revered English tradition are represented on this page, The site overall is a great recourse for recipes of all types. Interested in entertaining in high style? This site is definitely worth the visit.

Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks



Funny Blokes (cont'd. from page 1)

I don't want to ruin it for first time viewers with 'spoiler' details, but I will share some highlights. There's the cute opening where Henry remarks that "he may even let his wife get a word in edgeways," cut to Dawn French saying she likes Rowan Atkinson – he changes his mind "Maybe not!" And so begins the syncopated dialog from Henry that moves this video at a comfortable pace.

The lead profile in the program is the revered John Cleese and the *Fawlty Towers* run. Some of the funniest clips from the 12 episodes are peppered with interesting background commentary from Henry. The interview pieces with Cleese seem to be taken from the interview set produced for the DVD collector set of the series. Nevertheless, this profile is solid and insightful.

Andrew Sachs, Richard Briers and Geoffrey Hughes weigh in on the comedic talent that is Cleese. Sachs shares his story of the kitchen fire scene (detailed in *The Insider's* November issue). Geoffrey Palmer gives Cleese his due about how enthusiastic and involved he was in every facet of *Fawlty Towers'* production.

Next up in the program is Rowan Atkinson and *Blackadder*. Great scenes and commentary by Tony Robinson (he played Baldrick in the series) walk you through the four series of this mainstay Britcom. Analogies of Baldrick and Manuel and the physical comedy that makes many of the episodes so memorable are discussed.

The second segment (of three) leads off with a profile of our host, Lenny Henry. His wife in real life, actress Dawn French (*French and Saunders, Vicar of Dibley*) talks about his early days in stand up comedy, and we move quickly to his most notable television triumph, the creation of Gareth Blackstock in *Chef*. The lovely actress Caroline Johnson, who plays his wife in the series, weighs in on Henry's comedic talents along with other peers.

Veteran actor Frank Thornton and his portrayal of Captain Steven Peacock in *Are You Being Served?* provide first time insight into the character. Interviewed on the location of *Last Summer of the Summer Wine*, Thornton delves into his character development and interpretation of the role. Thornton goes on to discuss his role in *Summer Wine* and how he came to join the cast.

Ardal O'Hanlon is interviewed on his role as George Sunday, AKA Thermoman, in the endearing series *My Hero*. He talks about how he developed the character and actress Emily Joyce, who plays his wife, remarks about his comedic wit in the program.

Wilberforce Claybourne Humphries. Henry introduces a profile of the "irrepressible" John Inman. Mollie Sugden recalls meeting a department store salesman that Inman "got the walk from." And of course, no discussion would be complete without mentioning the memorable line "I'm free," which Inman says are two words he has never regretted his whole life. Henry gives Inman's comedic talent credit for standing the test of time as one Britcom's all time funniest.

Saucy segues into pledge breaks with Henry jumping into Gareth Blackstock character threatening viewers who do not pledge generously end each segment. Well done.

The next segment covers the love lives of Britcom's funniest blokes. A natural lead in is the funny Geoffrey Hughes and his role as Onslow in *Keeping Up Appearances*. And why the heck Daisy loves him so! A bit of trivia is revealed – Geoffrey Hughes was the voice of Paul McCartney in the Beatles animated movie *Yellow Submarine*. Geoffrey is interviewed on the background of the Onslow character and the dichotomy of his slovenly ways and most odd interest in molecular biology gleaned from watching *Open University*. The charming Patricia Routledge talks about her favorite episode and scene from KUA, where she dances with Onslow on the QE2, a scene Hughes says was nailed in one take. From the Routledge interview, she goes on to provide insight into comedy actor Clive Swift, who played her husband, Richard, in *KUA*. His unique ability to portray the character as henpecked and uniquely confused is well drawn out.

Richard Briers and *Good Neighbors*. Need we say more? An absolutely classic character and British comedy. Some of the funniest scenes and situations from the program are highlighted along with fond memories of the late Paul Eddington (Jerry in *Good Neighbors* and Jim Hacker in *Yes Minister*). Actress Penelope Keith (Margo in the *Good Neighbors* series) comments on the experience with Briers and her time on the program.

(Continued next page)

Funny Blokes (cont'd. from previous page)

No funny blokes list would be complete without a look at Geoffrey Palmer. *Butterflies, Fawlty Towers, As Time Goes By*. The list goes on. His hang dog face as one of his most remarkable attributes is front and center in the peer discussion of his talent. His role of Lionel opposite Dame Judi Dench in *As Time Goes By* is explored in this portion of the program. He recalls fondly the scene where he kisses Jean and how he was nervous about the segment.

Throughout the program, viewers are treated with peer commentary and character development insights that will surely be of interest to die-hard Britcom fans. While some may argue that a number of important actors qualifying as funniest bloke were overlooked, many were ably profiled in the program. So many talented actors have graced our television screens, a day-long program would be required to profile them all.

Duane Huey of Iowa Public Television, Bill Young of Dallas station KERA, Mike Seymour of Tampa station WEDU, Michele Street and all the other dedicated and talented folks who created the program should be congratulated for a job well done. This new special featuring some of Britcom's funniest blokes for this year's pledge seasons will make tuning in well worthwhile for true Britcom fans.

As the primary provider of Britcom programming, PBS stations work hard to bring the very best of the genre to viewers across America. *The Insider* hopes you will tune in and catch *Funny Blokes*. Most importantly, your financial support of your local PBS station is crucial to ensure they continue to provide quality programming in your community.

Catch the program and let us know what you think.



From Dog Collar to Lycra in a Flash

Ardal O'Hanlon and 'My Hero'

A newer entrant into the American Britcom scene is Irish stand up comic come actor Ardal O'Hanlon who has captured the attention of Britcom viewers in a number of American television markets. For those who crave new Britcom programming, the show is worth a look.

In *My Hero*, O'Hanlon leaps in one mighty bound from super-dense priest - Dougal in *Father Ted*- to super-dense alien; and his charm has carried the show.

The BBC sets the baseline story: On holiday in America, nurse Janet Dawkins tumbles into the Grand Canyon and is rescued by Thermoman, a red-liveried superhero from the planet Ultron. Thermoman is a well-known global wonder whom women find irresistible; the difference this time is that the alien behind the mask instantly falls for the British nurse. Thermoman's secret identity is health food shop proprietor George Sunday, and it is as George that Thermoman seeks out Janet once again, tracing her to her home in Northolt, west of London. Though he courts Janet as George, he quickly reveals his secret superhero guise. She is uncertain of the wisdom of a relationship, but decides to give it a whirl.

Blessed with extraordinary powers he may be, but George is ignorant of human life and has a baffling, off-centre view of things. This makes him a poor match for Janet in the eyes of her overbearing mother (and put-upon father) who would much rather she date her boss, the narcissistic Doctor Crispin, a minor (though he would say major) celebrity as he hosts a medical TV show. Also uncertain of George is Mrs. Raven, the loose cannon receptionist at Northolt Health Centre, where Janet works. On George's side is Janet's neighbor Tyler, still fazed owing to extensive drug experimentation in the 1960s. He likes George and knows he is Thermoman, but this is not a problem as nobody ever believes anything Tyler says. George also has a confidant in his Uncle Arnie, hailing from Ultron, but now running a diner in Brooklyn. The fifth series is running now in the UK, with the first four running in selected US markets.



(Continued from page 5)

So what is a proper English Afternoon Tea? Afternoon Tea is a light and elegant offering of tea, sandwiches, cake, warm scones with clotted cream and preserves, and a selection of delightful tarts, served between 3-5pm. All manner of sweet, baked teatime treats are available, and there are many regional specialties, with names such as Bath buns, Richmond Maids of Honour - a favorite of King Henry VIII – and the satisfyingly named Yorkshire Fat Rascals.

High Tea, despite its posh name, is more of a meal, eaten as an early supper between 5-6pm, with a main course, featuring British treats such as meat-pie, savory pastries, scotch eggs or toad-in-the-hole. It's like a country supper with the addition of cakes and confections, and of course lashings of tea. Over here, the terms seem to be interchangeable – Americans often refer to Afternoon Tea as High Tea. Having visited many tearooms here, I've found that an American tea can include anything from soup and a sandwich, quiche & salad or to salad to muffins and fruit.

Afternoon tea is a great excuse to get out your best china, invite friends over for a cuppa and a chin-wag (gossip!), to celebrate events such as birthdays, bridal or baby showers, or even for themed teas – use your fave Britcom for inspiration! Many's the time I've wanted to organize a Loony Monty Python Tea featuring Very Silly Scones. Or a Hyacinth Bucket Tea With the Vicar and a surprise appearance by Rose and a few of her bickering male friends.

Which Britcom star would you invite to your fantasy tea party? I don't know that I'd be brave enough to have tea with Basil Fawlty - he'd probably think I was 'riff-raff' for using the wrong fork. How about buttered scones for tea with a Monty Python Lumberjack and a few Mounties? Personally, I think a Very Silly Tea with a few Pythonites (and a smattering of Vikings) would be a hoot - we'd talk about the good old days over spam sandwiches, a Cheese-and-Cracker-Platter (sorry, no cheese), disorderly doughnuts and a plate of Spanish Rice Inquisition.

But if it's elegance you're after – a full-blown afternoon tea with Hyacinth would be very proper - if you could stand the company. She'd insist on serving Earl Grey Tea and showing off her best bone china with the hand painted periwinkles. And of course our Mrs. Bucket, er, Bouquet would be sensible enough to

make sure that spotted dick was off the menu if the Vicar comes for tea. And if he does, for goodness sake, don't sit him next to Rose. As for Onslow, he's more likely to be off down the local having an afternoon beer.

You probably couldn't go wrong with Margo from Good Neighbors as your hostess serving a very posh afternoon tea in her comfortable & pristine living room in the suburbs. But have tea next door with Tom & Barbara Good next door, and you'd be offered tea in a chipped enamel mug while sitting around the Aga stove in a stark kitchen. The Vicar of Dibley would probably serve a glorious and large Chocolate Tea, and Lionel in As Time Goes By would insist on Custard Tarts. Alex Callendar from May to December would joke about having Earl Grey in the kitchen, and ask if you'd like to meet him. Any offer from Baldrick in Blackadder for a cup of tea should be avoided at all costs. Tea at Father Ted's would be totally unavoidable - his housekeeper obsessively offers everyone a cup of good Irish tea, can't understand why anyone would refuse and indeed, refuses to take no for an answer.

Having lived in America for many years, I have learned to drink the occasional glass of iced tea. even if I have to use the lemon & pour packets of sugar into it to turn it into a sort of tea-flavored lemonade. But I just can't give up the hot tea habit. Even in one hundred degree weather, in scorching Texas heat, if you visit me at teatime, I'll be putting the kettle on. Now there's proper British eccentricity for you.



Postscripts

Another issue gone. Once again, many thanks to those of you who took time to drop me a line. It is much appreciated. I again urge all readers – take the time to let us know what you think about the publication, share ideas you may have for improvement and suggest topics you would like to see covered. I respond to all e-mails.

Thank you for your continued support and readership. I hope we can continue promoting a two way dialog on the fascinating topic of British comedies. Contact me by e-mail anytime at bbcinsider@comcast.net. Until the next issue, happy viewing!

Scott