

The Insider

Volume 1, Issue 3

Your Connection to the BBC Sales Company

March 2000

Editor's Note

Early on, I stated my goal of making *The Insider* a celebration of the best that British television has to offer. In this issue, we celebrate the best of the Britcoms. We'll tell you what to expect from the upcoming PBS special entitled *A Salute to British Comedy on American TV* plus, as an extra added bonus, you'll also find a "roadmap" of British comedy since the 60s to let you know what happened when. Smegheads can get the inside scoop on *Red Dwarf* and we even have a profile of the marvelous Dame Judi Dench.

There's this view that most Americans don't "get" the English sense of humor. I beg to differ. For several years I edited an Internet "webzine" dealing with British comedy and the vast majority of our subscribers were indeed American. They wanted to know about British shows normally seen on American TV, but many also used the zine as an "educational tool" to learn about programs not well known in the States.

I applauded this broad-minded view because with the easy availability of videotapes there's no reason *not* to sample new programs. It's also important to support your local PBS station so that they will continue to expand their selection of Britcoms. The history of British comedy is full of marvelous performers and shows, but there's plenty on the horizon to show that its future is very healthy indeed as we enter the new century. Watch this space.

Michelle Street, Editor

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Shakespeare's In Love (And So Is Everyone Else) with Judi Dench

From Romeo and Juliet to As Time Goes By, the story of Britain's Leading Lady

Is there anything this woman can't do? She's won every major acting award including an Oscar and a Tony. She's shown her versatility on the stage as well as the small and large screen. She sings. She dances. She's even gotten to order that dishy James Bond around. So I ask you: what more could a dame want?

I'm referring, of course to Dame Judi Dench, who was born Judith Olivia Dench on December 9th, 1934. She was the youngest child (and only daughter) of Reginald and Olave Dench.



I was genuinely surprised when I won. I thought, well, I didn't get it for Mrs. Brown, I'm certainly not going to get it for eight quick minutes with bad teeth.

-Dame Judi, on winning the Oscar.

Reginald Dench was a bit of a Renaissance man. He trained as a doctor at Trinity College, Dublin, before eventually settling in York, England, where Judi was born. However, he also possessed an artistic bent that manifested itself in his love of the theatre. He became a highly respected amateur actor both at Trinity and in local productions in York, while his wife became an accomplished wardrobe mistress.

At first, Judi thought she would follow in her mother's footsteps working behind-the-scenes. She attended Mount School in York and planned to go into either stage design or painting.

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The Insider Mailbox



Hi Michelle!

Just a quick comment to compliment you and your staff on The Insider newsletter. Great idea!

As a long time fan of Dad's Army, I want to ask how many episodes were originally made for the BBC and how many are now available on video? Is there a central location where they can be ordered from? Thanks!

Roger Lemnus, WI

Hi Roger! Thanks and glad to hear you're enjoying The Insider. There were 83 episodes of Dad's Army made, including several specials. There are a number of episodes available on video. Perhaps the best buy is the Dad's Army Collection Set, available from BBC Worldwide Americas at <http://www.bbc-worldwide-americas.com>. If you don't have Internet access, you can order it by calling 1-800-216-1BBC, Extension 18.

We watch *Last of the Summer Wine* on our PBS station. However, very recently the series had a change in cast. Brian Wilde (Foggy) departed and his place was taken by Frank Thronton as Truly. Foggy was very much the center of the comedy. We hope he was not taken ill. The program is just not the same without Brian. Can you enlighten us? Did he just grow tired of the series?

William C. Suhler. Maryland

Brian Wilde did indeed leave the series temporarily. The reasons for his departure were a mixture of wanting to move on to something new and reported tension on the set. He did eventually return, so hang on and you'll see him show up again.

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The Insider welcomes all correspondence. Send letters via e-mail to editor Michelle Street at bdigest@soltec.com or by snail mail to: The Insider, c/o Julie Marshall, BBC Worldwide Americas, 747 3rd Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803. Include your full name and location. 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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In The News



Tributes are pouring in for *Ballykissangel* star **Tony Doyle**, who died unexpectedly of an apparent heart attack on January 28th in London. Doyle, who played Brian Quigley on the popular series, was only 58 years old and had shared an evening out with his former *BallyK* co-star Stephen Tompkinson right before his death.

Doyle was about to begin work on a drama series called *McCready and Daughter*. He leaves behind six children from two different marriages. *BallyK* also lost **Birdy Sweeney** (who played Eammon) last May.

Blackadder star **Rowan Atkinson** is reportedly the front runner to play Harpo in an upcoming Marx Brothers biopic. Harpo's son Bill has said Atkinson is his personal choice and he certainly seems perfect given the wonderful talent he displayed for playing silent characters in *Mr. Bean*. The film will concentrate on the Marx Brothers' early years on Broadway and in Hollywood.

Paul Mendelson, who authored the very popular *From May to December* has teamed with **Paul Mayhew - Archer**, writer of some episodes of *The Vicar of Dibley*, to create a new series called *My Hero*. It deals with the exploits of health-food store owner (played by Ardal O'Hanlon) who doubles as the world's most famous superhero, Thermoman. The series debuted in February.

Also airing recently in the UK was *Gimme Gimme Gimme*, starring **James Dreyfus** (who you may remember as Constable Goody in *The Thin Blue Line*) and **Kathy Burke**, who played Joanna Lumley's boss on *Absolutely Fabulous*. This is sort of a British version of *Will and Grace*, exploring the relationship between a straight woman and a gay man.

John Cleese is reportedly teaming up with ABC to create his first series for U.S. television. Cleese will co-write the pilot of this series and serve as an executive producer of the show, which is slated appear in the fall of this year. The sitcom is set inside a law firm called Karpool, Ruumki & Whetfish, where some of the partners have literally made deals with the devil and become demons. The plots will focus on the battle between good and evil for the soul of one of the lawyers. Cleese said his interest in this was sparked by the guest appearances he's done on American television, including his Emmy winning appearance on *Cheers* and his riotous two-part stint on *Third Rock from the Sun*.



A Salute to British Comedy on American TV

A Fond Look at the Best of the Britcoms

For over 25 years, PBS has been **the** place to go for a fix of comedy from the UK. Other networks have imported English sitcoms from time to time, but very few have demonstrated the same depth of commitment to British programming as PBS.

The quality and breadth of comedies brought to America by Public Broadcasting stations is on display in a terrific new special entitled *A Salute to British Comedy on American TV*.

The forces behind *A Salute to British Comedy on American TV* are Bill Young from station KERA in Dallas and Jim Scalem. Together they have fashioned an entertaining, informative retrospective that contains generous amounts of clips from each show as well as numerous celebrity interviews. All of this is linked by the "Queen of British Comedy," Penelope Keith.

The idea grew from a smaller-scale show that KERA put together for one of its pledge drives. Young and Scalem thought that what had worked well locally could work well nationally as a salute to Britcoms and indeed, it does.

According to Young, putting together this special became more play than work. Shows were chosen by talking to fans and experts plus looking at what has been popular historically. Young said the celebrities had an "incredible willingness" to talk about these shows and were genuinely pleased by the popularity of their shows in America.

The salute begins – as well it should - with the program that probably did more than any other to turn people on to British comedy. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* has retained its popularity even after thirty years and in the minds of many, the Pythons are still synonymous with the phrase British comedy.

The members of the troupe were (and from all appearances still are) certifiable loonies. Terry Jones elaborates on some of the Python's best...errrm...bits, explaining that the Lumberjack Song took only half an hour to write, after which he and Palin went to the pub.

It must have been difficult to choose from all the classic Python skits, but the Dead Parrot gets to pine for the fjord and just in case you need a refresher course, John Cleese gives out sensible advice on how to guard yourself against an attacker armed with fresh fruit. Sublime, silly, yet very smart, Python will no doubt continue to enchant audiences well into the future.

The 70s are also represented by *Good Neighbors*, which in the UK was called *The Good Life*. The juxtaposition of this with Python demonstrates the basic schizophrenia inherent in the British comedy Americans have enjoyed. There's the surreal anarchy of the Pythons versus the gentle sophistication of Tom and Barbara Good's bid for self-sufficiency in *Good Neighbors*.

Interviews with Penelope Keith and Richard Briers explain the enormous popularity of *Good Neighbors* because in our heart or hearts, most people despise the rat race and yearn for self-sufficiency and simplicity.

Good Neighbors did much to jump-start the careers of Briers, Felicity Kendal, Paul Eddington, and Penelope Keith, who went on to star in the next Britcom featured - *To The Manor Born*.

The discussion of *To The Manor Born* features an interview with the still suave and handsome Peter Bowles, who correctly explains that audiences turned in not to see the struggle between the nouveau riche and the old money (as represented by the characters he and Penelope Keith played), but for the sheer romance of the series, which needed to and did end on a happy note.

This is followed by a look at the all-time champ *Are You Being Served?*, the most widely watched Britcom on PBS. This segment includes a rare glimpse of the legendary AYBS? creative team of David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd. Most hard-core fans already know that the idea for the series came from Lloyd's years at Simpson's Department Store, but who knew that there were actually many elderly British women who had cats and referred to them in all innocence as their "pussys?"

The extreme popularity of AYBS? can be explained by the sheer fun the cast was obviously having and also by the fact that, as Croft points out, "these were people you wanted to have round for dinner."

Croft and Lloyd are also responsible for another perennial favorite featured on this special. *'Allo 'Allo!* is an energetic farce about the French resistance and another successful Croft/Lloyd ensemble piece. It's also another classic Croft sitcom about the war and his ability to gently skewer but also accurately reflect British society is no doubt what led the Queen to honor him with the Order of the British Empire.

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RED DWARF: The Whole Smegging Story So Far

One star was arrested and did jail time before the charges were proven false and his name was cleared. Another reportedly left over a salary dispute. There was an acrimonious split of the creative team who have not worked together since.

Hmmm...sound like an episode of VH1's *Behind The Music* or the *E! True Hollywood Story*? Well kind of, but all of the above and more has happened since 1988 when The Jupiter Mining Corporation spacecraft *Red Dwarf* first took flight.

The genesis of *RD* was in a recurring skit called *Dave Hollins - Space Cadet* that appeared on a Radio 4 show called *Son of Cliché*. The writers were Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, who later became lumped as a collective entity called Grant Naylor, or as they were referred to by Robert Llewellyn (who appears as Kryten in the series), "the comedy police."

The premise for a new series that Grant Naylor brought to the table was nothing new. The sci-fi comedy genre had been mined before (and very well) by Douglas Adams in the popular *Hitch-Hikers Guide* radio series, books, and television shows. The idea of mismatched characters forced to live together and get along is a comedy staple from time immemorial, but in the hands of Messieurs Grant Naylor, it was anything but the son of a cliché.

The first episode sets up the premise as a computer with a deadpan face says:

This is an S.O.S. distress call from the mining ship Red Dwarf. The crew are dead, killed by a radiation leak. The only survivors are Dave Lister, who was in suspended animation during the disaster, and his pregnant cat, who was safely sealed in the hold. Revived three million years later, Lister's only companions are a life-form who evolved from his cat, and Arnold Rimmer, a hologram simulation of one of the dead crew.

Lister and Rimmer form the odd couple. Lister, he of the dreadlocks and Liverpool accent, is a slob. Not exactly the ambitious sort, he plods through his existence on curries, lager, and thoughts about returning to Earth to be with Kristine Kochanski, the love of his life. His plans to return, however, are continually thwarted.

Rimmer, on the other hand, is what the British generally term a "swot." You know, the type of guy who during school always had his homework done on Friday night.

Rimmer is as ambitious as Lister is lazy; still driven by a desire to please his deceased father.

They are joined by the graceful yet preening presence of The Cat, who is all about the outside. He's smooth, slick, well groomed, and well dressed, but not exactly gifted with a massive IQ.

Then there's Kryten, the fussy budget of a service mechanoid who with the help of Lister becomes almost human and gets enlisted as yet another nemesis of the pompous Rimmer.

Finally, the crew is watched over by the senile computer Holly, with an IQ of 6000 and a penchant for using the word "dude."

The role of Lister fit Craig Charles like a glove. Robert Llewellyn described him as one of the most hated/feared men in Liverpool, and Charles off-screen was very much a rough and tumble Scouser whose antics have landed him in hot water. During 1994, his driver's license was suspended when he was found guilty of drunk driving. Then, in 1995, Charles went on trial when he was falsely accused of raping an ex-girlfriend while on a night out with friends. A jury eventually took only 90 minutes to clear him of the charge, but during some of the long process leading to his acquittal, Charles was kept incarcerated, leaving the future of *RD* up in the air.

Off screen, Charles had a party partner in crime in the form of Danny John-Jules, a.k.a. Cat. While John-Jules and Charles (the more gregarious members of the cast) would spend much of their free time partying, the other members of the fearsome foursome - Robert Llewellyn and Chris Barrie - were, shall we say, quieter. Llewellyn once stated that he was usually in bed by with some hot cocoa and a book by 10:30, while Barrie spent most of his time and money pursuing a passion for cars.

The role of the Cat was another perfect fit of actor and role. The graceful form and movements of John-Jules (especially in the "Tongue Tied" production number from the episode entitled *Parallel Universe*) showed off his pre-*Dwarf* training and experience as a dancer. In what might have been a foreshadowing of his role on *RD*, John-Jules actually appeared in the London production of the long-running musical *Cats*.

The chemistry was definitely there and the four men meshed beautifully. They were helped along with great

scripts by Grant Naylor, some of which also proved quite touching. The second series, containing episodes such as *Better Than Life* and *Thanks for the Memory*, is especially memorable. Rimmer's drunken admission in the latter episode that he would've given up everything – his ambitions, his awards – simply to have loved and been loved, brought an unexpected depth to the usually annoying Arnold. In fact, over the course of the series each of the characters would be given a depth not normally found in sitcom characters.

Along the way, there were changes in the cast and crew. Holly (the supercomputer) was played by the magnificently deadpan Norman Lovett until a reported salary dispute caused him to leave at the end of Series 2. The character of Holly was then given a change of actor and gender when stand-up comedienne Hattie Hayridge took over the role until Series 6. Hayridge had already played Hilly, Holly's female counterpart, in the episode *Parallel Universe*.

Another loss was suffered when Chris Barrie bolted for most of Series 7. Barrie had been doing double duty on both *RD* while also playing the pompous monster Gordon Brittas on *The Brittas Empire*. He came to feel that he had taken Rimmer as far as he could.

He also had another worry. "Every actor who has played two spineless idiots, two fairly unattractive kind of characters, two losers at the end of the day, should start to think about the possibility of being typecast," he explained in an interview. Nevertheless, his departure left a real void that was explained by him going off to fulfill his destiny as "Ace" Rimmer. The writers and producers then decided to bring back the love of Lister's life, Kochanski.

Kochanski had formerly been a smaller role played by Clare (CP) Grogan. Grogan entered show business as a punk rocker in a band called Altered Images and appeared in a couple of films by respected Scottish director Bill Forsyth before appearing as Kochanski.

However, for Series 7, a basically unknown actress named Chloe Annett took on the expanded role, though as a Kochanski from a different dimension. This allowed the writers to mine new territory and the fits of jealousy shown by Kryten (who felt Kochanski would ruin his tight relationship with Lister) were one of the highlights of this series.

To the delight of fans, Chris Barrie returned full-time for Series Eight. How did the writers explain his reappearance? The plot line had nanobots resurrecting the entire crew, so not only was Rimmer back, he was no

longer a hologram. Also returning at the same time was the original Holly, Norman Lovett.

The changes brought on in starting with Series 7 were in part caused by the split between series creators Grant Naylor. Rob Grant gave up his duties as co-writer and co-producer of the series in 1996 and was quoted in the *Radio Times* as saying that he "wanted more than just *Red Dwarf* on his tombstone." Though not much has been said by cast or crew concerning his departure, it was rumored to be an acrimonious split.

Doug Naylor continued his association with the series, bringing in other writers on occasion to co-author the scripts. Rob Grant went on to create *The Strangers*, which debuted on February 15th, 2000.

Despite the upheavals and changes, fans have remained intensely loyal to *Red Dwarf*. Dwarfers continually obsess over everything from the show's future to the plot inconsistencies, of which there are many. The Red Dwarf Plot Inconsistencies Project has catalogued over 300 continuity and production errors in the various series, including the fact that Lister's appendix seems to have been taken out twice. Hundreds of Web sites have sprung up for the show, including one where you can find all of Rimmer's Space Corps Directives, another devoted to the food and drinks mentioned in *RD* and an official Web site at <http://www.reddwarf.co.uk>.

With its inspired lunacy and strong fan base, it was only a matter of time before US television executives saw a good thing. As so often happens when American TV tries to translate a British comedy, it was a case of they came, they saw, they ruined. Not only once, but twice.

The American version of *RD* never got past the pilot stage, even though Grant Naylor were brought in as consultants. Robert Llewellyn reprised his role as Kryten and *Frasier* star Jane Leeves played Holly. As Robert Llewellyn explained in the August issue of *The Insider*:

I had a great time making them and got on with the US cast very well, still keep in touch with Chris Eigeman who played Rimmer. I think there are many reasons behind why NBC didn't pick up the series, if I remember correctly they made nine pilots that year, three in their own studios, where RD was originally going to be made, and the rest in Universal studios where RD was made. They picked up the three they made in their own studios and dumped the rest. But who knows?

The first pilot was written by Linwood Boomer and from all reports, it toyed with many things that made the

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British Comedy: 1960s to the present



A Handy Dandy Roadmap to What Happened When

1962

- Series One of *Steptoe and Son*, the classic series starring Wilfrid Brambell and Harry H. Corbett as a father/son team who run a sad "rag-and-bone" business in London. This would later be transferred to US television as *Sanford and Son*.
- Graham Chapman and John Cleese star together in their first revue, called *Double Take*.
- British audiences get one of their first glimpses of Mollie Sugden in the David Croft produced *Hugh and I*.

1963

- David Frost brings biting political satire to British television with *That Was The Week That Was*. Included on the writing staff are David Nobbs (who would go on to create *Reginald Perrin*), Dennis Potter, Johnny Speight (who would go on to write *Till Death Do Us Part*), and John Cleese.

1964

- Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Alan Bennett and Jonathan Miller bring their classic stage revue *Beyond The Fringe* to television. This is one of the high points of the political satire boom of the 60s.

1965

- Michael Palin graduates from Oxford University and spends six months hosting a pop program called *Now!*
- Meanwhile, John Cleese and Terry Gilliam work together for the first time on a photographic comic strip about a man obsessed with a Barbie doll. It appears in a magazine entitled *Help!*
- The pilot of *Till Death Do Us Part* is shown as a "one-off" on Comedy Playhouse. A full series chronicling the exploits of bigoted, right-wing Alf Garnett (played by Warren Mitchell) would follow in 1966. Norman Lear would later take this premise, change the name Alf Garnett to Archie Bunker, move the setting to New York, and create American television history with *All in the Family*.

1966

- David Frost hosts the first series of *The Frost Report* and brings together for the first time most of the talent who would go on to form Monty Python. John Cleese was an occasional performer (as were the legendary "Two Ronnies" - Ronnie Corbett and Ronnie Barker) and the writing staff included Marty Feldman, Michael Palin, John Cleese, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman and Terry Jones.

1968

- The first of nine series of *Dad's Army* premieres.

1969

- The first of Spike Milligan's anarchic *Q*, series, which was a major influence on the budding Pythons because of its view that skits didn't necessarily need a beginning, middle and end, taking the emphasis off the punchline.
- *Monty Python's Flying Circus* premieres in October. Sales of Spam skyrocket.
- *Doctor In The House* premieres, with scripts by Graham Chapman and John Cleese plus Graeme Garden and Bill Oddie of The Goodies.



- A pre-Mr. Lucas Trevor Bannister has his first major role as "Heavy Breathing" in a series about garbage collectors called *The Dustbinmen*.
- A pre-Mrs. Slocombe Mollie Sugden appears as the snobbish, overbearing mother of a Liverpool lass in the Carla Lane sitcom *The Liver Birds*. This series would eventually run for ten series.

1970

- *The Goodies* (composed of Tim Brooke-Taylor, Graeme Garden and Bill Oddie) create a comedy classic with their own brand of visual lunacy. Basically a cartoon brought to life, *The Goodies* would eventually run for nine series.
- *AYBS?* co-writer Jeremy Lloyd marries future *Absolutely Fabulous* co-star Joanna Lumley. They split four months later, but Lumley still goes on to make an appearance on the "German Week" episode of *AYBS?*
- Frankie Howerd plays Roman slave Ludicrus Sextus in the first series of producer David Croft's sitcom *Up Pompeii!*

1972

- The pilot of *Are You Being Served?* is shown unexpectedly when the massacre of Israeli athletes causes a temporary halt to the Olympic Games.
- The Pythons begin production of their third series, which would be the last with John Cleese.

1973

- Premiere episode of *Last of the Summer Wine*.
- *AYBS?* begins its first full series.
- *Dad's Army* star James Beck ("Private Walker") dies at the early age of 42 from complications after a stomach operation.
- *Open All Hours* teams sitcom legends Ronnie Barker and David Jason in this series about a shopkeeper called Arkwright (Barker) and his nephew Granville (Jason). The scripts are by *KUA/Last of the Summer Wine* scribe Roy Clarke

1974

- Leonard Rossiter plays the greedy, petty but hysterical landlord Rigsby in the first series of *Rising Damp*.
- Ronnie Barker hits sitcom pay dirt again playing a prisoner as the first series of *Porridge* premieres. Also in the cast are Richard Beckinsale (of *Rising Damp*) and Brian Wilde (of *Last of the Summer Wine*). Three series and two specials of this classic are eventually made.
- The remaining Pythons produce their final series and call it a day after introducing viewers to the Worst Family in Britain.
- Producer David Croft has another hit with *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*, about a military theatrical troop in India during WWII.

1975

- Series One of *Fawlty Towers*.
- Python fans rejoice as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is released.
- Lenny Henry first comes to national attention when he wins the *New Faces* talent competition.
- John Inman reaches #39 on the UK charts with his single *Are You Being Served, Sir?*
- Felicity Kendal and Richard Briers try self-sufficiency in the first series of *Good Neighbors*, known in the UK as *The Good Life*.

1976

- Premiere episode of *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* starring the late, great Leonard Rossiter as a man who suffers a mid-life crisis and fakes his own death.
- *Pleasure at Her Majesty's* brings most Britcomedy royalty together for a benefit in aid of Amnesty International.
- Lenny (*Chef!*) Henry stars in a British version of *Good Times* called *The Fosters*.
- The *AYBS?* stage play runs from June to October.
- Monty Python invades New York to appear at the City Center.

1977

- Edward Sinclair (the Verger on *Dad's Army*) passes away, aged 63.
- John Inman plays Blackpool fish and chip shop owner Neville Sutcliffe in the series *Odd Man Out*. His co-star, Josephine Tewson, would later play Hyacinth Bucket's neighbor Elizabeth in *Keeping Up Appearances*.
- The cast of *AYBS?* goes to the Costa Plonka on vacation in a movie version of the popular series. Also in this film is Andrew Sachs, who must have been hired because of the Spanish accent he used as Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*.



1978

- Arthur Lowe goes AWOL from *Dad's Army* to play Father Charles Duddleswell in *Bless Me, Father*.
- Mollie Sugden teams up with Ian Lavender (that "stupid boy" Pike from *Dad's Army*) in the short-lived *Come Back, Mrs. Noah*.
- Series One of *Butterflies*, starring Wendy Craig as a woman dealing with mid-life crisis.
- Eric Idle masterfully mocks Beatlemania in *All You Need Is Cash*. Aided by the wonderful tunes of Neil Innes, Idle tells the story of The Rutles, the "pre-fab four" consisting of Dirk, Barry, Stig, and Nasty.

1979

- First series of *To The Manor Born*.
- Rowan Atkinson, Pamela Stephenson, Mel Smith, Griff Rhys Jones and Chris Langham team up for the classic satire of *Not The Nine O'Clock News*. (Langham would leave after the first series.)
- Second (and sadly, final) series of *Fawlty Towers*.
- Trevor Bannister leaves the cast of *AYBS?*
- Richard Beckinsale, star of *Rising Damp* and *Porridge*, dies of a heart attack at the age of 31. He leaves behind a daughter, Kate, who is now carrying on the family acting tradition.
- The charity benefits for Amnesty International continue as John Cleese directs *The Secret Policeman's Ball*.

1980

- *Yes, Minister* debuts, chronicling the adventures of politician James Hacker.
- *Dad's Army* writers Jimmy Perry and David Croft team up again for *Hi-de-Hi*, a long-running sitcom set in a holiday camp.
- The Pythons play before adoring fans at the Hollywood Bowl. This is filmed and later released as a motion picture.
- Channel 10 in Australia tries their own version of *AYBS?* set in a store called Bones Brothers. John Inman is the only one of the original cast to appear in this series.

1981

- *Only Fools and Horses* begins its long run.
- Mollie Sugden stars as housekeeper Ida Willis in *That's My Boy*.
- *Dad's Army* star Arthur Lowe (Captain Mainwaring) passes away at the age of 66.
- Harold Bennett (Young Mr. Grace on *AYBS?*) passes away at the age of 82.
- John Inman plays Rula Lenksa's secretary in *Take A Letter, Mr. Jones*.

1982

- Peter Bowles stars as *The Bounder*. Also in this popular sitcom scripted by Eric Chappelle was George Cole, star of the recent sitcom *Dad*.
- Comedy loses a great talent when Marty Feldman passes away after a heart attack. He is only 49.
- *The Young Ones* brings a decidedly anarchic and punk view of life to British television screens. "Alternative comedy" becomes the big catch phrase.

1983

- Rowan Atkinson begins his long ride through British history as *The Black Adder* premieres.
- John LeMesurier of *Dad's Army* passes away, aged 71.
- Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie, Emma Thompson, Ben Elton and Robbie Coltrane continue alternative comedy's assault on television in the short-lived but influential sketch comedy show *Alfresco*.

1984

- Arnold Ridley (also of *Dad's Army*) passes away at the age of 88.
- Listen carefully - I will say this only once - Café René opens for business on 'Allo 'Allo!
- Lenny Henry of *Che!* and Dawn French of *The Vicar of Dibley* marry on 20th October.
- First series of *Ever Decreasing Circles*, starring Richard Briers as Martin Bryce.
- Penelope Keith and Peter Bowles team up for *Executive Stress*. Geoffrey Palmer originally stars with Keith, but bows out after the first series.



1985

- *AYBS?* ends its long run.
- Jennifer Saunders gives a tour-de-force performance as Granny Fuddle and her four daughters in *Happy Families*. Also in the cast are Dawn French, Stephen Fry, and Adrian Edmondson.

1986

- The adventures of James Hacker continue in *Yes, Prime Minister*.
- *Blackadder* standouts Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie get their own series as *A Bit of Fry and Laurie* debuts for the first of four series.
- *Birds of a Feather* begins its long run, telling the story of two sisters (Pauline Quirke and Linda Robson) whose husbands get sent to jail for armed robbery.
- The first *Comic Relief* raises lots of money for charity and gives top alternative comics an opportunity to strut their stuff.

1987

- Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders come into their own in the first series of their sketch comedy show *French and Saunders*.
- *The New Statesman*, starring Rik Mayall as a excruciatingly slimey Member of Parliament, debuts and provides a scathing look into the inner workings of the government. It mines the same territory as *Yes, Minister*, but with a more wicked and exaggerated slant.

1988

- The crew of the Jupiter Mining Corporation spaceship *Red Dwarf* takes off for the first time, combining sci-fi and comedy into a classic series.
- Judi Dench becomes a Dame of the British Empire.
- *The First of the Summer Wine* debuts. This "prequel" looks at the characters in *Last of the Summer Wine* when they were children.
- *A Fish Called Wanda* is released to critical and public acclaim. Kevin Kline wins the Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor.
- Future Academy Award winner Emma Thompson makes a rare misstep with an ill-advised foray in sketch comedy called *Thompson*.

1989

- Only days before the 20th anniversary of the first Monty Python show, Graham Chapman succumbs to cancer. Terry Jones tries to bring humor to a sad situation by saying, "This is the worst case of party pooping I have ever come across."
- The adventures of Edmund Blackadder and Baldrick reach a touching conclusion during WW1 with *Blackadder Goes Forth*.
- First series of *May to December*, a popular sitcom about the romance between a middle-aged solicitor and a 26-year old teacher.

1990

- Stephanie Cole and Graham Crowden take up residency at the Bayview Retirement Village in the first series of *Waiting for God*.
- Patricia Routledge takes social snobbery to new heights in the first series of *Keeping Up Appearances*.
- Richard Wilson brings curmudgeonly retiree Victor Meldrew to life as the star of *One Foot in the Grave*.
- 'Allo 'Allo! star Gordon Kaye is involved in a car accident that leaves him with severe head injuries. He is back to work in six months.
- Rowan Atkinson brings another classic character to life as *Mr. Bean* begins his misadventures.
- The *Dad's Army* writing team of David Croft and Jimmy Perry teams up again for *You Rang M'Lord?*

1991

- Chris Barrie takes temporary leave from *Red Dwarf* to run the Whitbury New Town Leisure Centre in *The Brittas Empire*.
- Dawn French shows her versatility by playing numerous roles in the first series of *Murder Most Horrid*.
- David Jason and Pam Ferris play Ma and Pa Larkin in the first series of the wildly popular *The Darling Buds of May*.
- Lenny Henry tries for Hollywood film stardom in Disney's *True Identity*, but the movie flops.

1992

- Jean and Lionel rekindle their romance in the first series of *As Time Goes By*.
- *Absolutely Fabulous* introduces viewers to Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley as the drinking, drugging 40ish basket cases Edina and Patsy. The series would go on to win a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award as Best Comedy.
- Many of the original *AYBS?* cast members reunite for a sequel entitled *Grace and Favour*, which is also commonly known as *Are You Being Served Again?* In this series, the Grace Brothers employees are forced to make a living from the run-down manor house young Mr. Grace bought with their pension money.



- The writing team behind *Good Neighbors* (Bob Larbey and John Esmonde) come up with the fantasy sitcom *Mulberry*.
- Benny Hill (born Alfred Hawthorne Hill) passes away after decades of making people laugh around the world.

1993

- Lenny Henry cooks up some fine comedy in the first series of *Chef!*
- Nicholas Lyndhurst begins his two-timing, time traveling ways as Gary Sparrow in the first series of *Goodnight Sweetheart*.

1994

- Dawn French puts on her clerical robes in the first series of *The Vicar of Dibley*.
- Joanna Lumley receives an OBE (Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's Honor List for "services to British drama." The Queen apparently hasn't seen *Absolutely Fabulous*.
- Manchester comic Steve Coogan creates one of the absolute classic characters of the decade when he brings his popular radio character - talk show host from hell Alan Partridge - to television in the first series of *Knowing Me, Knowing You...With Alan Partridge*.

1995

- The great Peter Cook dies of a gastro-intestinal hemorrhage.
- Paul Eddington of *Yes, Minister, Yes, Prime Minister*, and *Good Neighbors*, passes away at age 68.
- Rowan Atkinson tries to keep the town of Gasforth safe as Inspector Raymond Fowler in *The Thin Blue Line*.
- Julia Sawalha (Saffron on *Absolutely Fabulous*) plays the daughter of another difficult mother in the first series of *Faith in the Future*.
- *Four Weddings and A Funeral* (written by *Vicar of Dibley* author Richard Curtis) sweeps the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards, with Hugh Grant winning for Best Actor. In the television comedy categories Steve Coogan's *Four Fights, Two Weddings, and a Funeral* (no relation or even a parody of the movie) is the big winner. Joanna Lumley is named Best Actress.
- The National Television Awards names *Men Behaving Badly* (the far superior Brit version that inspired a poor American cousin) best comedy.
- Penelope Keith plays a woman who suddenly finds herself raising her grandchildren in *Next of Kin*.

1996

- Jennifer Saunders puts an end to *AbFab* with a special appropriately titled *The Last Shout*.
- *Father Ted*, the wonderful sitcom about a disparate group of priests stuck together on a remote island, wins the BAFTA award for Best Comedy.
- Patricia Routledge is voted all-time Favorite Actress and David Jason is chosen as all-time Favorite Sitcom Performer by BBC viewers in a special poll for the Beeb's 60th birthday. All-time favorite sitcom is *Men Behaving Badly*.

1997

- *Red Dwarf's* Craig Charles stars in the pirate sitcom *Captain Butler*.
- *Only Fools and Horses Christmas Special* wins the National Television Award for Best Comedy and David Jason wins for Best Comedy Performer.
- Stephen Fry receives great reviews for his role as Oscar Wilde in the film *Wilde*.

1998

- Mary Millar ("Our Rose" on *Keeping Up Appearances*) passes away from cancer.
- Dermot Morgan, award-winning star of *Father Ted*, suffers a heart attack and passes away just as the third series of this popular sitcom is airing in the UK.

1999

- Bill Owen (Compo from *Last of the Summer Wine*) passes away from cancer.
- Lenny Henry moves out of the kitchen and into the classroom when his hand at drama in the series *Hope and Glory*.
- Michael Palin is made a Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen's Millennium Honors List. He is given this honor for his service to the television industry, specifically the many travel programs he has made for the BBC.

2000

- The Millennium Dome opens in London. One of the features visitors can see is the short film *Blackadder Back and Forth*, which sends Edmund and Baldrick spiraling through various phases of history.



The Insider Episode Guide: To The Manor Born

Penelope Keith is truly one of the great ladies of British situation comedy. She excels at playing upper -class snobs, demonstrated by her scene-stealing turn as Margo Leadbetter in The Good Life (Good Neighbors). She followed this up with probably her most popular character - Audrey fforbes - Hamilton, the "lady" of Grantleigh Manor who falls on hard times after her husband passes away. She wants Grantleigh Manor tradition to continue, but is forced to sell it and finds that its new owner, Richard DeVere, has different ideas. The fabulous chemistry between Keith and her co-star Peter Bowles and the witty scripts that kept viewers guessing as to whether or not the two pair would get together made To The Manor Born a classic sitcom. A number of episodes are available on video and are highly recommended. Here's a quick glance at all twenty-one episodes.

Series 1, Episode 1: Grantleigh. After her husband passes away, Audrey fforbes-Hamilton is forced to sell the manor they shared is understandably not happy about this. She wants Grantleigh traditions to continue, but the new owner (Richard DeVere) has different ideas.

Episode 2, All New Together. DeVere takes over possession of Grantleigh and Audrey has to make due with the smaller Old Lodge house. DeVere and his mother, unaware that Audrey used to be lady of the manor, offer her the job of DeVere's social secretary.

Episode 3, Rhythms of the Earth: Audrey tries to instill in DeVere the responsibilities that come with being owner of Grantleigh. This includes attending church, which is something of a shock to DeVere, who usually spends Sundays drinking coffee and doing the crossword in the newspaper.

Episode 4, Nation's Heritage: DeVere makes some changes to Grantleigh, including the destruction of an antique fireplace. Once again, Audrey tries to instill him the notion of tradition.

Episode 5, The Summer Hunt Ball: It's time for the annual Summer Hunt Ball, about which DeVere knows nothing. Getting Audrey to help leads to quite a bit of back and forth and use of psychology, but they end up crossing a bridge in their relationship in more ways than one.

Episode 6, The Grape Vine: Audrey's lack of money causes her to have to cancel her annual vacation. However, pride gets the best of her and she ends up faking a tan as well as a trip to Spain.

Episode 7, A Touch of Class. Audrey has to butt in when she discovers that a television commercial is being made with DeVere as Lord of the Manor. Little does she know how her meddling will interfere with the finished product.

Christmas Special: The First Noel. It is Audrey's first Christmas away from the Manor, but she will not let DeVere take away her one remaining responsibility: finding the holy crib for the church.

Series 2, Episode 1: The New Farm Manager. DeVere employs a new farm manager, who sets out to make the Estate more efficient. This brings him into conflict with Audrey. Brabinger (Audrey's butler) is ill, so Richard suggests that Audrey 'borrow' his butler, Old Ned, as a temporary. Audrey agrees, but Ned suspects that Richard is just trying to get him out of his cottage. In fact, Richard is merely planning to have all of the cottages renovated.

Episode 2, The Spare Room: A friend Audrey hasn't seen in ages shows up and turns out to be much more attractive than Audrey remembers her. This causes some jealousy when DeVere shows an interest in Audrey's formerly pudgy friend.

Episode 3, Never Be Alone: A very expensive piece of china goes missing from DeVere's house and

Audrey doesn't like being put under suspicion.

Episode 4, Remnant of a Garden Flower: When Arthur Smith makes his yearly visit to Grantleigh, Audrey is unable to be as charitable to this itinerant worker as she normally is. Richard agrees to help him out, but it turns out that Arthur is better at helping himself than anyone realizes.

Episode 5, The Honours List: Audrey does quite a turnabout when she mistakenly believes that the person in running for an honor from the Queen is none other than DeVere.

Episode 6, Vive Le Sport: Audrey injures her back just as DeVere asks her to go on a skiing holiday in Switzerland.

(continued on page 15, column 2)

To The Manor Born cast members:

*Audrey fforbes-Hamilton...Penelope Keith
Richard DeVere...Peter Bowles
Marjory Frobisher...Angela Thorne
Brabinger...John Rudling
Mrs. Polouvicka...Daphne Heard
Ned...Michael Bilton
Rector...Gerald Sim*

The Great Detectives



Murder, Mystery, Mayhem and the Writers Who Create It

It takes a good writer to know one and Nigel Williams, host of BBC's *The Great Detectives*, is a good writer. He is not well known in the States, but Williams has authored a number of critically acclaimed comic novels. *The Great Detectives* allows him to turn his eye to mystery writers and he artfully takes viewers through the lives and minds of four great masters of this genre: Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler and Georges Simenon.

The result is an intriguing mix of biography, psychology, and a glimpse into the writing life. The stories behind these authors are told through interviews, readings from novels, vintage photos, recordings, and more. Williams also delves into the characters made famous by each and does an excellent job of putting the authors in historical perspective.

The series is well represented by the episode on Agatha Christie. Williams traces her development from a solitary child of the Victorian era who lived in her imagination to a shy, reclusive woman who just wanted to be left alone to write. He delves into the mystery of her brief disappearance (which was never fully explained but may have had something to do with her husband's affair with another woman), talks to a homeopath about the various poisons Christie used in her novels, visits places she used as settings in her novels and in the end participates in a mystery murder weekend with other Christie fans. (Spoiler alert: Williams is the killer.)

The episode on Raymond Chandler is similarly thorough and thought provoking. Williams parallels the careers of the author of such classics as *The Big Sleep* (who worked as a business executive until he was into his 40s and got fired for his excessive drinking) and the one other detective fiction writer he truly respected – Dashiell Hammett.

There are some striking similarities between the two. Both hated their fathers, began their writing careers with the same pulp magazine, and ended up big fans of the bottle. Williams also explores how times had changed from the age of Dame Agatha. There is a lot of difference between the cerebral fiction of Christie to the more violent world of Chandler's creation Phillip Marlowe and Hammett's Sam Spade, but that may also be explained by the fact that their novels are set in America, where people are more prone to settle their differences with a gun. On a visit to Chandler/Hammett haunts in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Williams encounters "The Hammett Society," one of whom lives in the same room where Hammett wrote *The Maltese Falcon*. The room has been kept almost exactly the same way it was when Hammett lived there, right down to an alarm clock that belonged to him and a "Murphy bed" that emerges from a closet to change the living room into a bedroom.

These are only a few of the nice touches. The literary skill and wit Williams brings to this series is a real bonus and makes it compelling even for those who aren't necessarily fond of this genre. The timing for *The Great Detectives* is perfect, given how many fans await the latest works of Sue Grafton or legal thrillers by John Grisham and Scott Turow. In fact, what's also nice about *The Great Detectives* is that it's almost as much a tribute to the fans as it is to the writers. In an age where passive activities such as watching television and movies are accepted as the norm, it's encouraging to see that there are still people who want to be challenged and keep their minds actively engaged.



BITS AND BOBS

The UK paper *The Daily Mail* recently came out with their list of the Top 100 television shows of all time. Here's their Top Twenty.

1. Fawlty Towers
2. The Morecambe and Wise Show
3. Dad's Army
4. Only Fools and Horses
5. Inspector Morse
6. One Foot in the Grave
7. Father Ted
8. The Simpsons
9. NYPD Blue
10. Frasier
11. Pride and Prejudice
12. Cheers
13. Talking Heads
14. Boys from the Blackstuff
15. The Singing Detective
16. Till Death Do Us Part
17. Twin Peaks
18. Abigail's Party
19. Blackadder
20. Hancock's Half Hour

What's interesting is the predominance of comedy, which goes to prove some people's opinion that comedy is harder to do than drama.

Have any comments or additions to this list? E-mail me at bcdigest@soltec.com or send snail mail to the address on page 2.

THE INSIDER QUOTABLE:

"You are to be congratulated, my friend. We live in an age where illness and deformity are commonplace, and yet Ploppy, you are without a doubt the most repulsive individual I've ever met. I would shake your hand, but I fear it would come off."

-Rowan Atkinson as Edmund Blackadder

Get to Know Dawn French

Where you may have seen her: As Geraldine Granger in *The Vicar of Dibley* or in *Murder Most Horrid*.

Can also be seen in: *French and Saunders* with her sometime partner Jennifer Saunders.

Born: Plymouth, England on October 11, 1957. Her father was in the Royal Air Force and her mother was the owner of a poodle parlor who later became a counselor.

How She Got the Gig: Dawn trained as teacher at the Central School of Speech and Drama, where she met Jennifer Saunders. They began performing at a club called *The Comic Strip* purely as a lark. This led to their own series and various solo projects for the both of them.

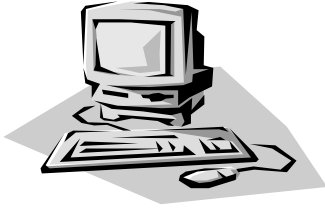
Home Life: Dawn is married to fellow comic Lenny Henry and they have an adopted daughter Billie.

Career High Point: Getting to "snog" Hugh Grant during a Comic Relief special. The kiss was promised only if Dawn and Jennifer raised a certain amount of money during their stint as Comic Relief hosts.

Quick Bit of Trivia: Dawn owns a chain of clothing stores in the UK with fashions geared towards the larger woman.

Next projects: New series of *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Murder Most Horrid*, plus the Ben Elton directed film *Maybe Baby*, due in June.

Proof That She's One Talented Lady: She pulled off an almost believable impersonation of Leonardo DiCaprio on a French and Saunders special.



SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

Web Reviews by David Bibb

Rimmerworld: The Theme Park for Rimmer Lovers http://members.xoom.com/rimmette/_rimmer.htm

Anyone who has ever surfed the net has noticed that a lot of sites look very similar. Rimmerworld is not one of them.

The surfer is first treated to a midi version of *The Rimmer Experience*. The site then features a virtual ride through "The Rimmer Experience" and as the site says, "It's kind of like the Disney World ride *It's a Small World* only much more annoying." The Terrorform ride, which explores the recesses of Arnold Rimmer's mind, is truly something to see and Dr. Donald's telling of Rimmer's past lives is great.

Don't neglect the Gift Shop, filled with exclusive Rimmer-based merchandise. The Red Dwarf java games are fun (and are linked from www.planetsmeg.com.) The most normal things on the site are the Red Dwarf, Rimmer, and Chris Barrie related links that the site provides.

Rating: 4 1/2 out of 5 mouse clicks

Red Dwarf MIDI Song Site <http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/Studio/2112/>

A very simple site, but one that deserves a lot of respect. The graphics are very nicely done but, more importantly, the site features a *Rimmer Experience* à la Handel, a Hungarian version of the main theme, the end theme, the Santana night end theme, and a Billy Joel version of *Tounge Tied*. Most of these tunes are available in both midi and .MP3 formats with more on the way.

Rating: 4 mouse clicks

As Time Goes By - Episode Guide <http://www.sff.net/people/bonnie/astimegoesby.html>

As the title indicates, the site is an episode guide but a very good one. It has detailed descriptions of each episode with pictures and snippets of dialogue. A nice touch is the way

the trivia quiz and the cast list for every episode are linked to the top of each episode. If you are a fan of the show you will certainly enjoy the descriptions of the episodes.

Rating: 3 1/2 clicks

Judi Dench Page <http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/Alley/2595/judid.html>

A biographical page with the emphasis on Dame Judi's theatrical performances. It is nicely illustrated with photographs of Dame Judi in costume. A number of videos for sale are listed with links provided to amazon.com for purchase. The site includes information on where to see the actress but, unfortunately there have been no updates since April 15, 1999. The biographical information and pictures are nicely done, but it is a pity the site doesn't seem to be updated very often.

Rating: 3 mouse clicks

To The Manor Born International Appreciation Society's Web Site <http://homepages.which.net/~roger.still/index.htm>

A promising work in progress, this page offers some good information and photographs.

The site is divided into "Mrs. Pattersons Village Shop Window" where items "Wanted" or "For Sale" may be advertised, the "Marlbury Echo" for the posting of submitted articles and current news, "Mrs. Beechams Cook Book" for favorite country recipes, and "The County Library" page for information on all things to do with the show and a brief episode guide including "cuttings."

My favorite section is the "County Library" where I learned things about the show I never dreamed of thinking about but which were fun. For example, the Manor House and lodge



(Internet Reviews - cont'd.)

are not close together (as it is in the show) but the impression is created with a lightweight replica of the gatepost. I also enjoyed the way they provided bits of the script and book to prove a point. Another strong section is "Mrs Poo's Old Czechoslovakian Sayings" which has always reminded me of the old polish sayings from the American series *Banacek*.

The site is a collaboration by fans who have certainly done a great job. They say they are still working on it.

Rating: 4 mouse clicks.

Quotes from "To the Manor Born"

<http://blues.helsinki.fi/~lamminjo/tmbquotes.html>

A simple site that lists some of the best quotes from the show. It is not fancy but it is fun.

Rating: 3 mouse clicks

Muldoon's British Comedy Page

<http://www.freenetpages.co.uk/hp/muldoon/british.html>

A simple but useful site composed of links to quite a number of web sites devoted to British comedies.

Rating: 3 mouse clicks.

ALSO RECOMMENDED

As Time Goes By Mailing List and Web Site:

<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Lot/8254/atgb.html>

The Official Red Dwarf Web Site:

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

Red Dwarf Links Page:

<http://www.afn.org/~afn15301/dwarf.html>

Chris Barrie Fan Site:

<http://www.chris-barrie-fans-site.co.uk>

Disclaimer: Please remember that the World Wide Web is an ever-changing place. Sites close down or move on a regular basis. The sites reviewed and recommended in this issue are operational at the date of publication. The Insider regrets any inconvenience caused by sites that move or close.

David Bibb is a Missouri-based Internet and British comedy addict.



(To The Manor Born Episode Guide - cont'd.)

Series 3, Episode 1: Be Prepared. Audrey decides she needs to reacquaint herself with the out-of-doors and she goes on a disastrous picnic with her best friend Audrey, during which they are chased by a bull. However, she also goes on a more pleasurable picnic with Richard.

Episode 2: The Age of the Train. Audrey is upset when Richard sees the closure of the local railway station as an opportunity to open a "Cash and Carry" place.

Episode 3: Horse Power. Audrey's Roll Royce is on the fritz and she has no money to repair it. Richard, in the meantime, has a new helicopter. However, Audrey manages to upstage him in her own inimitable style with the help of some horses from the stable she's watching over.

Episode 4: The Birds and the Bees. Audrey takes up beekeeping in an attempt to earn extra money. At the same time, Richard develops an interest in bird-watching, and discovers a rare bird on the estate that turns out to be a Bee-Eater. How will Audrey cope?

Episode 5: A Wife's Prerogative. Audrey agrees to act as Richard's wife to help him land a lucrative contract with a glamorous French businesswoman.

Episode 6: Connections in High Places. Richard faces a crisis as some of his Board of Directors plot to have him removed as Chairman. Audrey calls in the Big Gun - her influential Uncle Grevil - to help avert the crisis.

Episode 7: Home. The business was saved, but Richard must continue to raise capital to keep it afloat. This is not as easy as it seems and De Vere is forced to put the Estate up for sale. Following the death of Uncle Grevil, however, Audrey's inheritance once again allows her to live "to the manor born." She buys back Grantleigh and marries Richard. *Note: this episode is still among the highest rated single programs ever aired in the UK. Over 24 million viewers watched the marriage of Audrey and Richard.*

Original air dates:

- **Series 1: 30 September - 11 November 1979.**
- **Special: 25 December 1979.**
- **Series 2: 5 October - 9 November 1980.**
- **Series 3: 18 October - 29 November 1981.**

BBC Radio 2 aired ten specially recorded episodes of *To The Manor Born* during 1997. Four of these episodes were written specifically for radio while the others were adaptations of the TV scripts. Penelope Keith reprised her role as Audrey, but the role of Richard was voiced by Keith Barron.



Judi Dench (cont'd. from page 1)

After six frustrating months at art school, she discovered her true vocation was on stage, so she followed her brother and attended London's Central School of Speech and Drama. She quickly established herself as an exceptional actress and won all the major student awards while her spare time was spent taking in the major West End plays.

The numerous school productions she'd appeared in followed by her training at Central left her well prepared for theatrical life. She auditioned for the Old Vic and, thinking that she'd only get small roles, ended up instead her first time out with the starring role as Ophelia in *Hamlet*. Reviews were mixed - some even unkind - but it was the beginning of an apprenticeship that would see her tackle most of the major roles over the next few years.

One of the most memorable of these roles was as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by the legendary Franco Zeffirelli. Story has it that she poured so much into this role that during one performance, her cry of "Where are my father, and my mother, Nurse?" was followed by someone in the audience responding "Here we are darling, in Row H."

It was none other than Reginald Dench, visibly (and audibly) moved by his daughter's performance.

In the ensuing years, Judi appeared on-stage in the UK and went on tours of Africa, Australia and Japan. It was not all Shakespeare and classics, however. In the mid-60s she spent nine months singing and dancing her way through the London production of *Cabaret*, playing none other than Sally Bowles herself. In fact, Dench was supposed to have played the original Grizabella (the glamour cat) in *Cats*, but a leg injury forced her to bow out and Elaine Page stepped in to take her place.

During a Royal Shakespeare Company tour of Japan and Australia, Judi's life changed when the deepening relationship between her and fellow classical actor Michael Williams led him to propose marriage. They were wed in 1971, though not without some difficulty stemming from the fact that Williams is Catholic and Judi was brought up Quaker. A year later (on September 24, 1972), Judi gave birth to a daughter named Tara, who has always been referred to as Finty.

In a couple of respects, Finty is an example of history repeating itself. Judi was 37 when her daughter was born, the same age as own mother was when she gave birth to Judi. Also, Finty is now following in the family footsteps as an actress, having also trained at

the Central School of Speech and Drama just like her mother. In fact, Finty can be seen in the film *Mrs. Brown*.

Most of Dame Judi's professional life has been spent on the stage, but she has also – albeit somewhat late in life – left her indelible mark on the worlds of film and television. This has allowed her talent to be brought to an audience outside the rarified world of the London and New York theater.

Since 1992, she has become very well known to Americans in the PBS favorite *As Time Goes By*.

The premise of *ATGB* is similar to a series Dench did with her husband from 1981-1984 entitled *A Fine Romance*. This sitcom was written by *As Time Goes By* writer Bob Larbey and dealt with a similar theme of romance between two not-so-young people.

In *As Time Goes By*, Dench plays Jean Pargetter, a former nurse who now runs a secretarial agency. Through something of a fluke, Jean is reunited with her former flame Lionel after more than thirty years. The pair should never have lost contact in the first place, but letters that went undelivered while Lionel was in Korea made them think the other didn't care.

With a little push from her daughter, Jean and Lionel (played by the fabulous Geoffrey Palmer) rekindle their romance, move in together, and do what they should have done years before – they get married.

The emphasis of *ATGB* has not solely been on the romantic renaissance of Jean and Lionel. In the course of events, Lionel publishes his memoirs about his life as owner of a coffee plantation in Kenya and a mini-series based on this book is made by American television. These episodes contain some sharp barbs about how US television works.

There are also subplots about Lionel's father and stepmother Madge, who are two seniors living their second childhood and indulging in rowdy, dangerous behavior.

As Time Goes By is definitely a class act. Dench and Palmer are two heavy-hitters at the top of their game, as is writer Bob Larbey. They are ably supported by a wonderful cast. The only characters who seem to get the short shrift are Jean's daughter Judy (played by Moira Brooker) and her pal Sandy, played by Jenny Funnell. They're not given much of an opportunity to play "meaty" scenes, but Philip Bretherton gets to have a lot of fun as Lionel's agent; the glib, show-bizzy "hey, babe" type Alistair. Frank Middlemass and Joan



Simms bring a youthful enthusiasm to their roles as Lionel's father and stepmother.

Particularly enjoyable as well are the episodes where Jean shows flashes of jealousy over Lionel's very attractive secretary Daisy. Her solution is to stick him with the incompetent and unattractive yet loveable Mrs. Flack. In the end, though, Jean gets over her worries and lets Daisy return to work for Lionel.

Why as *As Time Goes By* struck such a chord with viewers? Classy pedigree aside, it demonstrates one of the strengths of British television in that it's not afraid to show characters who aren't young, thin, gorgeous and living in incredible apartments. *ATGB* isn't exactly reality-based programming either, but the characters are much easier to relate to than those on many American shows.

It also demonstrates the advantage of a writer being left alone to do his own thing. Many American programs are written by "committee," but most British programs are normally written by one or two people at most. Bob Larbey (who along with John Esmonde also wrote the classic *The Good Life/Good Neighbors*) knows the romantic comedy genre and gives the actors some wonderful lines and situations to sink their teeth into. He also pulls off the near miraculous by not letting things fall apart once Jean and Lionel marry.

The magic comes from the interplay between Palmer and Dench, who, as one reviewer put it, "make the art of comedy look easy." Palmer is a sitcom veteran whose hang-dog face and excellent timing make him perfect for situation comedies. His talent has been on display with roles in *The Rise and Fall of Reginald Perrin* and *Butterflies*. He also guest starred in episodes of *Fawlty Towers* and *Blackadder Goes Forth*. His film appearances have included two with John Cleese - in *Clockwise* and also *A Fish Called Wanda*.

He also appeared with Dench in her Academy Award nominated performance as *Mrs. Brown*.

This touching film chronicles the relationship between Queen Victoria and John Brown. Palmer plays the Queen's private secretary, Henry Ponsonby, while Scottish comedian Billy Connolly plays Brown, who is brought from Scotland to help the Queen get over her grief at the death of her husband Prince Albert. The two become quite attached, even though tongues wag because Brown is a commoner.

Then Dench won the Academy Award for her eight fabulous minutes as Queen Elizabeth in *Shakespeare In Love*. A small role, to be sure, but one which left no doubt of her total mastery of her craft.

Like her stage career, however, Dench's film have not been all Shakespeare and classics. She can also be seen giving James Bond his orders as M in the Bond films starting with *Goldeneye*.

Why did she choose this role? Despite the fact that she liked the idea of being in a blockbuster, she also relished the thought of telling Bond that he was a "sexist, misogynist dinosaur."

Once again, M is not a large role, but it is a crucial one that has expanded each time Judi has played it, probably because she has the authority and presence to pull it off and make the most of it.

After her critically acclaimed film work, she returned to the stage as the star of a new work by renowned playwright David Hare.

In *Amy's View*, Dench plays Esmé Allen, a well-known West End actress whose fortunes fluctuate over the years. The visit of her young daughter Amy, with a new boyfriend whose beliefs are diametrically opposed to her mother, begins a series of tragic events. In the end, this is a generational play about the long-term struggle between a strong mother and her loving daughter.

Advanced bookings for this play were already doing well before the Oscar ceremony, but soared after Dench won the Academy Award. She would eventually add a Tony to her collection for *Amy's View*.

Professionally, everything seemed to be going Judi's way, but over the past few years her personal life has hit a few snags.

First was the premature birth of her grandson, which eerily echoed a scene from *Amy's View*. During Act 1 of this play, Esmè guesses correctly that her daughter is pregnant. This scene would come to have a deep personal meaning for Judi when in June of 1997 Finty gave birth to a son named Sam. Her parents had not realized that she was pregnant.

The ensuing publicity caused the already publicity-shy Dench to become even more guarded. Then last summer, during the run of *Amy's View*, she had to return home when her husband was taken seriously ill and diagnosed with cancer. Instead of seeing her understudy, many theatergoers decided to cancel their tickets.

From Shakespeare to Sally Bowles, from tragedy to romantic comedy, Dench has proven as time goes by that she can do it all. Fans will be glad to know that a



new series of *ATGB* is in the works, so it won't be long until we get an update on the lives of Jean and Lionel. For those who need to catch up, videotapes are easily acquired at bookstores such as Borders and online at sites such as amazon.com

Let us hope that the Great Dame of the British screen and stage continue to grace us with her presence for a long time to come.



JUDI DENCH - OTHER NOTABLE APPEARANCES

THEATER

- 1989 - Directed Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson in *Look Back In Anger*.
- 1993 - Directed *Romeo and Juliet* at London's Regent's Park Theatre.
- 1995 - Played Desirée Armfeldt in Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*.

TELEVISION

- 1980 - 1983 - *A Fine Romance*, co-starring her husband Michael Williams.

FILM

- 1985 - *A Room with a View*.
- 1986 - *84 Charing Cross Road*
- 1987 - *A Handful of Dust*.
- 1995 - Kenneth Branagh's version of *Hamlet*.

GEOFFREY PALMER - NOTABLE APPEARANCES

TELEVISION

- 1963 - *Dr. Who: The Mutants, The Silurians*
- 1976 -78 - *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*.
- 1978 - 1983 - *Butterflies*.
- 1984 - *Fairly Secret Army*.
- 1986 - *Executive Stress* (first series only)
- 1986 - *Hot Metal* (first series only)
- 1996 - *The Legacy of Reginald Perrin*.

FILM

- 1973 - *O Lucky Man*
- 1986 - *Clockwise*.
- 1988 - *A Fish Called Wanda*.
- 1995 - *The Madness of King George*
- 1997 - *Tomorrow Never Dies*



(*A Salute to British Comedy... - cont'd. from page 3*)

Sandwiched between the two Croft/Lloyd farces is one of the most literate and critically acclaimed series ever produced in the UK. Especially in the sphere of political satire, nothing has ever had quite the bite of *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*.

These extraordinarily smart series were written by Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay. *Yes, Minister* won the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards for Best Comedy Series an incredible three years in a row and was apparently quite the favorite of former PM Margaret Thatcher. There can be no doubt she quite related to James Hacker, who has to maneuver his way through the machinations of government once he becomes a Minister and eventually becomes Prime Minister.

A Salute to British Comedy on American TV then winds up with highlights from three popular sitcoms of the 90s.

At the forefront is *Keeping Up Appearances*. Interviews with Patricia Routledge and Clive Swift shed light on the curious pairing of Richard and Hyacinth Bucket. Swift owns up to the fact that there's a bit of Richard in his own personality, while Routledge's admission that Lucille Ball was one of her "goddesses" makes Hyacinth's development into a much more physical character understandable.

It must be said that Ms. Routledge, now 70, is looking robust and vibrant. Fans may be a bit taken aback, however, by Routledge's own speaking voice and demeanor, which are not at all the shrill, domineering tones we're used to hearing from Hyacinth. But let's not forget that this is a woman who has also done musical comedy and classics such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* on stage.

Waiting for God is next. Stars Stephanie Cole and Graham Crowden share stories of the dangerous stunts they were sometimes required to do. Cole's character of Diana Trent especially can come off as curmudgeonly and mean, but at heart this is a touching and often tender comedy about the residents of the Bayview Retirement Home. Its literate scripts and wonderful performances make it easy to understand why this would have been included.

The final entry is *As Time Goes By*, with Judi Dench and Geoffrey Palmer both on hand to comment about the show's popularity. An interesting bit of trivia they reveal is that the pictures of the younger Jean and Lionel seen over the opening credits are actually of Judi's daughter and Geoffrey's son.

All in all, this is a fond tribute that fans will enjoy because these are shows that have stood the test of time and that we don't mind seeing again and again. Look for *A Salute to British Comedy on American TV*, coming to many PBS stations during the March pledge drive.



(Red Dwarf - cont'd. from page 5)

original special. Lister became clean-cut, well dressed, and Caucasian, while Rimmer's trademark H was replaced with a marble. The plot was very similar to the very first *RD* episode, titled *The End*. A second pilot restored some of the quirks from the original (such as Rimmer's H), but fared no better.

The original, however, has aged well and gotten special treatment. In 1998, the early episodes were remastered and improved with updated computer imagery and digital stereo sound, making *RD* the first comedy series ever to be given a "face lift." This gave the entire series a more consistent feel, though to be fair, the overhaul also cleaned up some of the cheesy special effects that gave the show its charm in the first place.

In between series of the Dwarf, the actors have kept very busy. Robert Llewellyn has authored a couple of well-received novels and presented a game show called *Scrapheap*. Danny John-Jules (who had a bit of a hit record with *Tongue Tied*) appeared with Baldrick himself (Tony Robinson) in the popular children's sitcom *Maid Marian and her Merry Men*. Chris Barrie found great success as Gordon Brittas in *The Brittas Empire*, but failed to repeat that success with *A Prince Among Men*. His legal problems behind him, Craig Charles has done stand-up tours, and starred in the somewhat dire 1997 sitcom *Captain Butler*, and presented a show entitled *Robot Wars*.

So will the cast reunite? Speculation and rumors about a movie and a ninth series always run rampant, but as of this writing, nothing is set in stone. Robert Llewellyn claims that the movie will be shot this year, but fans have learned not to believe it until they see it.

No matter where their course takes them, however, fans show no sign of tiring of the adventures of the crew of *Red Dwarf*. As we leave the Starbug for now, let's sing along to the shows jaunty closing theme:

*It's cold outside, there's no kind of atmosphere
I'm all alone, more or less
Let me fly far away from here
Fun, fun, fun in the sun, sun, sun*

*I want to lie shipwrecked and comatose
Drinking fresh mango juice
Goldfish shoals nibbling at my toes
Fun, fun, fun in the sun, sun, sun
Fun, fun, fun in the sun, sun, sun*



FOR THE TRUE SMEGHEAD

Some Red Dwarf Trivia and Other Stuff

- The *Red Dwarf* theme music was written by Howard Goodall, who also wrote similarly memorable music for *Blackadder*. The closing song is sung by Jenna Russell.
- Producer/Director Ed Bye is married to American Ruby Wax, who has become very popular in the UK as a writer and television chat show hostess.
- Prior to *RD*, Grant Naylor wrote the lyrics to a novelty tune that became a number one single. It was called *The Chicken Song* and had been featured on the series *Spitting Image*.
- Smeg is the actual name of an Italian appliance manufacturer.
- Robert Llewellyn is married to Judy Pascoe, who played Camille in the *RD* episode of the same name.
- Several *Red Dwarf* novelizations have been published. They are:

Infinity Welcomes Careful Drivers

by Grant Naylor
ISBN 0-14-012437-3
Penguin, 1989

Better Than Life

by Grant Naylor
ISBN 0-14-012438-1
Penguin, 1990

Last Human

by Doug Naylor
ISBN 0-67-085255-4
Penguin, 1995

Backwards

by Robert Grant
ISBN 0-670-84574-4
Penguin, 1996