

**Editor's Chin-wag**

Greetings from the Britcom world, and I hope this issues finds you in good stead. Many thanks to all who continue to write with their ideas, inquiries and words of support for this newsletter.

We hope you keep the ideas coming, things you would like covered, series you would like profiled and the like. If you get this publication from a friend, we hope you will contact your PBS stations that broadcast British comedies and ask them to offer it.

More and more British comedies are coming to DVD, so I hope you will keep track in the *New Releases* section of this newsletter. If you want to own them, new series are being released nearly monthly. If you watch them broadcast through your local PBS station, please consider a pledge or volunteering during pledge drives. It is a great way to enjoy British comedies and to support them in your community.

*N. Scott Jones, Editor*

**As Time Goes By****One Part Comedy, Two Parts Charm**

*As Time Goes By* is a sweet and unexpectedly long-lasting romantic sitcom in which two masters of the genre, Geoffrey Palmer and Dame Judi Dench, made the art of comedy look easy.

Palmer played Lionel, an ex-army officer and Kenyan coffee planter who returns to England to write his memoirs, entitled *My Life in Kenya*. Seeking the help of a temporary secretary to take care of the typing, an agency offers him the services of Judith Pargetter. Attracted by her youthful vigor, Lionel invites her out to dinner but chances to meet, too, with her mother Jean.



*Geoffrey Palmer & Dame Judi Dench*

During the Korean War she and Lionel had been very close, intent on marriage, but one vital letter went astray and each thought the other had given up. The point now was, could the old fires be stoked after a 38-year parting? And what about the twice-married Judith, who was rather keen on Lionel herself? Such was the situation and the dilemmas at the start of the first series. As time went by *As Time Goes By* changed tack somewhat and in the middle period concentrated on getting Jean and Lionel back together. Eventually they cohabited and married but things were never that simple for the prickly couple who were both too independent to settle easily into married life.

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## *Comics Pay Tribute to Ronnie B in Westminster Abbey*

Tributes were paid to **Ronnie Barker** at his memorial service in Westminster Abbey. It's only the third time a comic has been so honoured there, after **Joyce Grenfell** in 1980 and **Les Dawson** in 1994.

Here's what his friends and colleagues said about him at the service.

**Ronnie Corbett**, delivering the eulogy: "Forty years without an argument. Forty years of unmitigated pleasure, thrills and laughs."

**Sir David Jason**: "I attribute most of what I've done and achieved to Ronnie Barker. I always called him the guvnor, which he was for me."

**June Whitfield**: "I would never call Ronnie a comedian. He was a different kind of actor. He just disappeared into the role he was playing - and magnificently."

**Michael Palin**: "He just had a lovely sort of confidence about him. He wasn't a great showbiz character or anything like that, but he just knew how to do it."

**Michael Parkinson**: "He was very shy, a man uneasy with the fame that came with the job."

The last word came from Barker himself, as a clip from an interview was played in which he said: "I suppose I would like to be remembered as one of the funniest men people have seen on TV. He did make us laugh."

Barker died in October, aged 76.

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*The Insider welcomes all correspondence, story ideas and requests for contributed articles. Send letters via e-mail to Editor N. Scott Jones at [scott@bbcinsider.com](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.com) or by snail mail to: The Insider, c/o Hayley Ostrager, BBC Worldwide Americas, Sixth Floor 747 3<sup>rd</sup> 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**



### *Cheesy Cleesey?*

*The Fawlty Towers star has recorded a World Cup anthem. Heaven help us all.*

*Well, it's nearly World Cup time, and that can only mean one thing - the bad football song. Not only is Frank Skinner and David Baddiel's Three Lions to be re-released (on June 5), but even John Cleese has got in on the act.*

*Going by the moniker The First Eleven, he's recorded a ditty called Don't Mention the World Cup, named after... well, take a wild guess. Cleese said: "It's a catchy tune, and hopefully you'll be hearing it on a football terrace near you, very soon. Come on England!"*

*The song - which is now available on iTunes - has been created with Dean Whitbread, who helps Cleese with his Podcasts, and co-writer Ashley Slater.*

*Meanwhile, the reissued version of Three Lions is the same version as used for the 1998 World Cup - they haven't bothered to update it.*

**Editor's Note: Posted on the Beeb Comedy Blog. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external websites.**



# ***ViewerPoints: From and For Viewers Like YOU***

## ***Red Dwarf: A Universe of Comedy***



### ***A Comedy Cult That Could Make Even a Trekkie Blush***

Rob Grant and Doug Naylor were a writing partnership for many years before they devised 'Red Dwarf'. Their writing credits included such diverse shows as 'Son of Cliché', 'Three of a Kind' and 'Carrott's Lib'. They went on to become Head Writers and Producers on 'Spitting Image'.

They joined the latter show when it was on the brink of cancellation due to disastrous ratings, and managed to double the audience figures within six shows. Grant Naylor also edited a best selling book of the series, and much to their embarrassment penned a number one single, *The Chicken Song*, which earned a silver disc.

There was a painful gap of three years between the writing of the pilot for 'Red Dwarf' and the transmission of the first series. The script was rejected by various BBC bigwigs until it was finally picked up by BBC North, based in Manchester.

Ratings for the first series (February to March 1988) were not too impressive, but a second series had already been commissioned and the BBC kept the faith. Series II was a ratings success. In series III, the insecure mechanoid, Kryten, became a permanent crew member, and Hattie Hayridge replaced Norman Lovett in the role of Holly.

There was a change of direction for series VII, with the departure of Rob Grant, only two episodes featuring Rimmer, and the introduction of Kristine Kochanski as a regular character. Rimmer returned full time for series VIII, and the entire crew of Red Dwarf was rebuilt by nanobots. Well, it's never been exactly predictable...

Dave Lister is the last human being in the universe. A lowly technician on the mining ship Red Dwarf, he wakes up one day to find that the rest of the crew have been killed by a radiation leak. He has been in stasis for three million years.

*(Continued next page)*

*Red Dwarf (Continued from previous page)*

He is doomed to drift in space for the rest of eternity with only two companions: the hologram of his former crew-mate, Rimmer, and a creature called Cat who has evolved from a pet he smuggled on board.

From series III onwards, they were joined by a mechanoid servant called Kryten, and from series VII, by the attractive human female, Kochanski. The scenario changed in the most recent series (VIII), in which the boys (and girl) from the Dwarf find the rest of the crew have been restored to life.

*Red Dwarf* is one of the most popular shows ever broadcast on *BBC TWO*.

From the outset, the writers took hold of the staples of science fiction and gave them a good shake. You might expect rogue robots, body swapping and quantum leaping in any SF genre show, but never before have the heroes been so un-heroic. Or, as Lister so memorably put it, "Don't give me the *Star Trek* crap. It's too early in the morning".

The loving parody of science fiction might have attracted a core following but *Red Dwarf* is much, much bigger than the sum of its gadgets and spaceships.

No sitcom works without memorable, well-played characters, and that's what you get in *Red Dwarf*. In particular, the relationship between Lister, (a loveable, hygienically-challenged Everyman) and Rimmer (self-loathing personified) is brilliantly written and performed.



## **ViewerPoints In The Post**



*The Insider is very interesting! How can we make it available to all of our Brit Com fans here in Hampton Roads?*

**Debbie, WHRO in Virginia**

**Debbie, I have added your station to the distribution list – Thanks! SJ.**

*The Insider is thoroughly enjoyable and informative. I look forward to each issue. Thanks.*

**Debbie, in Wisconsin**

*I love the insider and always look forward to receiving it in the mail. My all time favorite Brit Com is "As Time Goes By", but I do look forward to the others as well.*

**Jo, Somewhere in America**



### ***BritQuotient Trivia!***

1. In *As Time Goes By*, what is Lionel's favorite tea time snack?
2. In the same series, what is the occupation of Jean's 'boring' brother in law?
3. Lionel's eccentric father ultimately remarries a woman renowned for driving what type of car?
4. In his cameo appearance in *Fawlty Towers*, what breakfast food does Geoffrey Palmer's character end up preparing himself?

**Submit your answers to  
scott@bbcinsider.com and read them here  
in the next issue of *The Insider*.**

## ViewerPoints

### *The Hidden World of Radio Comedy & Britcom Influence*

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](http://www.british-emporium.com). She and her partner Alexandra Evans are dedicated and frequent volunteers at Dallas PBS station KERA.*

So you've had a hard day at work and want some comic relief to help you relax. Chances are you headed straight to the telly and tuned into your fave Britcom! It's hard to imagine life without the goggle-box, but in the pre-TV days of yore, the 'wireless' was the main source of home entertainment, and families used to gather around their prized radio set in the evenings. Did you know that before finding fame on TV, many of our favorite stars such as Peter Cook, Ronnie Barker, Stephen Fry and Tony Hancock already had distinguished careers performing in long-running shows on BBC radio? And many hit comedies like "*Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*" aired on the radio long before appearing on the small screen. So if you're on the lookout for new sources of classic comedy, listen up for some great news - vintage radio is seeing a revival!

The wonders of the internet coupled with new iPod technology mean that classic audio comedy is now accessible to Britcom fans of all ages - all over the world. Or as Larry Groebe, Britcom fan and cast member of Texas Radio Theatre, a North Texas-based audio theatre company puts it, "You can now listen to '*Round The Horne*' around the clock. Podcasting is giving people a lot of fresh choices, and it's put a dent in the everyone-gets-the-same-DJ-and-music trap that American radio has fallen into. As a result, many people are rediscovering the fascination of the spoken word. So even if you don't exactly "tune in" to broadcast comedy anymore, it's actually easier to listen to it than it has been in a long time". I couldn't agree more. There's a wealth of British radio humor from the 50's-60's simply waiting to be re-

discovered, and I'm enjoying listening to early "before-they-were-famous" performances by my fave comedy actors. I've also begun to appreciate how skillfully written this vintage, almost 'forgotten', comedy material really was.

Traditionally, we Brits have made it a habit to tune into the wireless. We've grown up with Beeb radio chattering away in the background while we've got on with our everyday lives, and we depend on it as a reliable source of news, information, drama...and funny stuff. Back from the days of '*Forces Radio*', which popularized working class humor for the troops and helped get Brits through the dreadful war, it's always been a beloved source of light entertainment.

Almost every Britcom star has performed on the radio at some point in their lives. Andrew Sachs, who played Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*, once told me that early on, he practiced his comedy skills during repeated stage performances in various farces. But there's no clowning around or pratfalls on the radio - without visual distractions for the audience, comedy voice actors rely on a high degree of vocal skill and timing - characters & emotions have to be portrayed solely by masterful voice-acting. So it's probably true to say that many aspiring comics were able to perfect their techniques on the radio before making the successful leap to TV.

Groebe has also produced and directed a number of audio plays for TRT. When asked what skills he looks for in potential cast members, he reveals that he "looks for someone who can do with voice alone what most actors do with their whole body. In real life, most of us tend to drone a bit when we talk. For an audio performance, I'm looking for an extra edge of intensity in the way they read, plus a sense of dramatic timing in where they place the words and where they pause. We love to find people with a wide range of voices - the female who can switch between an aging grandmother and a young girl is great for the play and great for the audience."

*(Continued on page 14)*

# Special Feature

*Meet cast members of...*



## *As Time Goes By*

Charming, funny, moving, warm...all are appropriate adjectives to describe this charming series that is as much about mature relationships as it is traditional British comedy. Dench and Palmer are key elements of one of the most successful and long-running comedies from the BBC.

### **Dame Judi Dench as Jean Pargetter**

**Dame Judith Olivia Dench**, CH, DBE (born 9 December 1934), known as **Dame Judi Dench**, is an Academy Award-winning English actor born in North Yorkshire.

In her native country, Dame Judi has developed a reputation as arguably the greatest actress in post-World War II history, primarily through her work in theatre, which has been her main forte throughout her career. She has more than once come first in polls to find Britain's best actress

She received her professional training at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London and made her professional debut as Ophelia in *Hamlet* in Liverpool in 1957. She subsequently spent several seasons in repertory in Oxford and Nottingham. In 1961, she joined the Royal Shakespeare Company and made numerous appearances with the company in Stratford and London over the next two decades, winning several best actress awards.

Dench has also made numerous appearances in the West End and with the National Theatre in London. She is a multiple winner of the main awards for performances on the London stage, including a record six Laurence Olivier Awards. She has also appeared with success on Broadway in *Amy's Room*.

As she enters her seventies, Dame Judi remains probably the biggest draw on the London stage. She is often compared to Dame Maggie Smith, another British actress of the same generation, with who she has appeared in several movies and on stage in David Hare's two-hander *Breath of Life*.

Her many television appearances include the series *As Time Goes By* and *A Fine Romance*. She has also occasionally directed plays. She returned to the West End stage in April 2006 in *Hay Fever* alongside Peter Bowles, Belinda Lang and Kim Medcalf. If you are interested in catching the show, be advised the limited run ends on August 5, 2006

Judi Dench was created an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) in 1970, and raised to Dame Commander (DBE) in 1998. She was made a Companion of Honour (CH) in 2005.

In 1971 she married British actor Michael Williams and they had their only child, Tara Cressida Williams (aka "Finty Williams"), on 24 September 1972. Their daughter later became an actor like her parents. Dame Judi starred with her husband in the 1980s British sitcom, *A Fine Romance*. Michael Williams died of lung cancer, aged 65, in 2001.

Her notable relatives include Emma Dench, eminent Roman historian at Birkbeck College, London. Today, she is a patron of Friends' School Saffron Walden.

## **Geoffrey Palmer as Lionel Hardcastle**

Born in London, England, 4 June 1927. Married: Sally; children: Charles and Harriet. Began career as unpaid trainee assistant stage manager at the Q Theatre, London; subsequently became popular star of situation comedies; has also appeared on stage, in films and on the radio.

Geoffrey Palmer is one of British television's most reliable actors, appearing in several of the most popular situation comedies of the last 20 years or so and on occasion taking the lead role himself.

With his bloodhound features and lugubrious voice and manner, Palmer is instantly familiar in whatever role he plays. Not only is his face at once recognizable from the situation comedies he has appeared in, but his voice is doubly well known from his frequent employment as a voice-over artist for television commercials (notably for Audi cars). After serving his apprenticeship as an actor in the theater, Palmer emerged as an accomplished and individual performer in television situation comedy through his casting as the absent-minded eccentric Jimmy, brother-in-law to Leonard Rossiter's Perrin in *The Rise and Fall of Reginald Perrin*. Forever apologizing for turning up at the Perrin household in search of a meal after yet another "cock-up on the catering front," Palmer's Jimmy was manifestly appealing, though divorced from reality and pathetically woebegone. These qualities were clearly ideal for situation comedy and, soon after the end of the Perrin series, Palmer was back on the screen on a regular basis playing Wendy Craig's other half in Carla Lane's hit series *Butterflies*. As manic-depressive dentist Ben Parkinson, Palmer provided extremely sturdy support to Craig herself, alternately bewildered at his wife's outbursts and endearingly patient and clumsy in his efforts to understand her frustrations--though he could also be stubborn, tactless and impervious to suggestion when he chose.

Palmer returned to the dottiness of Jimmy in the Perrin series when he went on to play the comically unhinged Major Harry Kitchener Wellington Truscott, the central character in *Fairly Secret Army*. Convinced that the country was on the brink of chaos due to the machinations of the political left, Truscott was committed to forming his own army to counter the revolution that he feared was just around the corner. Thanks largely to Palmer's performance as Truscott this seemingly unpromising scenario fared reasonably well, with the dotty major proving surprisingly lovable in his futile attempts to muster a competent force, despite his reactionary views and rabidly bigoted attitude towards those of differing political opinions.

His subsequent series, *Executive Stress* and *As Time Goes By*, both saw Palmer back in more familiar sitcom territory, playing belligerently adorable partners in support of strong female stars, in the first instance Penelope Keith (in the role of her husband, Donald Fairchild) and in the latter case Judi Dench (in the role of her old flame, Lionel Hardcastle). *Executive Stress* proved a mixed success, though Palmer gave good value as always, but *As Time Goes By* settled in well as the plot traced the reunion of the two erstwhile lovers. Palmer played a returned colonial planning to write his memoirs, to be typed up by Dench's secretarial agency. This led to the gradual rebirth of their romance, culminating in their marriage in the 1995 series.

Palmer has occasionally ventured out of the sitcom territory with which he is usually associated. Notable examples of experiments in other fields of comedy have included guest appearances in such acclaimed shows as *Fawlty Towers* and *Blackadder Goes Forth*, in which he played Field Marshall Haig.

## **Jenny Funell as Sandy**

Biographical information is scarce. Here are some of her television, radio and stage credits:

2005, Television, Sandy, *AS TIME GOES BY* (SERIES 1-10 1991-2005), BBC Television, Sydney Lotterby

2004, Stage, Linda, *TOM DICK AND HARRY*, Theatre Royal Windsor, Ray and Michael Cooney

1999, Television, Linda Dodds, *MONSTER TELEVISION* (26 EPISODES), BBC Childrens Television, Jeremy Swan

1997, Stage, Polly, *FAMILY CIRCLES*, Richmond Orange Tree Theatre, Sam Walters

1997, Stage, Siobhan, *LOVE ME SLENDER*, Scarborough/Orange Tree Th, Auriol Smith

1996, Radio, Anya, *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, BBC World Service, David Hitchinson

1995, Stage, Elvira, *BLITHE SPIRIT*, Derek Nimmo Productions, John David

## Moira Brooker as Judy

See *Where Are They Now*, on page 12 of this newsletter.

## Philip Bretherton as Alistair

Philip was born in Preston, Lancashire (North England) in 1956. He studied Drama at Manchester University in 1973.

Philip's first professional stage appearance was at The 1975 Edinburgh Festival in 'Golden Oldie,' returning in 1979 in 'Once Upon A Crime.' Philip's hobbies are swimming, horse riding, cricket and he holds a jet ski license.

His TV credits include Ian Davenport (the flash car dealer and love-rat!) in *Coronation Street* (Granada), *New Tricks* (BBC), Alistair Deacon in *As Time Goes By* (BBC) opposite Judy Dench and Geoffrey Palmer, and Stefan Hauser in *Footballers' Wives*. His other TV work includes *Doctors* (BBC), *Swallow* (BBC), *Casualty* (BBC), *Real Women* (BBC), Eric 'Rico' Finnigan in *Hollyoaks* (Mersey TV), *Wing & A Prayer* (Thames), Gordon Struan in *Holding On* (BBC), *Sharman*, *The Paradise Club*, *Inspector Morse* and *Rumpole Of The Bailey*.

On the stage he also has a long list of credits including Flanders Kitteridge in *Six Degrees Of Separation* (Royal Exchange Manchester), Charles in *Blithe Spirit* (Theatr Clywd), Elyot in *Private Lives* (Glasgow Citizens Theatre), Warwick in *St Joan* (Birmingham Repertory Theatre), Jack in *The Importance Of Being Ernest* (Theatre Clwyd / Birmingham Rep / Toronto) and Stephen Fauldgate in *Beethoven's Tenth* (Watford Palace Theatre).

Philip's voice work is equally varied. In radio drama his credits include *As Time Goes By* (2 series on BBC Radio 2), *Anthony & Cleopatra* (Penguin Shakespeare Series), *Coriolanus* (Penguin Shakespeare Series), and *The Jury* (25 episodes BBC Radio 4).



*Central Cast of 'As Time Goes By,' At Taping in London*



## ***Series Profile: A Brief Look at Mr. Bean***



***“Bean.”***

The title character, played by Atkinson, is a selfish, childlike, sometimes ingenious, and generally likeable buffoon who frequently gets into hilarious situations due to his various schemes and contrivances. The show relies upon physical comedy, with Mr. Bean speaking very little dialogue. He lives alone in his small flat in Highbury, North London.

Mr. Bean often seems unaware of basic aspects of the way the world works, and the program usually features his attempts at what would normally be considered simple tasks, such as going swimming, redecorating or taking an exam. The humor largely comes from his original solutions to any problems and his total disregard for others when solving them. Indeed, some of Bean's actions occasionally have a particularly malevolent aspect to them.

At the beginning of episode two onwards, Mr. Bean falls from the sky in a beam of light. These opening sequences were initially in black and white in episodes 2 and 3, and were intended by the producers to show his status as an "ordinary man cast into the spotlight". However, later episodes showed Mr. Bean dropping from the night sky in a deserted London street, against the

backdrop of St. Paul's Cathedral. Later in the animated series he was shown to be an alien. Atkinson himself has acknowledged that Bean "has a slightly alien aspect to him".

Teddy (usually pronounced "Teddie" by Mr. Bean) is Mr. Bean's teddy bear, generally regarded as Mr. Bean's best friend. Although inanimate, he is invaluable as a trusted conspirator, easy to beat at chess and doubles as a good dish cloth or paint brush in an emergency. The bear is a dark brown, knitted oddity with button eyes and sausage-shaped limbs and invariably ends up broken in half or in various other states of destruction. Occasionally, Teddy seems to be almost animate, for example when Mr. Bean hypnotizes Teddy, snaps his fingers and the bear's head falls backwards as if he's fallen asleep instantly.

Mr. Bean's car, an MkIII Austin Mini, developed a character of sorts. At first, an orange Mini was Mr. Bean's vehicle of choice, but this was crashed at the end of the first episode. From then on, the car was lime green with a black bonnet. It made its first appearance in 'The Curse of Mr. Bean'.

*(Continued next page)*

The Mini was central to several antics, such as Mr. Bean getting dressed in it whilst driving or steering it whilst sitting in an armchair strapped to the roof. It also had a number of innovative security measures; Mr. Bean fitted the door with a bolt-latch and padlock, rather than use the lock fitted on the car, and he always removed the steering wheel instead of the key, which formed a running joke in several episodes, at one point deterring a car thief. The car was crushed by a tank in 'Back to School Mr. Bean', but returned in later episodes.

The Mini is often seen in conflict with a light blue Reliant Regal Supervan III, which will usually get tipped over, crashed into, bumped out of its parking space and so forth.

One of the original Mr. Bean Minis is on display at the Cars of the Stars Motor Museum in Keswick, northern England.

Although Mr. Bean is the only significant human character in the program, other characters appear, usually as foils for his various antics. There is only one recurring supporting character, his sometime "girlfriend" Irma Gobb (played by Matilda Ziegler). However, several notable British actors and comedians appear alongside Atkinson in sketches as various one-off supporting characters, including Richard Briers, Angus Deayton, Nick Hancock, David Schneider and Richard Wilson.



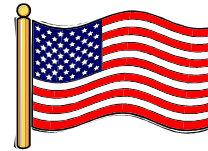
As Lionel progressed in the literary world complications arose. First there was Alistair, his smarmy agent who soon started dating Judith and who, to Lionel, represented all that was wrong with the modern generation. Then there was Lionel's eccentric father Rocky and his pursuit of his dream woman Madge. But the biggest diversion of all, outside of the central relationship, was the fact that Lionel had sold the story of his and Jean's romance to an American TV company, who were going to turn it into a glossy mini-series. Numerous episodes followed the progress of the production before they all got to see the finished article.

Throughout its run, *As Time Goes By* was a smoothly-purring vehicle, expertly driven by its lead actors and fine-tuned to perfection by writer Bob Larbey. (He had previously explored a similar entanglement-of-the-not-so-young scenario in *A Fine Romance* also co-starring Judi Dench.) The series was not suited to all tastes, being perhaps best appreciated by middle-class middle-agers, but it certainly was not as twee as it might have appeared on the surface, with some genuinely sharp and edgy moments puncturing its cozy image. Larbey himself must have enjoyed lampooning the US treatment of scripts and storylines and possibly attained some of his ammunition from his own experiences in such situations. The creation of the series was credited to Colin Bostock-Smith, although it has been reported that actor Geoffrey Palmer, who brilliantly portrayed the curmudgeonly but gentle Lionel, first took the idea to the BBC. By the time of its eighth season the show was enjoying considerable success in the USA where, despite her Oscar-winning film performances, Judi Dench was best known as Jean from *As Time Goes By*. The series proper ended in 2002 with the wedding of Judith and Alistair, and the departure of Canada- and marriage-bound Sandy (Jean's employee and Judith's friend) and Harry (her on-off boyfriend, a policeman), leaving Jean and Lionel quietly to themselves. A week later there was an hour-long compilation of highlights from the preceding 64 episodes in which the pair looked back at selected moments from their recent years together, ostensibly so that Lionel can consider writing part two of his autobiography. Three years later, the show's legion of devotees were given a chance to catch up on all the regulars in a two-part seasonal special which found Jean growing broody for grandchildren and cajoling a reluctant Lionel into discussing 'medical problems' with Alistair.



Sources: BBC and the BBC's Comedy Page

## New DVD/Video Releases



### **'Allo 'Allo – The Fifth Series – Parts 1 & 2**

Due for release on DVD: July 25, 2006

For Rene, the end of the war just cannot come soon enough. Relying on a camera hidden inside a potato, a long distance duck, and of course, his unparalleled charm, he aids the French Resistance in their outlandish plots to fool the Germans and end the war. But if Rene doesn't marry Denise, the leader of the Communist Resistance, it could mean the end of him! With his trusty piano player at his side, Rene manages to escape a giant circular saw, fake the death of the undertaker, blast his way into the bank's vault, and fit almost a million Francs down Lieutenant Gruber's trousers. Can Rene obtain the plans for the German invasion in time to save everyone? Or will the overbearing love of his female collaborators force him to save himself?

You can buy this series in separate part or the total 4 disc set which contains the following episodes:

Part 1 consists of 2 discs with the following episodes:

*Desperate Doings in the Dungeon*  
*The Camera in the Potato*  
*The Sausage in the Wardrobe*  
*Dinner with the General*  
*The Dreaded Circular Saw*  
*Otherwise Engaged*  
*A Marriage of Inconvenience*  
*No Hiding Place*  
*The Arrival of the Homing Duck*  
*Watch the Birdie*  
*Ren? - Under an Assumed Nose*  
*The Confusion of the Generals*  
*Who's for the Vatican*  
*Ribbing the Bonk*

Part 2 consists of 2 additional discs with the following episodes:

*The Reluctant Millionaires*  
*A Duck for Launch*  
*The Exploding Bedpan*  
*Going Like a Bomb*  
*Money to Burn*  
*Puddings Can Go Off*  
*Landmines for London*  
*Flight to Geneva*  
*Train of Events*  
*An Enigma Variation*  
*Wedding Bloss*  
*Down the Drain*  
*All in Disgeese*

### **As Time Goes by – The Reunion Specials** Recently Released

Share more love and laughter in the BBC's most enduring romantic comedy series. Now that Judith and Alistair are married, Jean hopes for grandchildren, much to Lionel's dismay. It's Jean's turn to be dismayed when a man who grew up on Lionel's coffee plantation arrives at the front door, calling Lionel his father. Extras include hilarious outtakes and bloopers, complete with exploding custard tarts, wardrobe malfunctions and muffed lines, plus a delightful behind-the-scenes look at the making of an episode, from first rehearsals through final taping, on location and before a live and appreciative audience.

**You can find or pre-order these new releases and/or collectibles at [www.bbcamerica.com](http://www.bbcamerica.com).**



# Special Feature

## *Reader Poll: "Where Are They Now?"*

*Which favorite actor would YOU like to hear about?*

### ***Whatever happened to Moira Brooker?***

*I am writing in regard to your Newsletter topic "Where are they now?" I would like to know more about MOIRA BROOKER, who plays Judy on "As Time Goes By". She is such an attractive good actress. My husband and I would not miss the show, it is so entertaining.*

*Thank you, Maria H.*

In addition to various cameo appearances in television series, Moira Brooker currently serves with two other colleagues providing presentation skills training for corporations through workshops and individual training programs.



*Moira Brooker*

Brooker is most famous in her role as Judith Hanson in the BBC romantic comedy series *As Time Goes By* (1992–2005). This program lasted eleven seasons and was popular in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States, where it was broadcast on public television stations.

Brooker's character is the daughter of Jean Pargetter, who was played by Judi Dench, Brooker's idol. Her romantic interest and ultimately her husband in the series, the multi-millionaire publisher Alistair Deacon, is played by Philip Bretherton. Her best friend and co-worker Sandy is played by Jenny Funnell.

Brooker is married to actor Anthony Milner and has two children. She and her family reside in Brighton.



*Where are they now?*

***Send your nominations for  
"Where Are They Now?" to  
[scott@bbcinsider.com](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.com)***



## ***BritCom LaughLinks***

### **As Time Goes By Central**

<http://www.atgb.com>

Nice site with hodgepodge of bits, bytes and snippets on the popular series. Some interesting trivia bits, photos and some good character profiles are housed here. Worth a look for the die-hard *ATGB* fan.

**Rating: 3 out of 5 mouse clicks**

### **Red Dwarf Homepage**

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

WOW. Rarely does the Beeb go this far in web content for a specific show, but Dwarfers will love this site. Pics, trivia, quizzes, robust content for this Britcom cult classic. You can surely take a deep dive here on all things *Red Dwarf*.

**Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks**

### **Rowan Atkinson Site**

<http://www.rowanatkinson.org>

If you love Rowan, you will love this site – very complete and includes Mr. Bean plus this star's complete works. The information here is very comprehensive and a must for any fan of Mr. Atkinson.

**Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks**

### **British Comedy Resources**

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

Phill's site is a great resource on basic information on just about any British comedy. Published here before, this site is worth repeating if you are interested in complete episode guides to a series. Not a lot of in-depth narrative, but robust with the basics.

**Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks**

### **Shop BBC America**

<http://www.bbcamerica.com/shop/shop>.

A great stop to find the latest DVDs, Britcom collectibles and other information on favorite shows. While it may be self-promoting to list it here, it is definitely worth checking out for upcoming releases and pre-orders.

**Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks**



### **Quotable Lines**

*"You know what they say about vodka Mrs. Slocomb, one's alright, two's the most, three under the table, four under the host!"*

**John Inman as Mr. Hunphries in *Are you Being Served?***

*Britcom Radio (cont'd. from page 5)*

So what are the advantages of audio comedy? The 'sound only' format is versatile for those on a shoestring budget - you can be as imaginative and inventive as you want, and you don't need elaborate sets, costume, makeup or cameras! With sound effects, a decent script and a few good voice actors, your story can be as wild, fantastic or surreal as you like. It could be set anytime in history, and literally anywhere in the universe, infinity or beyond! It's often said that necessity is the mother of invention, but it's really very entertaining for the audience when a few actors play many different roles. I've found that listening to the radio and the simplicity of using just one innate sense of hearing can often invoke strong feelings. For me, it's just as exciting as television - after all, back when we were living in caves, we often heard the lion before we saw it...enough to give anyone an adrenaline rush, and not exactly my idea of home entertainment!

In the days before wireless, comedy fans had even fewer choices for comic relief - wandering minstrels, sing-alongs by the piano, the odd knees-up at the local pub, traveling circus shows or maybe a trip to the local music hall for a vaudeville (variety) show! So where did radio comedy start? In Britain, radio broadcasting started in the 1920's and most light entertainment could be found on BBC Radio 4 - which to this day remains one of the best sources of audio comedy. Tune in if you want to hear new comic talent, future stars and experimental, adventurous formats.

Compared to US radio, British stations offer a wide variety of comedy and continue to producing new shows, the best of which make the jump to television - recent examples are '*Goodness Gracious Me*' and '*Little Britain*'. Historically, *Radio 4* has been home to some of the longest running and popular Britradiocoms... remember The Goon Show? In the 1960's, the comic talents of Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers and Harry Secombe came together to create truly

alternative, cutting edge humor - as opposed to the usual vaudeville-style entertainment which up until then had dominated the radio waves. The scripts were written by Milligan - a comic genius who truly suffered for his art. His inspired lunacy and eccentric character-based humor was a breath of fresh air that caught the imagination of post war Britain and - via the wonders of short-wave radio - other corners of the Empire and indeed the rest of the world. The crazed capers of madcap British characters such as Eccles, Neddie Seagoon and Bluebottle were loved and mimicked by an audience of all ages, all walks of life and all classes - even Prince Charles was a big fan! Their catchphrases & funny accents soon became incorporated in everyday language, and the fast pace of the material meant that the show could be listened to repeatedly and still be entertaining. And just in case you think Goon humor only appeals to old fogies, you might be interested to hear that this legendary show was the subject of a recent play in Leeds, England called "*Ying Tong*" - and the cast were delighted to find that youngsters who had never heard of The Goons found the whole thing hilarious!

#### *ROUND THE HORNE*

Ohh Bona! From 1965, *Round The Horne* was another hit comedy on *Radio 4*. It starred Kenneth Horne, Kenneth Williams, Hugh Paddick and Betty Marsden, and is fondly remembered by many Brits as a regular feature during Sunday lunchtime. The show was full of delightfully risqué double entendres and surprisingly camp humor. Horne's charming voice made for easy listening, and Williams' nasal, often obsequious delivery simply lent itself to a myriad of dubious characters....his comic style was so refined that he only had to say "oooooooohhhhh" into the microphone and listeners found it hilarious. The show's format was a winning combination of music, comedy songs, sketches, fake listener phone-ins and a dash of topical humor.

*(Continued next page)*

The series enjoyed a recent revival in Britain as a theatre show, *'Round the Horne Revisited'*. Diehard fans were able to wallow in nostalgia and gain a certain amount of satisfaction that this excellent comedy is also being re-discovered by a younger generation.

Top comedy talents like Bill Oddie, Tim Brooke-Taylor, Graeme Garden surfed the airwaves for many years, and in the 70's, the comedy trio moved onto television with their hit comedy *'The Goodies'*. And alongside his early television work with David Frost on *"The Frost Report"* in the 60's, our fave Python John Cleese was also contributing to radio comedies including the long-running *"I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again"* which later evolved into *"I'm Sorry, I Haven't A Clue"* - a hilarious take on the game show format. Whereas the former was scripted, the latter had a fresh new format and was for the most part improvised. Anything could happen...and usually did!

***Much of today's Britcoms originate from radio comedy.***

The late, great Ronnie Barker's radio career started in a delightful comedy series entitled *"The Navy Lark"*. In it, he played Un-Able Seaman Johnson, along with names such as Leslie Phillips, Dennis Price and Jon Pertwee who played a conniving Chief Petty Officer. As well as being a marvelous Time Lord in *Dr Who*, Pertwee wasn't half bad at comedy, either! I would highly recommend this vintage, feel-good show to Britcom fans - Phillips' voice is a veritable orchestra of inflection and you can tell when you listen to Navy Lark that the superb cast had a jolly spiffing time making it. It's sheer joy to listen to Barker in his younger days, putting on a country-bumpkin accent for his role as Johnson. He later worked in television with Ronnie Corbett as a sketch performer and writer in *"The Two Ronnies"* and went on to reach dizzying heights of popularity in the hit BBC sitcoms *Porridge*, *Going Straight* and *Open All Hours*. *"H-H-H-Hancock's Half Hour"* was another big radio-to-TV hit, making Tony Hancock a household name.

Writers Galton & Simpson went on to create the critically acclaimed TV series *Steptoe & Son*. Did you know that *'To the Manor Born'* starring Penelope Keith started life as a pilot for the radio? The finished product was so good that it was immediately transferred to television! It wasn't just actors that made it big on TV. Manic DJ Kenny Everett made a successful jump to TV with *"The Kenny Everett Video Show"* - considered to be required viewing for young Brits, along with shows like Douglas Adams' *"The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy"*. Originally written for radio, I recall it being the first time I'd heard comedy sci-fi on the radio and how unique it sounded.

Like a rebellious teenager, *'Hitchhiker'* seemed to have turned the previously fuddy-duddy world of Auntie Beeb's Radiophonics workshop on its head - and I don't think her SFX have been the same since! The slightly mad, yet compelling cosmic noises, together with the late Adam's inspired writing and a distinguished, well-chosen cast of voice actors made the show and the late Adams a runaway radio success story - from best selling books, a television series to the internet and film.

David Walliams and Matt Lucas' strange collection of characters on the award winning BBC show *"Little Britain"* also began life on *Radio 4* in 2001. The original show was a series of sketches featuring teenager Vicky Pollard and "the only gay in the village" (or so he thought) Daffyd Thomas. The show's title is an amalgamation of the terms 'Little England' and 'Great Britain', and it made its debut on television in 2003, with an eight-episode series on the BBC's digital-only channel *BBC Three*. Most of the TV material was adapted from the radio version, but Walliams and Lucas went on to successfully create new sketches featuring many other popular recurring characters which have gained a loyal audience - it's even become a stage production in London. Happy viewing, and given the chance, happy listening!

