

## Editor's Chin-wag

Hello fellow Britcom lovers! I am happy to say that the February issue of *The Insider* generated an increase in reader e-mails with questions, suggestions and the like. Awesome. Please make a note of the new and permanent e-mail address for our pub: [scott@bbcinsider.com](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.com).

Any and all reader input and comments are welcomed and you can reach me directly through the new e-mail addy above. A thousand thanks to all of you who took time to write; it makes me want to work even harder to bring you the latest Britcom news.

Speaking of...I would love to hear from those who saw the new *Funny Blokes* pledge special. A lot of peeps worked hard to bring that home. Good...bad...indifferent, I would be curious as to your feedback. Well, time to muck in writing this issue. Best wishes and cheers to all our loyal readers.

Happy reading all.

*N. Scott Jones, Editor*

## Her Majesty's Police Force Laughs aplenty in *Thin Blue Line*

Aaaahhhh...if they would only make more. In two short series, BBC's *Thin Blue Line*, once again, displays the seemingly unending talent of actor Rowan Atkinson and writer Ben Elton. The lament is, much like Cleeze's *Fawlty Towers*, the series run was all too short. Anyone who takes the time to engage this staple of the British comedy genre will undoubtedly be left craving more.



*Rowan Atkinson and crew deliver witty and well-acted comedic content in this charming look at suburban law enforcement.*

One thing you can be sure of, Rowan Atkinson, Ben Elton and a crew of mercurial and, yes funny, characters deliver laughs aplenty in this charming look at suburban England law enforcement. From college pranksters and pedestrian mischief, to the glory-seeking CID head's desire to find and conquer true crime, each and every episode delivers new challenges for the station. Couple this with intra-station house love interests, Derek's (the CID officer) challenges with his wife (Teenah!) and you have the makings of some great comedic story lines.

The Boy Scout-esque Inspector Fowler, portrayed by Atkinson, is long on ethics, hapless in his love life and always "regular of bowel" as he is often prone to point out. He leads a band of beat officers that range from the sexually ambiguous to the fiercest advocates for causes *du jour* and issues for women in the work place. Layer this with sporadic incompetence, and one soon becomes engrossed in with life in Gasforth. The BBC sets up the story like this...

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## A Brief Editorial View

They just can't produce them fast enough for me – DVD releases of favorite Britcoms that is. For me, right now, it is a bit like water torture. Slow and agonizing. This too shall pass.

Having recently watched the first two series of 'Allo 'Allo on DVD, it pains me to think I must wait until sometime in August to get my hands on Series 3. I have always loved this show, but have always been at the mercy of a broadcast schedule to catch it, and invariably come in mid story or series. The availability of BBC comedy series on DVD brings new enjoyment in being able to watch your favorite show, in chronological order, and see the true character and plot development. So my message to the *Beeb* is: I will take all you can manufacture; the sooner the better.

My wife is amazed at how I can watch the same episodes of say, *Are You Being Served?*, over and over again and not get bored. I explain to her the beauty of being a British comedy lover is – every time I watch an episode, I see or experience something new – a line here, a line there, a nuance I missed before. She sometimes rolls her eyes, to which I retort – why have so many spent centuries staring at the Mona Lisa? It is art. To many of us, great British comedies are just that – art.

Well art lovers, I will belt up and let you read on in this issue. Happy reading.

**N. Scott Jones, Editor**

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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 Oliviu Savu, 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



### *From the Beeb Blog*

The BBC's **Last Laugh** competition has been hailed as "possibly the biggest script writing competition ever" after attracting almost 5,000 entries.

The contest, which invited the public to finish the last ten minutes of one of eight new sitcom scripts written by the likes of Carla Lane and Marks and Gran - attracted a total of 4,816 entries.

This follows on from **End of Story** last year, made by the same team for **BBC THREE**, which invited the public to complete short stories crafted by big-name writers including Ian Rankin and Fay Weldon. The competition received almost 17,000 entries making it the largest short story competition in the UK.

Finalists in the Last Laugh competition – who will be revealed in a series in the autumn presented by Dara O'Brian - could see their script made into a comedy pilot for BBC THREE.

Project manager Esther Coleman-Hawkins added: "Writing comedy is tough but the level of entries is fantastic and our initial readings suggest that there is some quality gagging in there."

Julian Friedmann, Editor of *Scriptwriter Magazine*, said: "While I do think this is an astounding number of entries, I suppose I shouldn't be so surprised because there are so few avenues for people wanting to break into comedy writing, that perhaps it isn't so amazing that so many people have taken this opportunity."

A reading panel is currently wading through what is effectively more than 800 hours of comedy writing to whittle them down to four endings.



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

## *Goodnight Sweetheart?*



*Nicolas Lyndhurst progresses from the daft Rodney (Only Fools and Horses) to the time warped Gary Sparrow in this charming and oft-times nostalgic series*

This is not your typical knee-slapping Britcom, but it is a charming, entertaining and, yes, sometimes humorous look at a man who stumbles into time travel and develops love interests and lives in two completely different eras – 1990s London and 1940s war time London.

Actor Nicolas Lyndhurst makes a successful transition from goofy kid brother Rodney to a quasi-dramatic role in *Goodnight Sweetheart*. The show's central strength lies in the lead character's ability to go back and forth in time and visit an earlier, simpler and more charming London. The storyline is as follows.

Lyndhurst was cast as Gary Sparrow, a TV repairman whose marriage to Yvonne is in the doldrums. Out in London looking for a business address one day, he wanders down an alley, Duckett's Passage, and finds himself - though of course he does not immediately realize it - in the London of 1940.

In a street-corner pub, which at first he mistakes for a 1940s themed hostelry, he meets Phoebe, the landlord's attractive daughter, and they are immediately smitten with one another. Returning through the same alley brings Gary back to the present, and he discovers that he can enter 1940s London the same way at any time. So begins his double life.

As the weeks pass, Gary begins a fiery 'past' romance with Phoebe (who, as her father Eric constantly reminds her, is engaged, albeit reluctantly, to a serviceman fighting overseas) while somehow managing to hold his 'present' marriage together. Yvonne knows nothing of her husband's time-traversing escapades yet she is aware that the lame excuses to cover his absences mean that something 'funny' is going on. The only person in whom Gary confides his secret is his best friend Ron, who becomes increasingly embroiled in the expanding tissue of lies that Gary creates to allay his wife's fears. A printer by trade, Ron spots the financial opportunities of Gary's time-traveling and gets him to acquire records and other items worth big money to collectors in the 1990s. In return for these favors, Ron forges 1940s papers so that Gary can move about in wartime London without suspicion.

Back in the past, Gary weaves a similar web of lies to explain the tell-tale idiosyncrasies and anachronisms that mark him out, to them, as an odd fish. Firstly he convinces Phoebe that he is working undercover for the government, a fib that neatly accounts for many anomalies, including his non-enrolment in the forces and his knowledge of future wartime events. Secondly, he claims to have spent a long time in the USA, so that whenever he accidentally produces modern-day gadgets and devices, years ahead of their time, he claims they are commonplace in America.

This explanation usually satisfies the somewhat naive bar-drinkers but if a particular device, like a Walkman, is obviously revolutionary, Gary falls back on excuse one, claiming that it is a top-secret prototype. At the same time, he makes a great impression as an entertainer, playing and singing songs from the 1960s and beyond (especially Beatles hits) and claiming them as his own.

As the series progressed, Gary becomes increasingly obsessed with his life in the past and manages to cover his frequent absences by creating a successful 1940s memorabilia business, which purportedly sends him away on trips. At home, Gary's marriage to Yvonne has survived despite all the problems. At various times he debates whether to give up one of his lifestyles and commit himself completely to the other, but the lure of living in both worlds is too strong. Eventually, to complicate matters still further, he marries Phoebe, she gives birth to his son, Michael, and they move into a swish Mayfair apartment with Noel Coward as a neighbor. (He was played by David Benson, whose one-man stage-show about - and as - Kenneth Williams had won deserved acclaim.)

The series ended on a bittersweet note with Gary stuck in the past, the portal inexplicably closing on VE Day. Ron is left to explain the whole fantastic story to Yvonne, who is distraught when she realizes she will not see her husband again. Gary feels sorry for Yvonne but accepts that his life is now totally with Phoebe and Michael.

*Goodnight Sweetheart* supplies viewers with equal parts drama and humor, sprinkled with a charming dash of nostalgia from World War II London. The series is not yet available on DVD in the States, but you can rest assured, we will keep our eyes wide open and let you know when it becomes available.

*Editor's Note: The BBC's Comedy Homepage – located at [www.bbc.co.uk/comedy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy) - is an excellent source of information on this and other beloved Britcoms. Portions of this piece were well-written and redacted from the BBC's coverage of 'Goodnight Sweetheart'.*



## ViewerPoints In The Post



*I'm a member of VPT (Vermont Public Television) but they do not offer a subscription to your newsletter. Can I subscribe to it anyway? I think the information in it is really great and I read it from cover to cover when my sister sends it to me.*

**Margaret, in Vermont**

*I encourage you to contact your local PBS station and request they offer it to viewers in your area! ED.*

*Thanks for continuing the writing of The Insider...I really enjoy reading about all of the Comedy Greats!*

**Jean, in Texas**

*The Insider is very popular with our BritCom fans and we'd like to keep giving them current issues if available.*

**Lisa, Virginia Public  
Television WVPT**



### **BritQuotient Answers!**

- In an episode of *Fawlty Towers*, Basil says "this is a hotel, not a borstal." This is an old English reformatory system designed for youths between 16 and 21, named after an old convict prison at Borstal, Kent.
- The drunken Greek chef's name in the *Gourmet Night* episode was Kurt.
- The *Fawlty's* wedding anniversary date is April 17.

**Submit your trivia bits to [scott@bbcinsider.com](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.com) and read them here in the next issue of *The Insider*.**

## ViewerPoints: Contributions

### *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*

#### *Tips for Fun & a 'Fancy Dress' Do*

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.*

Picture the scene... Basil serves Hyacinth a sherry in the parlor while a noisy rabble of Vikings demand spam at the buffet table. The guest DJ is Mr. Humphries spinning Britpop hits and Del Boy's chatting up Miss Brahm's in the corner while Rose and Father Ted strut their funky stuff on the dance floor. There's an English RAF soldier hiding in the pantry and the Health Inspector's stopped by to track down a Norwegian Hamster on the loose in your kitchen.

No, these aren't excerpts from the latest PBS Britcom documentary. These surreal Britcom scenes - and many more - could play out for real in your own home if you theme your next fancy dress party around your fave British Comedy characters!

British sitcoms, with their casts of colorful characters simply lend themselves to party themes - so if you are a Britcom fan who loves to entertain, here are some ideas to make your next party a truly fab event that your guests will talk about for ages.

Having grown up in England, I miss the type of social life I had there, the get-togethers, frequent dinner parties (eating out was a luxury!) and the endless social whirl, darling. Not that I came from an upper class background, or anything....it's just that, well, you've got to hand it to the Brits. They know how to throw a party, and have a right good knees-up, whatever the age, class or background.

We Brits love to dress up and that led to us dreaming up some very creative fancy dress party ideas - ideas that would still work today. Yes, we did Vicars & Tarts, James Bond, Famous People Fancy Dress, Murder/Mystery etc....but my fondest memories are those with comedy-related themes. One in particular

was an 'Allo 'Allo themed party at a friend's house at a time when that particular sitcom was all the rage in England and was also a show in London's West End. Now listen very carefully, I shall say this only once! Among the guests were uniformed soldiers galore, French waitresses, Resistance girls, a Herr Flick & Helga, various British airmen, LeClerc in various disguises and the piece de resistance was a couple of our girlfriends dressed as The Pantomime Cow! Not to be outdone, I was a Resistance girl on the outside (and a French Waitress underneath!!). Everyone had to speak in silly French accents, Mother was in bed upstairs, cafe music was playing downstairs and guests were served Beaujolais, bistro-style food and naughty French pastries for dessert.

For a small gathering, how about a Keeping Up Appearances Party? You'd have to get Richard to keep an eye on Rose and The Vicar, and for goodness sake, don't put Daisy in charge of the food - unless you like beer, bacon butties and salt & vinegar crisps!

For larger affairs, ask guests to dress as their favorite Britcom character and have fun guessing all their various identities. Have a prize for best costume to encourage people to come dressed, or you could organize a talent show as part of the festivities!

Of course you could always take the loony route....go all out and have a Monty Python party! Here's one theme that you can really have fun with - there are a myriad of characters to choose from: Mr. Gumby, Bicycle Repair Man, The Suicidal Chef (holding a grubby fork), Mr. Teabag from The Ministry Of Silly Walks, The Man from The Wilderness as the MC, and of course, nobody expects THE SPANISH INQUISITION!!! Particularly topical at the moment would be a "Holy Grail" party, given the popularity of Eric Idle's hit musical "Spamalot", based on the classic film, and currently playing on Broadway.



*(Continued on page 16)*

# Special Feature

*Meet the cast of...*



*'Allo 'Allo*

Information here is researched using a number of sources, mostly from a series of newsletter articles in the now-defunct email-zine Vertical Hold, the Internet Movie Database, and Jeremy Lloyd's autobiography "*Listen Very Carefully, I Shall Say This Only Once*". Some of it has been augmented and corrected from still other sources, including original copies of other shows.

## **Gorden Kaye as Rene Francois Artois (and his twin brother Rene)**

Gorden Kaye, born in Moldgreen, Huddersfield (Yorkshire) attended Huddersfield Technical College in the early 1960's and made his TV debut as Elsie Tanner's nephew in *Coronation Street* in 1968. He went on to minor roles in many other shows and a part in the 1977 Python-filled film *Jabberwocky* (as Sister Jessica) before joining Jeremy Lloyd and David Croft on two short series, *Oh, Happy Band* and *Come Back, Mrs. Noah*, and finally teaming with them and achieving sex symbol status through *'Allo 'Allo*. His popularity and work schedule didn't interfere with later film appearances as they continued, including appearing in Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*.

His fame made him a target for the British tabloids - one of which, in 1988, discovered that he was having a homosexual affair. In response, just before they were due to publish photographic evidence, he happily admitted that he was gay, writing a personal memoir called *Rene and Me* with the help of a friendly journalist - thus robbing the scandal-mongers of their scoop. Mr. Kaye appeared in a few episodes of the Lloyd-Croft comedy *Are You Being Served?*, popped up in episodes of *Last of the Summer Wine* and *All Creatures Great and Small*, and was the stalwart host of *Nationwide* in the short-lived *Come Back, Mrs. Noah*.

Gorden Kaye made the news in January 1990 when a windstorm-related injury nearly led to his death. While in his car during a fierce windstorm, a wooden object broke through his windshield and stabbed into his head, nearly killing him instantly. After a six-hour brain operation, he went into a long but eventually successful recovery, while the tabloid press tried to sneak in and get shots of him unconscious on his bed. Jeremy Lloyd sat with him for long periods, and Gorden's agent came visiting with many videotapes of *'Allo 'Allo*, which Jeremy thinks may have helped remind him who he was. Afterwards, Gorden suggested that *'Allo 'Allo* should end, but Jeremy Lloyd convinced him otherwise, and the show continued for another two series. Despite his miraculous recovery, Gorden still has no memory of the accident.

Since the end of *'Allo 'Allo*, Mr. Kaye has gone on to appear with Carmen Silvera (his long-suffering wife Edith in *'Allo 'Allo*) in the 1996 film *La Passione*, and on stage starring in *Harvey*, with Rue McClanahan.

## **Carmen Silvera as Edith Melba Artois**

Born in Toronto and raised in England. She left for Montreal during the war, where she trained in ballet and worked in three Ballet Russe productions. Later, she studied drama - and in the 1960s won national prominence as Camilla Hope in the BBC serial *Compact*. Her other roles include appearances in TV series *Dad's Army*, *New Scotland Yard*, *Two Women*, *Whoops Apocalypse*, and *Within These Walls*, as well as playing Miss Marple in a stage version of *Murder at the Vicarage*. She has appeared twice in *Doctor Who*, notably as Clara the Clown in the adventure *The Celestial Toymaker*. She later appeared with Gorden Kaye in the cast of the film *La Passione*. In 1990, she was paid the great honor of being the subject of *This Is Your Life*!

In August 2002, Carmen Silvera succumbed to lung cancer and passed away.

### **Vicki Michelle as Yvette Carte-Blanche**

Was 32 years old when 'Allo 'Allo began, having previously played small roles in *Minder*, *The Kenny Everett Show*, *The Professionals* and *The Two Ronnies*, in which she played a Cockney newsboy. She also has appeared in *Are You Being Served?* and had a key role in the short lived Lloyd/Croft collaboration *Come Back, Mrs. Noah*, playing the space commander's assistant. She's been seen most recently on stage in a Newcastle production of *Dracula* (Nov '96).

### **Francesca Gonshaw as Maria Recamier (series 1-3)**

Left after the third series of 'Allo 'Allo to join the cast of *Howard's Way*. She also appeared in the film *Biggles: Adventures in Time* (1986) and the 1983 TV Movie *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

### **Rose Hill as Madame Fanny La Fan (Edith's mother)**

Appeared in a number of films prior to her regular role as Fanny in 'Allo 'Allo. Most famously, she was in the second Pink Panther film, *A Shot In The Dark*, as well as in the TV Movie version of *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1981.

### **Kirsten Cooke as Michelle "of the Resistance" Dubois**

Born in Sussex and trained at the Webber Douglas Academy. Mainly a stage actress, Kirsten's television credits include *A Dave Allen Christmas Special*, *Woolcott*, *Rings on their Fingers*, *Dawson Watch*, and *The Upper Hand*. She has now gone on to play the role of "Molly" in the series *Down To Earth*. Kirsten is married, with four children, and lives in West London.

### **Richard Marner as Colonel Von Strohm**

Born in St Petersburg, and is fluent in Russian, English, French and German. One of his early stage roles - as Dracula - is still regarded by some as the definitive interpretation of the role. His films include *The Boys from Brazil*, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, *The African Queen*, and the Swiss film *Four in a Jeep*, in which he did all the Russian dialogue. Also look for him in the television movie *The Birth of the Beatles*, as the Club Boss. Recent work includes guest shots in *Lovejoy* (1994) and the movie *The Sum of All Fears* (as the Russian President).

### **Guy Siner as Lieutenant Hubert Gruber**

Born in Manhattan, educated in England and trained for the stage at the Webber Douglas Academy in London, where in a career of some 20 years he has become well known both in theater and television. He made his London debut in the original West End production of *Cowardly Custard*. Other London theater includes *Nickleby & Me*; *Blithe Spirit*; *The Frogs*; *Off the Peg*; *The Biograph Girl*; and *Don't Dress for Dinner*.

On TV, you can see him as Pylades in *I Claudius*, as well as roles in *Dr. Who - Genesis of the Daleks*; *Seinfeld*; *Knots Landing*; *Babylon 5* (in the episode "Rumors, Bargains, and Lies"); and of course, in 85 episodes of 'Allo 'Allo!

In films, Guy has appeared in *The Disappearance of Kevin Johnson*; *Great Harry & Jane*; *Lost Highway*; *Leprechaun IV*; *Playing God*; and *Big City Blues*. You can even have Guy talking to you in your own home by going out and purchasing the computer game "TIE Fighter" from Lucasarts: when you play the game, Guy's the voice of your commanding officer! Guy now lives in Los Angeles, where he juggles two careers - actor and writer.

### **Sam Kelly as Captain Hans Geering (series 1-4)**

Appeared in many television comedies besides his three-series turn in 'Allo 'Allo. He left the show to join another British sitcom, *We'll Think of Something* in 1986 (though he returned for a guest shot, reprising his role as Hans Geering, during series 7). He has also appeared in the TV series *Porridge*, *Haggard* and the recent miniseries *Martin Chuzzlewit*, as well as the film *Blue Ice*. He also worked with another AA star, Kenneth Connor, in the films *Carry On Dick* and *Carry On Behind* in 1974-75.

### **Kim Hartman as Private Helga Geerhart**

Kim started her career as an assistant stage manager at the Belgrade Theater in Coventry, where she first met author and producer David Croft. After graduating from the Webber Douglas Academy, she worked in a variety of theaters around the country, and has worked in Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Germany, Holland, and the USA.

In 1990, Quinton Arts (the production company formed by herself and her husband John Nolan) mounted a successful production of *Aladdin*, starring Kim and two other 'Allo 'Allo actors: Sue Hodge and Arthur Bostrom.

Kim lives in Cotswold with her husband, her children Tom and Miranda, two Springer spaniels and two cats.

### **Richard Gibson as Herr Otto Flick (series 1-8)**

Began his acting career at age 16 and before leaving school, he had played Apollo in the BBC serial *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Later, he co-starred in *The Coral Island*, *The Gates of Eden*, *The Children of the New Forest* and as the title character of *Park Ranger*. Known as the cast's practical joker, in real life he is nearly the opposite of the straight-laced Herr Flick; it appears probable that Gibson orchestrated the mass appearance of much of the 'Allo 'Allo cast in the crowd scenes for an episode of *EastEnders*. Since leaving the show, he has appeared in the television miniseries *Trade Winds*.

### **Kenneth Connor as Monsieur Alphonse**

After co-starring in 16 of the 25 *Carry On* films (including the first, *Carry On Sergeant*), Kenneth was no stranger to vulgar suggestiveness. He also appeared in more sophisticated comedies, such as the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*, *The Magic Christian*, and *Cuckoo Patrol* and other popular television series like *Hi-de-Hi*, *Blackadder the Third*, *You Rang M'Lord*, *On The House* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. He passed away a year after the final episode of 'Allo 'Allo.

### **Arthur Bostrom as Officer (Captain) Crabtree (series 2-9)**

Born in Rugby, Warwickshire, Bostrom is the holder of a BA (Hons) degree from Durham University, and appeared in the world premiere of Ray Cooney's hit farce *Run For Your Wife* in Guildford, UK, and was recently on stage at the New Theater in a 1995 production *The Wizard of Oz*.

His television credits include the Croft comedy *Hi De Hi*, *The Crystal Cube*, *Just Good Friends*, *Fothergill*, and the role of George Bartlett in *Miss Marple- the Body in the Library*. Mr. Bostrom also maintains his own web site, complete with a biography and photos.

### **Gavin Richards as Captain Alberto Bertorelli (series 4-7)**

Before replacing Sam Kelly in 'Allo 'Allo, Richards played Lucius in a televised version of *Titus Andronicus*, and directed and starred in Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, for his own Belt and Braces Roadshow Company.

### **Sue Hodge as Mimi Labonq (series 4-9)**

For the past 15 years, 4'9" Sue Hodge's credits have included musicals (among them *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *The Rocky Horror Show*), cabarets, straight plays and several recordings. Like Gorden Kaye, she appeared in the Terry Gilliam film *Brazil* - as a 'Force of Darkness'.

### **Moira Foot as Denise Laroque (series 5)**

After a recurring role as Miss Thorpe in the Lloyd/Croft comedy *Are You Being Served?*, she appeared as the receptionist in the famous film farce *The Strange Case of the End of Civilisation As We Know It* before returning to work with Lloyd and Croft on their new series, 'Allo 'Allo.



## Series Profile: A Look at 'Allo 'Allo



*“Listen very carefully; I will say this only once.”*

A riddle. What happens when you combine:

1. A village in WWII occupied France
2. The proprietor of a “quiet” little Café staffed with female tarts
3. Three knackwurst sausages, one containing a stolen painting of “the fallen Madonna with the big boobies”
4. Two downed British airman and an imposter gendarme with bad French language skills
5. The French Resistance
6. An incompetent German colonel, his captain and light-loafed lieutenant
7. A quasi bed-ridden mother-in-law with flashing bed knobs ; and
8. Herr Flick of The Gestapo always having a “canoodle” with the colonel’s assistant?

You guessed it. You have just begun scratching the surface of nine seasons of the celebrated British comedy ‘Allo ‘Allo. Rene Artois (Gorden Kaye) is in a constant struggle to run his café, please his wife Edith (Carmen Silvera), comply with demands from Michelle French Resistance (Kirsten Cook), avoid being shot by the Germans, cornered by an infatuated Lt. Gruber (Guy Siner), hide two British airmen and help them get back to England, avoid detection by Herr Flick of The Gestapo (Richard Gibson), hide a priceless stolen painting for the town’s Colonel von Strom (Richard Marnier) and avoid being shot, incarcerated or otherwise harmed during it all. Whew! A pretty tall order that leads to some great comedy situations.

During its nine series run, a few characters came and went – but one constant shone through it all: never underestimate the concealment value of a large knackwurst sausage and the antics employed to ensure a comfortable retirement by hiding a valuable stolen painting in that very foodstuff. Sound corny? Not at all. It is perfectly logical. Consider the story line.

René Artois, a café owner in the town of Nouvion who becomes unwittingly involved with the resistance when they use his establishment as a centre from which to hatch plans to smuggle two British airmen back to Blighty. This adds complications to René's life which is already convoluted enough: he is married to Edith, a formidable woman who entertains in the café by singing (badly), but like all good comedy Frenchman he is also enjoying a passionate affair. The object of his lust is the beautiful Yvette, a leggy waitress at the café. Much mirth is caused by their constant attempts to steal a few precious moments alone, which they rarely achieve without coming close to being rumbled.

René himself is the target of the unwanted attentions of the fey Lieutenant Gruber, aide-de-camp to the Gestapo's Herr Flick. The patronage of Flick and other Germans causes René further problems when resistance agent Michelle embroils him in her (often ludicrous) secret plans.

The show had serial elements, and the sheer number of episodes, 85 in total, meant that similar themes often surfaced, including the continuing attempts to transport the airmen and Herr Flick's pursuit of a valuable

painting (*The Fallen Madonna With The Big Boobies*, by Van Clomp). Early on in the series, to escape the wrath of the SS, René fakes his own death and continues through the remainder of the episodes as his own fictitious twin brother. This deception prompts aged lothario Monsieur Alfonse into pursuing René's 'widow', with a view to marriage. This prospect had its attractions because it would allow René to plight his troth with Yvette, but the drawbacks - losing the café and his savings - prove overwhelming and so he thwarts the courtship. Other characters in the show include the fat, thick German Von Strohm and his colleague Hans Geering (Sam Kelly); ice queen Helga (Kim Hartman), Herr Flick's right-hand-woman; diminutive waitress Mimi La Bonque; and Edith's mother Fanny 'Fifi' Lafanne (Rose Hill), who eventually marries Leclerc. The original Leclerc was played by Jack Haig but following the actor's death the writers invented Leclerc's twin brother who was played initially by Derek Royle and later by Robin Parkinson. David Janson appeared as Hitler in an episode of series eight and he returned to the cast for series nine, this time taking over the role of Herr Flick.



Photo: Central cast of *'Allo 'Allo*

The show had a cunning method of dealing with language problems. French characters spoke their native tongue with pantomime-style exaggerated French accents, but when they spoke English they adopted equally exaggerated posh Oxford accents. The English characters spoke English normally, but when they spoke French it was with a poor, almost incomprehensible cod French accent. This was especially true of the Englishman named Crabtree, who survived in Nouvion disguised as a gendarme and whose strangulated English-French gave the show its most memorable catchphrase with his customary greeting 'Good Moaning'.

The show's other principal catchphrase was resistance leader Michelle's, 'Leesen verry carefully, I weel zay zis only once...'. Throughout the cast, the characterizations were uniformly broad and the show was an equal-opportunity offender when it came to stereotypes: it depicted the French as greedy and sex-obsessed, the Germans as inefficient bumbler and the British as upper-class twits.

Beyond the stereotypes, one can easily get consumed in the multiple plot lines and funny turns the situations deal poor Rene as he struggles to keep body and soul together. Series 1 and 2 are available in the US on DVD, with Series 3 due for release on August 16, 2005. With approximately 6 episodes per DVD, it's going to be a long haul to get all 85. But along the way, the antics can be charming and laughs abundant. This show is definitely worth giving a whirl.

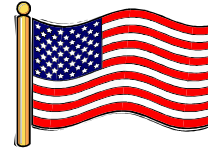
*Editor's Note: The BBC's Comedy Homepage – located at [www.bbc.co.uk/comedy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy) - is an excellent source of information on this and other beloved Britcoms. Portions of this piece were well-written and redacted from the BBC's coverage of 'Allo 'Allo.*



### *Heard on the Grapevine*

*The Insider* has heard that actor James Dreyfus (*Thin Blue Line, Gimme Gimme Gimme*) will be tapped to replace Ardal O'Hanlon as George Sunday/Thermoman in the next series of *My Hero*. Stay tuned.

# New DVD/Video Releases



## Due Out This Summer From BBC Worldwide Americas

### **All Creatures Great and Small: Series 5 (DVD)**

Share more warmth and humor with James Herriot, the world's best loved veterinarian.

### **All Creatures Great and Small: Series 1-5 Set**

**Release Date: 7/19/2005**

Return to the Yorkshire Dales and relive all the wondrous stories and scenes (and animal sounds) from the first five series of one of the BBC's most popular dramas. Who knew so much intrigue, chaos and cacophony could take place in such a small veterinary practice? Includes both the 1983 and 1985 specials.

### **Good Neighbors: The Complete Series 1 - 3 (DVD)**

*Good Neighbors* is considered one of the best British sitcoms ever by critics and audiences alike and took North America by storm when it premiered here on PBS. This four-disc set contains the complete series 1-3 plus the 1977 Christmas special!

### **'Allo 'Allo: Series 3**

The Germans, The Resistance and the British Airman continue to give Rene fits as he tries his best to survive the antics and run his Café. To be released on DVD in the United States this August and can be pre-ordered now.

## Recent Releases

### **Absolutely Fabulous: Savings Set**

Now your dream of holding your own *AbFab* marathon can come true! Every uproarious scene, all the outlandish behavior and every glittering guest star from Series 1 through 5 are compiled for your delirious enjoyment at a great savings. A complete riot!

## Britcom Collectibles Corner

Some of you may be like me, a collector of "things." Okay, some of us may even be pack rats. But I can tell you, collecting items from favorite British comedies can be downright fun. I love my *Mr. Bean* and *Fawlty Towers* Corgi sets – I am still trying to find some sources for those of you who want them; I don't think Corgi is making them anymore.

I can tell you that the Shops at BBC America have some pieces at sale prices right now. I just ordered (at a sale price) the Corgi production of the Trotter's three-wheeled van from *Only Fools and Horses*.

For *Dr. Who* fans, there are a number of robots and other pieces on sale there as well. These sale prices indicate to me that these collectibles may be going out of stock or out of production. I tell you this not to drive up sales for the Beeb, but to let you collectors know, so you can grab them now.

If you have resources for acquiring British comedy collectibles, please let us know and we will share them here. Show memorabilia, toys, figurines, whatever the item, let's discuss them here and share the enjoyment. In the meantime, if anyone know where you can get an actual Grace Brothers shopping bag, like the ones used in *Are You Being Served?*, I would love to hear from you. [scott@bbcinsider.com](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.com)

*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 Eve Matheson?*

...asks Margaret from Vermont. Well Margaret, in addition to doing some narration work recently on some audio books, here is what we could find.

For those that don't know, Eve Matheson portrayed a central character, Zoe, in the first two series of the BBC's *May to December*.

### Actress – TV & Films

**Losing It** (2000) (TV) as Jude's Mother

**"The Ambassador"** (1998) TV Series as Catherine Grieve

**Swept from the Sea** (1997) as Mrs. Wilcox  
... aka Balayé par la mer (Canada: French title)

**Grushko** (1994) (TV) as Nina

**"May to December"** (1989) TV Series as Zoe Angel (1989-1990)

**"Vanity Fair"** (1987) (mini) TV Series as Rebecca Sharp

**What If It's Raining** (1985) (TV) as Siobhan

**"Jane Eyre"** (1983) (mini) TV Series as Leah

**Churchill and the Cabinet War Rooms** (1995) (TV) (narration) Quotations

### Notable TV Guest Appearances

**"Holby City"** playing "Cara Walker" in episode: "I'm Not in Love" (episode # 3.26) 1 May 2001

**"Heartbeat"** playing "Moira Hamilton" in episode: "Appearances" (episode # 7.19) 18 January 1998

**"Lovejoy"** playing "Valerie Endacott" in episode: "Three Men and a Brittle Lady" (episode # 5.5) 3 October 1993

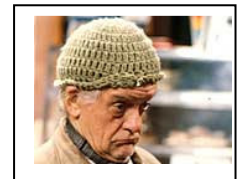
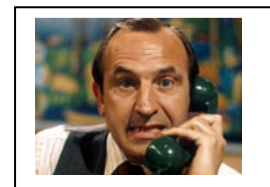
**"Boon"** playing "Rebecca Blake" in episode: "Shot in the Dark" (episode # 7.13) 1 December 1992

**"Stay Lucky"** playing "Cassy Quinn" in episode: "The Sisters of Achill" (episode # 3.5) 9 November 1991

**"The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes"** playing "Miss Tangey" in episode: "The Naval Treaty" (episode # 1.3) 8 May 1984



### Wanted: Update on My Favorite Britcom Star



*Where are they now?*

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



## ***BritCom LaughLinks***

### **Café Rene**

<http://www.coldcut.com/video/aa/>

An excellent site of all things 'Allo 'Allo. Cast information for this issue of *The Insider* was gathered there and the site is just well done in terms of information on this staple of British comedies. Cast bios, episode guides, trivia and the like, it is all there for lovers of Rene Artois, his Cafe and Nuviogne's band of characters.

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

### **'Allo 'Allo Picture Gallery**

<http://www.ycdtot.com/allo/>

Want a screen shot from your favorite episode? This site has more than 2300 pictures from screen shots of the program. Some of the funniest moments are captured in stills for your private use and enjoyment. Not sure if the Beeb would approve of this site, but it is there nonetheless.

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

### **The Goodnight Sweetheart Page**

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

Want to know about the show? Go here. Latest news, facts, story backgrounds and actor profiles – this site a treasure trove for lovers of this popular BBC series.

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

### **Are You Being Served? Scrapbook**

<http://www.tvheaven.ca/aybs.htm>

A neat little site with some great pictures and information on one of the most popular of all British comedies. It has audio and a cute treatment in navigating the site information. Definitely worth the visit for lovers of AYBS.

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

### **Thin Blue Line at Rowan Atkinson.org**

<http://www.rowanatkinson.org/TBL.htm>

Part of Atkinson's overall site, this installment provides useful information for fans of this two series run British comedy. Episode guides, character profiles and actor information is resident on this page. Worth the look if you are a fan.

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

### **The British Comedy Homepage**

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

Want find out about British comedies past and present? Start here. Great links, chocked full of information and fun to review. British comedy lovers will want to spend some time here. All brought to you by the BBC.

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



*Thin Blue Line (cont'd. from page 1)*

"Inspector Raymond Fowler (Atkinson) is the commanding officer of the uniformed police force in Gasforth Police Station, a small nick in a small town. Here can be found all the problems that beset the modern police officer and Gasforth is no different from any other small station, just another part of the Thin Blue Line. The only difference being, of course, that in Gasforth, the officers of the Thin Blue Line tend to be slightly thicker.

Fowler is a stick-in-the-mud who is constantly astonished at just how much mud there is to stick in. He's in the 10th year of a relationship with Patricia (*Serena Evans*) the desk sergeant, who bravely stands between the station and the public, wondering why she bothers taking the details of the endless stream of drunks and yobs that pass her desk. Fowler's force also includes Constable Kevin Goody (*James Dreyfus*), definitely the thickest part of the Thin Blue Line, who is deeply in love with Constable Maggie Habib (*Mina Anwar*), but that love is unrequited, something Goody can't even spell, let alone come to terms with. To her, graffiti is a vibrant street art. To him, it's nasty little yobs scribbling on walls. Constable Gladstone (*Rudolph Walker*) is the oldest officer at Gasforth, a man who has seen everything before. Unfortunately, he's forgotten all of it.

The might of the uniformed branch pits its wits against crime and the CID force of Gasforth station, led by Detective Inspector Grim (*David Haig*), who isn't a happy man. CID work can be so depressing. Nothing but hooligans, yobbos and foul-mouthed delinquents, though as Fowler points out, some of Grim's officers aren't so bad. Grim's sidekick is Detective Constable Kray (*Kevin Allen*) - definitely not a dedicated copper, he uses his warrant card principally for pushing in queues in shops." He was replaced in Series 2 by actor Mark Addy who, today, has learned an American accent and stars in the American sitcom *Still Standing*, which airs each week on CBS here in the United States. What a transition from an earring wearing Cockney cop, to a father of a typical American family.

Viewer response to, and critical review of, *Thin Blue Line* in the United Kingdom was surprisingly harsh which, one might conclude, is most likely why there were only two series of the show made. Here in the US, the 14 episodes have found a warmer response from viewers. One might attribute this to the fandom of Atkinson himself – *Mr. Bean*, *Black Adder* and the like. Maybe. But the normal sledgehammer wit one came to expect from previous Atkinson/Elton productions is noticeably absent from *Thin Blue Line* American audiences responded to it enthusiastically, all the same, because it was both delightful and entertaining in calmer fashion than their earlier collaborations.

Both Series are now available on DVD in *Thin Blue Line: The Full Line Up*. Here is the episode guide:

### **Series 1**

**RAG WEEK** - The local students are doing wacky stunts for charity. Fowler & Patricia are held up at bank, Grim is on the phone to the Home Office, Kray to the kebab shop. Complications ensue.

**QUEENS BIRTHDAY PRESENT** - Inspector Fowler & Sgt Dawkings are partners in service & in life. Its their 10th anniversary, but it looks like the Queen's official birthday celebration will get in the way.

**NIGHT SHIFT** - Juvenile delinquents crowd the station. Patricia can't wait to get away from them. Unfortunately, Fowler's teenage son has come to stay from his mother's. Meanwhile Fowler is upset because Grim is at Scotland Yard, and not him.

**HONEY TRAP** - Inspector Fowler prepares his team including PC Habib for the pub quiz final, which means that DI Grim will have to make do with PC Goody in a miniskirt in order to ensnare Terry the Tank.

**FIRE & TERROR** - WPC Habib fancies a handsome fireman & PC Goody is jealous. DI Grim is onto 'the big case' & Inspector Fowler is plagued by an insane hoaxer who claims to have seen Lord Lucan recently.

**KIDS TODAY** - Police Sgt. Patricia goes all broody when a baby is dumped at the station. Habib is harassed by fascists leading Goody to commit assault. Fowler leads a camping trip for young offenders, but Grim is planning a short sharp shock.

*(Continued next page)*

*Thin Blue Line (cont'd. from previous page)*

## **Series 2**

**COURT IN THE ACT** - Inspector Fowler prepares his force for the rigors of cross-examination in court, and Constable Goody tries out a fetching new uniform.

**ISM, ISM, ISM** - The Mayoress informs Fowler that an illegal immigrant asylum-seeker has taken refuge in the town; Grim attempts to join a secret lodge.

**FLY ON THE WALL** - A television crew come to Gasforth to make a documentary about policing in the raw, and they don't come much rawer than Fowler's force.

**ALTERNATIVE CULTURE** - Grim declares war on drugs. Meanwhile, a plumbing crisis at the station means the women have to share the men's locker room.

**COME ON YOU BLUES** - When Gashforth FC reaches the second round of the FA Cup, DI Grim looks forward to tackling some major league hooligans.

**ROAD RAGE** - Patricia joins a group of anti-road protestors and Fowler is presented with confronting her, and an eclectic group of activists in the execution of his duties.

**GREEN EYED MONSTER** - When Grim says they're looking for married officers Fowler decides to propose to Patricia, who promptly turns him down.

**YULETIDE SPIRIT** - Grim is on the trail of some dangerous carol singers, Fowler experiences treachery at the hands of an amateur dramatic group and Goody proves that giving Xmas presents at work can be a bad idea.

Love it, like it or leave it, is a memorable British comedy and one that proves the fact the genre has a little something for everyone. While a few viewers may find some of the supporting characters boorish, annoying or trite, Atkinson delivers wit, endearment and entertaining viewing for British comedy lovers.



## ***“Are You Being Served? AGAIN”***

### ***Series Brief and Little Known Factoids***

Seven years after the final episode of **Are You Being Served?** five of the characters returned in **Are You Being Served? AGAIN** -- originally titled **Grace and Favour** in the UK.

In the opening episode, the staff of Grace Brothers department store are appalled to discover that, in his will, the late 'Young' Mr. Grace bequeathed all of his money to a charity for fallen women, and invested the staff's pension fund by buying an old house, Millstone Manor. The penniless quintet of Slocombe, Peacock, Humphries, Brahms and Rumbold decide to move in to the manor house and open it up as a hotel; thus they remain together but in a completely different environment.

The location aside, however, everything was much as before, with double entendres, mass confusions, broad slapstick and a good re-airing of old catchphrases being paramount: Mr. Humphries gaily minced about hollering 'I'm free!' and Mrs. Slocombe once again held forth on the condition of her pussy. The first series concentrated on the alteration of the manor house (actually Chavenage House in Gloucestershire) as a hotel, the second showed the staff dealing with guests. One of these, it turned out, was Cecil Slocombe (played by Donald Morley), Mrs. Slocombe's husband whom she had not seen since he had 'popped out to the supermarket' 42 years earlier.

The comedy is the normal Lloyd/Croft fare, but if you loved the original, you might enjoy the characters revisited, albeit post-retirement, in this short lived sequel. While not as knee-slapping funny as the original show, it's good for a few laughs and a stroll down memory lane of what made each of these characters unique. You can have them all in a single DVD collection, available now.



(Continued from page 5)

Here are some pointers to success for party planners:

1. If propriety is a consideration, remember that you won't have any control over your guests' choice of costume, and generally, the older the Britcom, the less politically correct it is.
2. For successful fancy dress parties where everyone can join in/make costumes on a budget, choose a general theme or a Britcom that includes many characters such as *Allo Allo*. *Blackadder* might seem like a good theme, but remember that period costumes are more difficult to procure. Be warned! A *Keeping Up Appearances* party for a small crowd might result in many Hyacinths in your living room. Not a pretty sight, and could be quite alarming - particularly if they're all blokes.
3. Tie the food/drink to the theme e.g. French food & wine for an *Allo Allo* bash, Gourmet Night for a *Fawlty Towers* fracas, elegant canapes for a Hyacinth soiree, army rations for a *Dad's Army* knees-up and LOTS OF CHOCOLATE for a *Vicar of Dibley* get-together. Chocolate fondue, perhaps?
4. Think about the type of music you'll be playing - this will really set the mood of the party.
5. Have fun with the 'greeters' and 'wait staff' - imagine Hyacinth at the door, imploring everyone to remove their shoes, and DO mind the wallpaper, dear! Onslow would make a great valet and having Basil and Manuel in charge of the food would be an absolute scream.

And remember! Support Britcoms on your local PBS station. Ask the volunteer coordinator if it's OK to dress up as Comedy Characters when you and your group are manning the phone banks during British Comedy Night. Note: this can sometimes backfire. Some years ago, when we dressed up for the Python Marathon Pledge drive at KERA-Dallas, the crew were so enamored that they made us sing the Spam song. Live. On-Air. Oh, the things we do for PBS!

On a final note....have fun in this, your celebration of the spirit of classic British Comedy - great writing, fabulous characters and costumes and rib-tickling situations. Good-hearted laughter truly is the best medicine and one of the most enjoyable of stress relievers. Through the ages, in its various forms, British humor has kept us going when the going gets tough.

So go on, have a giggle this Saturday night, and pass me another sherry, Onslow!



### **Postscripts**

Reader response and participation continues to grow and makes producing this publication just that much more enjoyable. It is great to hear from people from around the country. Haven't seen it covered yet? Write me. A great story idea? Write me. Any and all suggestions are welcomed.

Once again, thank you for your continued support and readership. I hope we can continue promoting a two way dialog on the fascinating topic of British comedies. Contact me by e-mail anytime at [scott@bbcinsider.com](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.com). Until the next issue, happy viewing!

*Scott*

#### **Did you know?**

'*Allo 'Allo* star Gordon Kaye made a number of guest character appearances in *Are You Being Served?*

Among others, he portrayed a TV commercial producer, a Scottish paparazzi photographer and a Greek restaurant worker in various *AYBS* episodes.