

Editor's Chin-wag

Greetings lovers of Britcoms. As I write this edition, my thoughts are with all the good folks from New Orleans across to the Mississippi and Alabama Gulf Coast who have suffered so much from Hurricane Katrina. If you can contribute help to these good people, please do so.

Not to be redundant – well, a little anyway – I want to thank all of you who continue taking time to write with suggestions, questions and the like. As we have come back online with *The Insider*, reader response continues to grow – if e-mails are an indicator.

Please feel free to keep the dialog going at scott@bbcinsider.com. I love hearing from you and responding to your interests in these pages. So let us hear from you when you get the chance – we will be sure to cover as many inquiries and suggestions as we can in each subsequent issue. Until then...

Happy reading all.

N. Scott Jones, Editor

Bits and Bobs...mostly Bobs Gossip, News Briefs and More

OK...OK...so James Dreyfus (*Thin Blue Line, Gimme Gimme Gimme*) and I were supposed to connect by phone for an interview – and we missed each other. Tough to catch a guy on the set filming a TV special in England while I toil away at much less glamorous tasks here in the States. He and I will re-connect in the next couple of weeks. Sooooooo... he will be the cover story in the November issue, and I will use this space to ramble on about random happenings in the Britcom world.

I am anxious to talk with him about his current projects and YES I CAN CONFIRM – he IS replacing Ardal O’Hanlon as George Sunday aka Thermoman in the BBC comedy series *My Hero*.

I have gotten a lot of inquiries in response to our “Heard on the Grapevine” note from last issue speculating about this development. Most question how it will be possible to effectively make the transition in a character that O’Hanlon clearly developed as his own. Well don’t throw anything at me, but I happen to think Dreyfus is quite talented. While I am making no prediction on the ultimate success of the character transition, I think Dreyfus is a great choice to continue the series.

The remaining cast is totally unchanged. Janet, Piers, Tyler, Mrs. Raven (I just love her character), Arnie, Stanley & Ella – but clearly, George’s character will evolve with Dreyfus in the role. I suggest it is not a quantum leap. There are parallels with both actors who play the role of Sunday. O’Hanlon’s portrayal of other daft characters (like Father Dougal McGuire from *Father Ted*) and Dreyfus’ portrayal of fey/daft characters like his role in *Gimme Gimme Gimme* and the sexually ambiguous Constable Goody in *The Thin Blue Line*. We’ll see how it works out and what Dreyfus has to say next issue.

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UPDATE: No Laughing Matter

No doubt many hearts go out to those affected by Katrina. From our friend Julius Cain at the *BBC Sales Company* in New Orleans:

“Suzette and I are so touched that so many friends are thinking about us. Thank you. We have just moved in with my son in Birmingham where we will remain, and I will work, until we can return home.

We had originally thought to ride out the storm with our cats at the Fairmont Hotel in downtown NOLA. Thankfully, I panicked on Sunday morning and we got the hell out.

Some estimates call for us not being able to return to the city until November. We are now among the displaced. But we are enormously blessed.

As of today we believe our house, most of it at least, missed the flood waters. We remain concern for the one of our five cats we couldn't get out. But friends have gotten in the house to put down lots of food and water for her.

We have prospects for the future. So many of the poor have nothing. Nothing. Again, Suzette and I are blessed.”

Please keep Julius and Suzette in your thoughts and prayers along with all of those impacted by this terrible tragedy.

N. Scott Jones, Editor

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

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News, Trivia & Naughty Bits



...and even the bizarre from the BBC Blog

*“Want a piece of me?
15th August 2005*

John Cleese is to undergo an operation on his colon and has jokingly (we think) decided to sell off the bit that's removed.

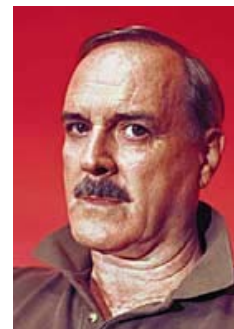
The comic is to have a small section of his digestive tract removed after contracting diverticulitis, the inflammation of pockets that often form in the colon of over-60s.

Fans who subscribe to his website newsletter at thejohncleese.com were told yesterday: 'In case any of you have noticed that things have gone a bit quiet in the last few days - it is because the old man has decided to have some surgery to cure some digestive problems he's been having.

'The good news is that the infected bit which has been cut out by the surgeon will be offered for sale on the website in the next few days. Proceeds from the sale will be divided between JC and the very nice surgeon.'

Don't all rush at once.”

Editor's Note: Posted by Steve Bennett, Comedy Journalist. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external websites.



Actor John Cleese



ViewerPoints: *From and For Viewers Like YOU*

That Straight Talkin': Vicar of Dibley



Witty, sardonic, and yes, always loveable – our favorite Vicar endures the dense, the sublime and always seems to find a silver lining – or something...

No...no no... no no no no no..YES! So says parish council member Jim Trott in answer to any question. And through it all, Geraldine Granger, Dibley's first and only woman vicar navigates the inane and aloof in this hilarious comedy series. Witty, funny and charming all – the Beeb chronicles the series:

“When their ancient vicar, Pottle, dies during the middle of a service, the villagers of Dibley prepare for a suitable replacement, hoping that the new man is young and enthusiastic enough to stir the locals from their apathy and get a decent-sized congregation packing into the church instead of the recent single-figure attendances. What they get is Geraldine Granger, a chocolate-guzzling, joke-cracking, irreverent reverend who breezes into the place like a breath of fresh air. The parish council is generally bemused by its new spiritual guardian but its head figure, local squire David Horton, is simply outraged by her appointment and takes steps to have her replaced. Geraldine's optimistic outlook and obvious enthusiasm prove popular with the wacky villagers, however, and David is forced reluctantly to accept her appointment, forming a working friendship although often disagreeing fundamentally on policy or method. Although, on paper, this may seem like yet another entry in the canon of religious-themed sitcoms, *The*

Vicar of Dibley, like *Father Ted* had a decidedly 1990s feel and approach. The ordination of female vicars was still a controversial and topical issue when the show first aired, and that debate fuelled the comedy for the first few episodes. Later however, when the novelty of a woman vicar wore off, the show relied upon the interplay between the major characters. Although Geraldine (reputedly inspired by real-life Reverend Joy Carroll of Streatham, south London) was the centerpiece of the show, it was performed as a comedy ensemble, with the inner-sanctum of the church council providing the team support. Apart from the pompous, Conservative, egocentric Horton, the council members comprised his son, the hapless Hugo; the vague parish clerk, Frank; the incomprehensible Jim Trott; the straight-talking land worker Owen; and the elderly flower-arranger Letitia. The other main player was the verger, Alice Tinker, a staggeringly naive, off-beam young woman with the IQ of a kettle, who went on to become engaged to Hugo, much to the distress of his father. All of these characters were extreme in one way or another (Dibley was described in one episode as 'the in-breeding capital of the world') and their particular idiosyncrasies - like Alice's massive lack of reasoning, Hugo's bizarre waffling and Letitia's mind-boggling culinary creations, mixing, for example, anchovies with peanut butter, or ham with

lemon curd - all helped bring a greatly pleasing, surreal tone to what was otherwise a relatively straightforward situation. (The Letitia character, portrayed by the great Liz Smith, was killed off in the April 1996 Easter special.) Romance eventually blossomed between Hugo and Alice (despite David's opposition) resulting in marriage and the birth of their first child.

In the middle of it all, as the fun-loving but comparatively 'normal' Geraldine, was Dawn French, giving yet another spot-on performance that utilized her talent for delivering complicated funny lines

It was a little surprising that *The Vicar Of Dibley* was not more extreme and hard-edged - initially, in fact, there were criticisms that it was middle-of-the-road - but closer inspection revealed just how clever it was, the scripts managing to convey subversive ideas in such a subtle and humorous way that they passed by almost unnoticed. The very notion of a woman vicar being sexy and cracking ribald gags was revolutionary in itself; most episodes featured a short post-credits sequence in which Geraldine told Alice a bawdy joke, with Alice - being too dense to understand them - reacting in a number of weird ways, all inappropriate."

You can get all of the series in one set entitled "The Divine Collection." This series will not disappoint the most avid Britcom fan. The hectic careers of these actors made visits to Dibley all too short of a run. But hope springs eternal. As you will see in the New DVD Releases section of this newsletter, new material will be released on September 27, 2005 in a 10th anniversary DVD that takes us back to Dibley some five years since the series ended. A must-have in my book. Be sure to tune in for a hilarious look at a band of mercurial and sometimes disturbing characters in the hamlet of Dibley.

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



ViewerPoints In The Post



I think 'Allo 'Allo is the greatest Britcom ever made, and reading your June issue was very interesting.

Kathy, in Ohio

...keep up the good work. I love the "Insider".

Deb, in Iowa

Love your publication. Being a fan of Britcoms, it is a lot of fun to read. I just wanted to ask if it is definite that Ardal O'Hanlon has left My Hero.

Reed, in New Jersey

ED: *Yes, it is definite. I will keep your observations and questions in mind when I interview James Dreyfus, his replacement (also Thin Blue Line, Gimme Gimme Gimme), next month. The interview with James will be an anchor story in the November issue of The Insider. Stay tuned.*



BritQuotient Quiz!

- What is the name of Janet's parents' dog in the series *My Hero*?
- In the same series, what super hero name did George's cousin Arnie have before being "de-frocked" by the Ultron council for charging a fee to be rescued?
- In the episode where Janet and George look after her parents' dog, George and he can communicate. What does he think is George's *real* name?

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

ViewerPoints: Contributions

Some Like it Hot

Indian Influences on Food & Fun in British Culture and Comedy

By Sheela Kadam

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

Whenever I visit England, I always come back a few pounds happier - and heavier! As an expat Brit living in America, I love and miss not only hearty British fare, but also the variety of ethnic food choices so readily available 'back home'. In London, it's impressive to see how Indian cuisine increases in excellence and innovation every year, and 'going out for a curry' truly is a national pastime. But it's not just strides in the foodie scene that I've noticed - from music to fashion, Indian influences are now an integral part of multicultural Britain. And if you've seen groundbreaking Britcoms such as "Goodness Gracious Me" or "The Kumars at Number 42", you'll realize that Asian humor has really made inroads in British comedy today.

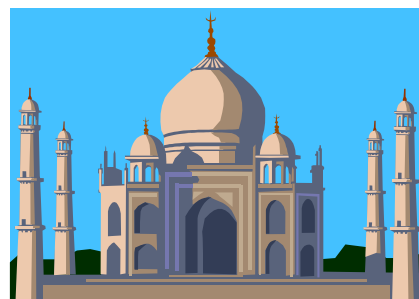
A LOOK AT INDIANS IN BRITISH COMEDY

The British were in India for over 350 years, so it's no surprise that most British families have some sort of link to India, which finally gained independence in 1947. The film *Carry On Up The Khyber* (1968) was the Carry On Team's rather fond take on the British Raj, and the team played most of the Indian roles. Set in British India, 1895, it showed the Burpas were revolting - but then again "The Devils in Skirts" guarding the Khyber Pass were none too charming either! The plot consisted of a group of Brits trying to save India from, well, the Indians! Memorable performances included Sid James as Sir Sidney Ruff Diamond; Kenneth Williams as the scheming Khasi of Kalabar; Bernard Bresslaw as Bungdit Din and Cardew Robinson as the Fakir.

Spike Milligan got some mileage from playing Indian roles in comedy sketches and the sitcom 'Curry and Chips', but the one I remember most was "Mind Your

Language" which aired in 1977. This was a popular Britcom featuring the antics of an English language class for a mixed bag of adult foreign students which included Indian actors Dino Shafeek and Jamila Massey and Sri Lankan-born Albert Moses. Set in England, the comedy centered on the 'foreign is funny' concept, which led many to later think of it as 'politically incorrect'. What made it so popular was that although the teacher, Jeremy Brown, (played by the late Barry Evans) always respected his students' cultures and treated them all as equal, his students never got along as well as he expected them to! Despite their bickering, however, it was evident in the storylines that at the end of the day, they were always willing to help each other out. Needless to say, most of the comedy centered on misunderstandings and breakdown of communications.....the Spanish student arguing with the rather hot headed Italian, the Indians annoying each other and a Greek throwing a spanner in the works. Strangely enough, it was very popular among Indians.

"It Ain't Half Hot, Mum" was set in India during the days of The British Raj, showcasing the adventures of a British Army unit who entertained the troops, and their bombastic, bullying 'no time for nancy boys' Battery Sergeant Major. Named after a frequent line in letters back home from soldiers stationed in India, it featured Indian actors Dino Shafeek as the Charwallah and Barbar Bhatti as the Punkahwallah, but the most hilarious Indian character was played by Michael Bates in the role of Rangji Ram, chief Bearer and anglophile who mistakenly thinks he's a Brit. Most of his comments were prefaced with "we British...." The charwallah was always roped in to help the Brits get out of sticky situations, and the lowly yet observant Punkawallah spoke his words of wisdom purely in Hindi, except for his punch line which was always delivered in broken English. Bates did such a great job that I remember my friends & I being surprised to later find out that he was actually English!



(Continued on page 16)

Special Feature

Meet select cast members of...



The Blackadder Series

Laughs for the ages. Literally. Rowan Atkinson, Tony Robinson and crew deliver witty, side splittingly funny performances across four different eras of history in the renowned Blackadder series. The following chronicles the accomplishments and background on the band of actors that make the series a delight to watch.

Rowan Atkinson as Sir Edmund Blackadder (all series)

Rowan Sebastian Atkinson was born January 6, 1955 in Consett, County Durham, England. Two of his most well-known characters are Edmund Blackadder and Mr. Bean.

Atkinson was educated at St Bees School and studied electrical engineering at Newcastle University then at Oxford (Queen's College), starting his comedy career at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Atkinson toured with a one-man show, with Angus Deayton as the straight man. The one-man show was filmed for television, and is still popular on video. It characterizes Atkinson's comedy style, which is tightly planned and scripted, often physically-based comedy - comedy as performance, rather than comedy as observation or discussion, observant of life as many of the routines were. Atkinson's talent for physical comedy has seen him described as "the man with the rubber face". In 1978 he was offered his own television series by *ITV* but turned it down in favor of *Not the Nine O'clock News*.

In 2003, he was listed in *The Observer* as one of the 50 funniest acts in British comedy, and in a 2005 poll to find *The Comedian's Comedian*, he was voted amongst the top 50 comedy acts ever by fellow comedians and comedy insiders.

He suffered from a stutter as a child and it sometimes returns when he is in stressful situations. In particular, the letter "B" poses a problem for him. He managed to overcome the problem through over articulation; however, this over articulation, somewhat ironically, evolved into one of his trademark comic devices in itself. His pronunciation of "Bob" in *Blackadder* being a famous example. His accomplishments are significant as follows:

THEATRE

Rowan Atkinson One-man Show

UK Tour, 1991

The Sneeze Performer

Aldwych Theatre, London, 1988 - 1989

Rowan Atkinson At The Atkinson One-man Show

Brookes Atkinson Theatre, Broadway, 1986

The News Revue One-man Show

Shaftesbury Theatre, London and tours of Australia, New Zealand, the Far East and the UK, 1986

The Nerd Performer

Aldwych Theatre, London 1984 - 1985

Rowan Atkinson In Revue One-man Show

The Globe Theatre, London 1981

The Secret Policeman's Other Ball Performer

Live Show, Theatre Royal, 9th - 12th September 1981

The Secret Policeman's Ball Performer

Live Show, Theatre Royal, 27th - 30th June 1979, *ITV*

Student Revues at the Edinburgh Fringe Writer/ Performer

Dundee University Theatre Group, Oxford Theatre Group etc, 1973 - 1977

Beyond A Joke One-man Show

Hampstead Theatre, London, 1978

FILM

Love Actually, Rufus

Working Title/DNA Films, 2003

Johnny English, Johnny English

Working Title/Universal 2003

Scooby Doo, Emile Montavariou

Warner Bros., 2002

Rat Race, Enrico Pollini

Paramount Pictures, 2001

Blackadder Back & Forth, Various lead

NMEC-Skyscape, 2000

Maybe Baby, Mr James

BBC Films, 2000

Bean - The Ultimate Disaster Movie, Mr Bean

Polygram/Working Title/ Tiger Aspect Pictures, 1997

The Lion King, Voice of Zazu

Disney, 1994

Four Weddings And A Funeral, Father Gerald

Working Title Films, 1994

Hot Shots - Part Deux, Dexter Hayman

20th Century Fox, 1993

The Witches, Mr Stringer

Warner Bros., 1990

The Tall Guy, Ron Anderson

Working Title Films, 1989

The Appointments Of Dennis Jennings, Dr. Schooner

HBO/BBC2, 1989

Never Say Never Again, Nigel Small-Fawcett

Warner Bros., 1983

TELEVISION

Mr Bean - The Animated Series, Voice of Mr Bean

ITV1, March 2002 - Present Day

Comic Relief: The Big Hair Do Martin Bashir

BBC1, 2003

The Jubilee Girl, Sir Osmond Darling-Blackadder

BBC1, 2002

Comic Relief: Say Pants to Poverty

BBC1, 2001

The Royal Variety Performance 2000, Performer

BBC1, 2000

Comic Relief: Dr. Who and the Curse of Fatal Death

BBC1, 1999

A Royal Birthday Celebration, Sir Edmund Blackadder

ITV1, 1998

The Thin Blue Line, Insp. Raymond C. Fowler

BBC1, 1995 and 1996

Comic Relief: Behind the Nose Mr Bean

BBC1, 1995

Mr Bean, 14 Episodes Mr Bean/Co-Writer

ITV, HBO and Tiger Television, 1990 - 1995

Heroes & Villains: Full Throttle, Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin

BBC1/Tiger Television, 1995

Comic Relief: The Invasion of the Comic Tomatoes, Mr Bean

BBC1, 1993

The Driven Man, Himself/Writer

Tiger Television, 1993

Bernard And The Genie, Charles Pinkworth

BBC1, 1991

Blackadder Goes Forth, Capt. Edmund Blackadder

BBC1, 1989

Blackadder's Christmas Carol, Various Blackadders

BBC1, 1988

Blackadder The Third, Edmund Blackadder Esq.

BBC1, 1987

Blackadder Two, Lord Blackadder

BBC1, 1986

Comic Relief, Performer/Director

BBC1, 1986

The Black Adder, Edmund Blackadder

BBC1, 1983

Not The Nine O'clock News, Various Roles/Writer

BBC2, 1979 - 1982

Rowan Atkinson Presents...Canned Laughter, Various Roles

ITV, 1979

Tony Robinson as Baldrick (all series)

Tony was born on the 15th August 1946 in Hackney East London. His first school was Woodford green preparatory school, and then he attended Wanstead County High Grammar School. He made his stage debut when still at school, at the age of 12 in the original production of Oliver. The boy playing the Artful Dodger didn't turn up and Tony volunteered to take his place as there were no designated understudies. This was followed by numerous shows, films and TV appearances as a Child actor. Tony passed 4 O'levels (History, Geography and both English Language and English Literature) and went on to do 'A' levels, however he decided that wasn't for him and chose to go to drama school. He was too young to go to RADA but got a place at the Central School of Speech and Drama.

After leaving he spent several years in rep and worked for two years as a theatre director before joining the Chichester festival theatre. Tony did various television appearances before getting his "big break" in landing the part of Baldrick in Blackadder. This changed Tony's life and really launched him into the public eye, from this point on Tony has rarely been off our screens and has made, written and produced many programs, over 1000 in fact and appeared in several feature films. He has written seventeen children's books, including "Tony Robinson's Kings and Queens".

Tim McInnerny as Percy (Series 1, 2 & 4)

Tim McInnerny (born September 18, 1956) is known for his roles in *Blackadder* as Lord Percy (series one and two) and Captain Darling (series four). He decided not to reprise his role as Percy in series three due to a fear of being typecast, although he did appear in a guest role as a different character in a single episode of the series.

He has also worked as a serious actor, having appeared on stage in the original production of *Pravda* with Anthony Hopkins, and on television in *Edge of Darkness* (1985) where he played a nervous and embittered anarchist. He has also starred in *Notting Hill* (1999) as Max, as well as *The Emperor's New Clothes* (2002), *102 Dalmatians* (2000), *FairyTale: A True Story* (1997) and *Wetherby* (1985). In 1989 he co-starred with Kate Bush in the music video for her song "This Woman's Work". In 2004, he joined the cast of the BBC/Kudos spy drama *Spooks* for its third season, playing Oliver Mace, a semi-regular character. McInnerny (stress on the penultimate syllable of "McInnerny") was brought up in Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire and educated at Wadham College, Oxford.

Hugh Laurie as Prince George and Lt. George (Series 3 & 4)

Hugh Laurie (born June 11, 1959) is best known for his television work, especially his double act, A Bit of Fry and Laurie, with Stephen Fry. He was born and raised in Oxford, where he attended the Dragon School (a famous prep school), before going on to Eton and then to Selwyn College, Cambridge, where he read Archaeology and Anthropology. His father had won an Olympic gold medal in rowing, and he himself was a rower at school and university, taking part in the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race of 1980. During his first year at university, Laurie dated Emma Thompson, now a well-known actress. He also joined the famous Cambridge Footlights, which has been the starting point for many successful British comedians. When Footlights brought their end-of-year revue to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1980, Laurie met Stephen Fry. In his final year, 1981, he was the president of the Footlights Club, while Emma Thompson was the vice-president. Laurie has branched out into a solo career as an actor in both comic roles (such as the *Blackadder* series with Rowan Atkinson as Prince George and Lieutenant George) and also had more serious roles, such as his parts in the films, *Peter's Friends* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Other film appearances include *Maybe Baby* and *Stuart Little*. In 1996, his book *The Gun Seller*, a humorous novel of suspense, was published; it has become a best seller. Laurie is currently working on a second novel, *The Paper Soldier*.

Miranda Richardson as Queen Elizabeth I (Series 2)

Miranda Richardson (Born 3 March 1958, in Southport, Lancashire) is commonly regarded as one of the finest acting talents of her generation, and noted for her distinctive ability to deeply delve into the minds of the characters she plays. The second daughter of middle-class parents, she had a talent for acting from an early age. Richardson had originally intended to study veterinary medicine, but her squeamishness made this impossible. She enrolled at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, where she studied alongside Daniel Day-Lewis. In 1981, she made her stage debut in *Moving* at the Queen's Theatre in London. Three years later, she made her big screen debut as platinum blonde nightclub hostess Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in the United Kingdom in Mike Newell's critically acclaimed biographical drama, *Dance with a Stranger*. Her performance in that film won her much praise, and within a year, she had been cast by Steven Spielberg to appear in his World War II drama *Empire of the Sun* (1987).

Richardson is perhaps best known for her role as infantile Queen Elizabeth I, aka Queenie, in the cult British comedy *Blackadder*. Other television roles include the bitchy Pamela Flitton in *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1997), Miss Gilchrist in *St. Ives* (1998), Bettina (the obsessive compulsive interior decorator) in *Absolutely Fabulous* and the emotionally repressed Queen Mary in *The Lost Prince* (2003). As well as a number of high profile supporting roles in the cinema, including Vanessa Bell in *The Hours*, Lady Van Tassel in *Sleepy Hollow* and Patsy Carpenter in *The Evening Star*, she has also won acclaim for her performances in *The Crying Game* and *Enchanted April*, for which she won a Golden Globe, beating a quartet of Hollywood heavyweights: Geena Davis, Whoopi Goldberg, Shirley MacLaine and Meryl Streep. Two Academy Award nominations (for *Damage* and *Tom & Viv*) have not altered the actress's modesty. She refuses to discuss her private life in interviews, and takes both leading and supporting roles in a variety of different genres. Her extensive film credits have included worthy stints in a number of critically acclaimed indie features, among them Robert Altman's *Kansas City* (1996), Robert Duvall's *The Apostle* (1997) and Richard E. Grant's *Wah-Wah* (2005). More recently, Richardson appeared as Queen Rosalind of Denmark in the Julia Stiles vehicle *The Prince and Me*, and the ballet mistress Madame Gyry in the long-awaited film version of *The Phantom of the Opera*, starring Gerard Butler and Emmy Rossum. She has since signed on to appear as Rita Skeeter, the toxic Daily Prophet journalist in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, to be released in November 2005.



Series Profile: A Look at Black Adder



“The path of my life is strewn with cowpats from the devil's own satanic herd.” -- Blackadder

The headline is but one of many classic quotes from Edmund Blackadder as he shares his views on love, life and his social standing throughout the centuries (tongue firmly in cheek in this description).

Over four time warped series, you can follow the trials and tribulations of the oft-times perverse and always acid tongued Blackadder as he serves and is subservient in life, dependent on the particular series. What one discovers throughout is a collection of witty, well-written situational comedies that tease the mind and charm the soul.

It is implied that in each series the Blackadder character is a (distant) descendant of the previous one. With each observed generation, Blackadder's social standing is reduced, from prince, to nobleman, to royal butler, to army captain; and by the end, in the last episode of the last series, nothing more than cannon-fodder. However, he concurrently goes from an incompetent fool (in the first series) to an ever more cunning and devious genius.

Series 1: The Black Adder

Set in the Middle Ages, this is in fact a secret history. It opens with the Battle of Bosworth Field (1485) being won by Richard III (played by Peter Cook), instead of Henry Tudor who won in reality. However, Richard III is then accidentally killed by Lord Edmund Plantagenet (Richard tries to borrow Blackadder's horse, but Edmund thinks he is stealing it and cuts his head off).

The late King's nephew, Richard, Duke of York (played by Brian Blessed) who is Lord Edmund Plantagenet's (The Black Adder) father, is then crowned as Richard IV. Lord Edmund never took part in the battle (he arrived late and

went the wrong way, but claimed to have killed four hundred and fifty peasants and several nobles, one of whom had already been killed by his brother...). Richard, Duke of York (one of the 'Princes in the Tower') was in reality only 12 years old (and perhaps two years dead) when Battle of Bosworth Field took place in 1485, and so far too young to have had two grown up sons.

The series then proceeds to examine the reign of Richard IV (1485 - 1498). Richard and his wife Queen Gertrude of Flanders, the Witch Queen, have two sons.

By the end of the series, events converge with our timeline, when King Richard IV and his entire family are poisoned, allowing Henry Tudor to take the throne as King Henry VII. He then proceeds to rewrite history, presenting Richard III as a monster, and eliminating Richard IV's reign from the history books. In this series, the character of the Black Adder is somewhat different from later incarnations, being largely unintelligent, and relying more on the plans of Baldrick. The title of Laird of Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles may have been inspired by the then leader of the Liberal Party David Steel who was MP for that constituency when the series was written.

The character does evolve through the series, however, and he begins showing signs of what his descendants will be like by the final episode, where he begins insulting everyone around him and making his own plans. "The Black Adder" is also a title that Edmund adopts during the first episode (after first considering "The Black Vegetable"); presumably one of his descendants adopted it as a surname prior to *Blackadder II*, where the title character bears the name "Edmund Blackadder".

Series 2: Blackadder II

Blackadder II is set in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (reigned 1558–1603). The principal character is Edmund, Lord Blackadder, a great-grandson of the original Black Adder (according to the title song) and a close servant of the Queen. The Queen (or Queenie), played by Miranda Richardson, likes to chop off people's heads and play jokes on Edmund. Edmund's hopes of marrying her never bear fruit. The Queen is joined by her advisor Lord Melchett (with whom Blackadder has a mutual relationship of hate) and her insane nanny, Nurse. This series establishes the more familiar character of Edmund: cunning, shrewd, entirely and without fail insulting to everyone he does not have to suck up to, and witty, following the BBC's request for the show to be made funnier.

The action is generally split between Blackadder's house (or to be more specific his front room, though we do also get to see his hallway, bedroom, dining room and Baldrick's bedroom) and the Queen's throne room. Each episode also features another location, from a poverty-stricken man's front room (which was the setting for Blackadder II's first ever scene) to a German dungeon. This was done after the first series, when large sets and outdoor scenes proved too expensive.



Rowan Atkinson as Blackadder with Tony Robinson as Baldrick in Blackadder the Third

Series 3: Blackadder the Third

Set in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a period known as the Regency. For much of this period, King George III was incapacitated due to poor mental health, and his son George, the Prince of Wales, acted as regent. From 1811 until his father's death in 1820, he was known as "the Prince Regent".

In the series, E. Blackadder Esquire is the butler to the Prince of Wales (played by Hugh Laurie as a complete fop and idiot). Despite Edmund's respected intelligence and abilities he has no personal fortune to speak of. According to Edmund he has been serving the Prince Regent all their lives, since they were both breastfeeding (when he had to

show the Prince which part of his mother was serving the drinks). There are three main sets: the Prince's quarters, which are large and lavish, the below-stairs kitchen hangout of Blackadder and Baldrick, which is dark and squalid, and finally Mrs. Miggins' coffee house (Mrs. Miggins' pie shop was a never-seen running gag in *Blackadder II*; she - or, at least, a descendant of hers - was now finally shown). As well as Rowan Atkinson and Tony Robinson in their usual roles, this series starred Hugh Laurie as the Prince Regent, and Helen Atkinson-Wood (no relation to Rowan) as Mrs. Miggins. The series features rotten boroughs, Dr. Johnson (played by Robbie Coltrane), the French Revolution and the Scarlet Pimpernel, over-the-top theatrical actors, highwaymen who hate squirrels, and duels.

Series 4: Blackadder Goes Back and Forth

This series is set in the trenches of the First World War. Another "big push" is planned, and Captain Blackadder's one goal is to avoid getting shot, so he plots ways to get out of it. Blackadder is joined by the idealistic, gung-ho Lieutenant George (Hugh Laurie), and the world's worst cook, Private S. Baldrick. Loony General Melchett rallies his troops from a French mansion, where he is aided and abetted by Captain Darling (Tim McInnerny), pencil-pusher supreme, whose name is played on for maximum comedy value. In a list of the 100 Greatest British Television Programs drawn up by the British Film Institute in 2000, voted for by industry professionals, *Blackadder Goes Forth* was placed 16th. Captain Darling's name was originally intended to be Captain Cartwright, until Stephen Fry chirped in with the name 'Darling', and the name, along with Blackadder's pronunciation of 'Bob', became one of the funniest words to be said in the series.

In Closing

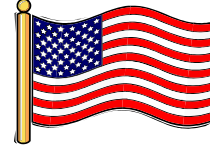
In addition to the four series, a number of specials were produced. These include *Blackadder: The Cavalier Years* and *Blackadder's Christmas Carol*.

For both new and veteran Britcom viewers alike, the Blackadder series provides a collection of some of the best craftsmanship that British comedies has to offer. Rent it, buy it, watch it – you will be glad you did.

Editor's Note: Wikipedia is an excellent resource (and fan-based) on information, trivia and insights to numerous British comedies and was used significantly in the research and content of this story.



New DVD/Video Releases



Vicar of Dibley: 10th Anniversary Specials

Release on DVD: September 27, 2005

*Amazon.com says: "The Vicar of Dibley fans rejoice! These two hour-long 10th Anniversary episodes rank with the very best. Even though the last full series was 4 years earlier, the cast hasn't lost their fantastic rapport--particularly the delightful chemistry between feisty Vicar Geraldine Granger (Dawn French, *French & Saunders*) and her sweet-tempered but dimwitted verger, Alice (Emma Chambers, *Notting Hill*); these two bounce off of each other like a classic comedy duo. The first episode is Christmas-themed and features a contest to write a new Christmas carol and an implausible (yet very funny) visit from amazonian supermodel Rachel Hunter, which leads everyone to believe that Gerry is gay. The other is supposedly a New Year's episode, but it's really about Gerry's impending birthday, speed-dating, and writing a letter to the Prime Minister about world poverty (culminating in a serious and surprisingly moving plea aimed at the 2005 G8 Summit meeting). As ever, French is the barely-calm center of wildly spinning carousel of village eccentrics and the results are wonderfully funny."*

If you love the Vicar, this will be a must for you...new stuff and the first since the series concluded in 1999. Definitely worth adding to your Britcom library!

Upcoming Releases

Are You Being Served? Christmas Specials (DVD)

Four classic comic Christmas specials presented uncut and lovingly restored. Includes Christmas Crackers, The Father Christmas Affair, Happy Returns and The Punch and Judy Affair. A great gift for the comedy lover in your life.

Butterflies: Series 2 (DVD)

Geoffrey Palmer (*As Time Goes By*, *Mrs. Brown*) and Wendy Craig (*The Forsyte Saga*) star in the second season of this funny yet poignant BBC series about a frustrated housewife, her detached dentist husband and bickering teenage sons.

Only Fools and Horses: Series 6 (DVD)

What is Del doing with inflatable women named "Lusty Linda" and "Erotic Estelle"? Why is Rodney pretending to be 14? Find out in the riotous sixth season of the show recently named "The Best British Sitcom of All Time" in a 2004 audience poll.

The Kumars at Number 42 (DVD)

The Kumars bulldozed their backyard and created a state-of-the-art TV studio. Now they host one of the oddest-and funniest-talk shows ever! Roar with laughter as celebrity guests get mixed up in the oddball shenanigans hailed as "laugh-out-loud funny" by The Chicago Tribune.

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



Special Feature

Reader Poll: "Where Are They Now?"

Which favorite actor would YOU like to hear about?

Whatever happened to Patrick McGoohan?

...asks a reader from Pennsylvania. At 77, he now lives in Los Angeles...here is a recent bio piece on his career....

McGoohan was born in New York, the son of Irish immigrants. Soon after his birth, the family returned to Ireland, gifting Patrick with a transatlantic accent that sounds simultaneously familiar and exotic to English-speaking audiences of all stripes. Settling in Sheffield, England, McGoohan worked in a variety of occupations before becoming a stage manager and then actor. He has appeared in 180 stage productions, including the Orson Welles production of *Moby Dick* in London's West End and Hugh Whitmore's *Pack of Lies* on Broadway.

McGoohan became a household name in the United Kingdom when he starred as agent John Drake in the hit TV series *Danger Man*. From 1960-1 McGoohan appeared in thirty-nine half-hour episodes of the series; in 1965-6 the show was resuscitated in color in an hour-long version (retitled *Secret Agent* in the U.S.) and McGoohan appeared in forty-five additional episodes. Growing justifiably tired with the series, McGoohan abruptly quit after a two-hour finale, and proposed his own show idea to ITV. The resulting series, *The Prisoner*, for which McGoohan originally planned only six episodes but which eventually stretched to seventeen, is universally regarded as classic. The setup is simple: A secret agent, never named, retires from duty and is abducted by an organization that is also never named - they dub him *Number Six* and demand his secrets; he insists he's not a number, and refuses to talk. Surreal, claustrophobic,

paranoid and ultimately too subversive for much of its audience, the series was executive produced by McGoohan, who also wrote and directed many episodes.

Subsequently McGoohan relocated to Los Angeles and appeared in guest-star roles in the TV series *Rafferty*, as well as eight episodes of the series *Columbo* for which he also directed six episodes.

McGoohan has appeared in such films as *The Dam Busters* (1954), *The Three Lives of Thomasina* (1963), *All Night Long* (1963), *Ice Station Zebra* (1968), *Mary, Queen of Scots* (1971), *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *Silver Streak* (both 1976), *Brass Target* (1978), *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), *Baby...Secret of the Lost Legend* (1985), *Jamaica Inn* (1985), *Of Pure Blood* (1986) and *Braveheart* (1995). The actor had one of his most popular roles in the 1964 Disney TV production of *The Scarecrow of Romney Marsh* (released theatrically as *Dr. Syn, Alias the Scarecrow*).



Where are they now?

***Send your nominations for
"Where Are They Now?" to
scott@bbcinsider.com***



BritCom LaughLinks

BBC Comedy: Blackadder

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

Love it. Great information resource and orientation to the Blackadder series. Neat trivia pieces, knowledge base and other resources. Complete episode guide to all series can be found here. Great photos, wallpapers and other fun pieces are available at this site. Definitely worth the trip for all Blackadder fans. Check it out!

Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks

Rowan Atkinson Site: Blackadder

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

If you love Rowan, you will love this site – very complete and includes Blackadder plus this star's compete works. This link is for the Blackadder section of his work. The information here is very comprehensive and a must for any fan of Mr. Atkinson.

Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks

Vicar of Dibley: A Fan Site

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

A neat site with big information on Geraldine and friends. Worth a visit to gain more info on this beloved series.

Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks

Indian Cooking & Recipes

<http://www.indiaexpress.com/cooking>

Want to try your hand at even more Indian cuisine delights, this site is for you. Easy to follow recipes and a great variety for those seeking to take their cuisine exploration to the next level.

Rating: 3 out of 5 mouse clicks

The Latest on *My Hero* Series

http://www.downthetubes.net/tv/my_hero

Here you go Reed – read all about it. James Dreyfus replacing Ardal O'Hanlon as Thermoman. Insights on Series 6 and much more on that wacky Ultronian and vitamin shop owner. Worth the look.

Rating: 3 out of 5 mouse clicks

The British Comedy Homepage

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

Worth repeating. 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



News Briefs

Benny Hill show comic writer dies

Comedy writer Dave Freeman, who was instrumental in the success of Benny Hill, has died at the age of 82. Freeman co-wrote and appeared in *The Benny Hill Show* in its early days and also worked with Tommy Cooper, Frankie Howerd and Tony Hancock. He also wrote for sitcoms including *Bless This House* and *Terry and June* as well as scripting two *Carry On* films. Freeman worked with Benny Hill from 1955 until the mid-1960s, when the comedian's show moved to ITV.

Corbett attacks 'dumbed-down TV'

Ronnie Corbett has joined fellow comedy stars Victoria Wood and David Jason in attacking the declining standards of British television programs. Speaking to the *Radio Times*, the *Two Ronnies* star said there is too much bad language and reality TV. "You get fed up watching shows with not much care and love," he complained. Corbett, soon to reunite with Ronnie Barker for a new *Two Ronnies* series, also criticized quiz shows like the BBC's *They Think It's All Over*. "It's just laughing at each other and thinking, 'Aren't we clever?'" said the 74-year-old comedian. Corbett is the latest comedy star to bemoan the "dumbing down" of modern TV programs.

Victor Meldrew's face is found in the heavens.

Still no cure for various forms of terminal illness, but scientists have been hard at work on another - some may say even more important - project. They've found the faces of Victor Meldrew and The Vicar of Dibley in the stars.

A team of four astronomers, led by the University of Sussex's Mark Garlick, were paid by UKTV Gold to perform this vital role, spanning two months. They mapped the shapes of the channel's sitcom characters against numerous star charts to find a match.

And although Dr Garlick says they take "a bit of imagination" to see, he's come up with the new constellations of Victor Meldrew and The Vicar Of Dibley.

Meldrew is centered on Ursa Major, which contributes stars to his eyes, jowls and nose and is visible from the UK for much of the year but not the winter. He is highest in the sky in April or May, facing north.

The Vicar of Dibley constellation, most visible in the UK from November to April, is centered on Orion with Mintaka, the central star in Orion's Belt, marking the end of her jaw line.

Python team are back again, for an archive special

Rumor has it that the surviving Pythons are all writing new material for an archive show celebrating the team's success. John Cleese, Eric Idle, Terry Gilliam, Michael Palin and Terry Jones will each write and present their own hour-long special about their glory days to make the series, *Monty Python's Personal Best*.

And they will all collaborate - a rare word to use in conjunction with the Pythons these days - on the final episode in honor of Graham Chapman.

The shows are being made for America's *PBS* public service broadcaster - which first aired the Pythons in the US - and will be screened in the spring. No word yet on whether they'll get an airing in Britain, but it's got to be likely someone, somewhere would want to buy them.



Some Like it Hot (cont'd. page 5)

In *Are You Being Served*", a character called Mr. Patel, played by Renu Setna appeared as the store's head of the Accounts Department in a hilarious episode involving a new Security Dispenser Machine which gives out staff wages. The machine contained an identity photo of each staff member, and was programmed not to issue wages unless each staff member stood in front of the machine to be scanned, and the scan exactly matched the photo. Captain Peacock was the first to try out the machine, but after scanning him, it thunders, Dalek-like, "DO NOT PAY OUT, DO NOT PAY OUT!" Patel checks Peacock's identity photo, and finds that it's an image of Peacock dressed in a pirate costume, complete with red bandanna and black eye patch, taken during Grace Brothers' production of the *Pirates of Penzance*. Patel asks Peacock to wear an eye patch and something red on his head to obtain his salary, but Peacock doesn't have his pirate costume with him. Miss Brahm takes a small black bra off a model and tells Peacock to use it as an eye patch, and Mrs. Slocombe finds a pair of red knickers, and the scene ends with (guess what) Peacock putting the garments on his head and waiting for his salary, much to the staff's delight.

With Britain becoming more multicultural, gradually more Indian characters started to appear in light entertainment, soap operas and comedies such as "Tandoori Nights" - and comedy writers had a field day thinking up a host of curry jokes! A couple of Indian conmen appeared in a memorable episode of *Only Fools And Horses* to pull a fast one over Del-Boy and Rodney.

Comedy scenes in Indian restaurants had the obligatory background 'furry wallpaper', twangy sitar music and obsequious Indian waiters, but they seemed to be popping up on every block, so beloved was the cuisine with the population. Vindaloo was often referred to in *Red Dwarf* as Lister's favorite food, and there was even mention of Margo's disapproval of it in 'Good Neighbours' - poor old Jerry only gets to eat his forbidden Vindaloo when Margo is away for the evening.

The Kumars At Number 42 aired in the UK in 2001 and is a great example of the continuing diversity of ethnic comedy and shows how multicultural British television has become. Part sitcom and part celebrity chat show with an improvisational feel, it stars The

Kumars, a fictional Indian family living in London, consisting of Madhuri and Ashwin Kumar (Indira Joshi and Vincent Ebrahim), their thirty something nice-but-dim son Sanjeev (Sanjeev Bhaskar), and Sushila (Meera Syal), Sanjeev's grandmother. Sanjeev's parents have built a TV studio at the back of their house so that their son can follow his dream of being a television presenter, but much to his chagrin, his family always join in the proceedings with hilarious results. Ashwin is full of rambling stories that have no point and Sushila totally breaks the usual character of 'sweet old Indian Granny' - she's full of saucy one-liners and always has her eye on the male guests. Sanjeev is inadvertently comical as the inept host to a variety of celebrity guests who don't seem to mind being sent up by an Indian family at all! They enjoy the Indian snacks in the Green Room (living room), put up with the pointed questions and are jolly good sports about being paid in chutney. The Kumars has been shown in India, Malaysia and in South Africa, where former President Nelson Mandela appeared as a guest on the show. The show's format has been so popular that the Australians even made their own version in 2003 entitled "The Greeks on the Roof". So what's better than a beer and curry with your mates? Beer, curry and a Britcom with your mates! Try the easy recipe below - if you are new to curry, it's a great introduction to Indian cuisine.

To that end, I have shared a couple of my favorite Indian cuisine recipes on the following page. These dishes are delightful and a great way to introduce yourself to the flavors of true Indian cooking. These are mild "curries" in terms of spiciness. So try these out - you know you want to. And the next time your favorite Britcom star talks about going out for "a curry," you can absolutely relate.

Seems that we'll be seeing a lot more British Indian comedy. Pass the Vindaloo!



Try some authentic Indian recipes next page.

ViewerPoints: Contributions II

Some Like it Hot, Some Mild

Recipes for the Indian Cuisine Beginner

CHICKEN KORMA

Serves 3 - 4

This mild and creamy chicken curry is a popular Indian restaurant dish.

Ingredients

1-2 tablespoons Vegetable Oil
1 medium Onion, chopped
1 lb boneless skinless Chicken breast, cubed
1 tablespoon Garum Masala (Indian Pepper Blend)
1 10 ounce can Patak's Korma Cooking Sauce
1/2 cup Chicken Stock
1/2 Bell Pepper, cut into chunks (optional)
2-4 Tablespoons Sour Cream
To Garnish: Chopped Cilantro & chopped Scallions

Preparation

Heat oil in a large skillet or saucepan. Add onions, stir fry until golden brown. Add chicken and Garum Masala, stir for five minutes or until cooked through. Add Korma sauce and stock. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes over a medium heat. Stir in the bell pepper if using, and the sour cream.

Garnish and serve over hot Basmati or other long-grain rice with lemon wedges.

BOLLYWOOD POTATOES

Serves 4

Ingredients

1 lb Potatoes, peeled & cubed
2 tablespoons Vegetable Oil
1 teaspoon Mustard Seeds
1 medium Onion, finely chopped
2 cloves Garlic crushed
2 tablespoons PATAK'S® Mild Curry Paste
Salt to taste

Preparation

1. Boil potatoes in salted water until tender.
2. Heat oil in a large, non-stick skillet, heat oil.

Add mustard seeds, and when they begin to pop, add the onion and garlic; sauté until golden brown.
3. Stir in the curry paste. Reduce heat, cover and cook for 2-3 minutes.
4. Add the potatoes. Cook an additional 5 minutes, adding additional water if potatoes begin to stick. Season to taste and serve.

For more great recipes, be sure you pay a visit to www.british-emporium.com



Postscripts

Thanks to all who continue to read and support *The Insider* through feedback and inquiries. So goes another issue of *The Insider* that for me has been an odd journey to write whilst worrying about so many of our countrymen affected by Hurricane Katrina.

As always, 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. Until the next issue, happy viewing!

Scott

Inside Joke Trivia Bit

When Blackadder is explaining how he caught the nurse as the German spy by saying three schools of which only two were great universities, Melchett says "Quite right, Oxford's a right dump." This is an in-joke, as Stephen Fry (who played Melchett) went to Cambridge, and Rowan Atkinson (Blackadder) went to Oxford.