

# The Insider

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Your Connection to the BBC Sales Company

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## Editor's Note

What makes a television classic? The traits are pretty obvious. Great cast, great writing, and characters we can relate to on some level, even if they are a bit exaggerated and over the top.

*The Insider* devotes a good chunk of this issue to getting you better acquainted with a classic that has stood the test of time. *Are You Being Served?* contains not only the traits listed above, but also an infectious sense of fun provided by a cast that really enjoyed what they were doing.

There's also a look at the interesting life and career of Lenny Henry. He is best known as Gareth Blackstock, the haughty *Chef!*, but I encourage you to search out some of his other works as there is much more to him than heaping out the abuse at Le Chateau Anglais.

I also take time this issue to deal with a pet peeve of mine: America's continual messing about trying to "translate" British programs for American audiences. I didn't mention all of the translations, so if you have any comments or disagree with my views, please let me know.

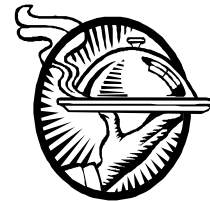
With that I'll say bye for this issue. I'm off to England for a bit and shall return with a lot of things to share. See you next time with all the juicy details. Cheers!

*Michelle Street, Editor*

## Lenny Henry

*Cooking Up Fine Comedy and More*

Forget Julia Child and while you're at it, tell that Iron Chef to take a hike. For fans of British comedy, no one cooks better than Gareth Blackstock, celebrity chef extraordinaire at Le Chateau Anglais in the hit sitcom *Chef!*



***I tried in the past to please too many people, and there was a time when I was in danger of spreading myself too thin, but you learn.***

***-Lenny Henry***

In *Chef!*, Lenny Henry plays Gareth Blackstock as a latter day Basil Fawlty – an egomaniacal monster who is impossible to work for and, as his wife will attest, impossible to live with. Gareth is consumed by his job and trying to maintain the exacting standards at Le Chateau.

They may share a tendency towards workaholism, but Lenny Henry the person is nothing like the monstrous Gareth. In fact, the man is a bit of a politician and by his own admission, has spent most of his life attempting to please everyone.

Perhaps this is due in part to his childhood in the West Midlands town of Dudley. He was one of the few black children at his school and quickly discovered that the key to being accepted was to be entertaining.

Lenny (born Lenworth George Henry) was one of seven children and the first of the Henry children to be born in England. His older siblings were born in Jamaica, where his parents lived until moving to the UK during the 50s. Like many other comedians, Lenny had a very strong willed, forceful mother.

*(continued on page 16)*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 The Insider Mail and News
- 3 Are You Being Served? Introduction
- 5 Are You Being Served? The Cast
- 7 Great Moments in Grace Brothers History
- 9 David Croft, Chairman of the Board/Croft Family Tree
- 12 Made In The USA
- 14 The Insider Episode Guide: *Chef!*
- 15 Spotted On The Internet

## The Insider Mailbox



### VICAR OF DIBLEY

My husband and I are planning a trip to England this summer and want to visit the village where *The Vicar of Dibley* is filmed. Can you tell us the name of this village?

Julia Smith, IA

EDITOR REPLIES: Exteriors for *The Vicar of Dibley* are shot in Turville, Buckinghamshire. Bon voyage and say hello to the Dibley Parish Council for us.

### RICHARD BRIERS

I enjoyed the *Good Neighbors/The Good Life* Frequently Asked Questions in the last Insider. What is Richard Briers up to these days?

Sandie Salvucci, WI

EDITOR REPLIES: Briers is definitely keeping busy. He recently appeared in *Monarch of the Glen* and is also providing the voices of cartoon dog and cat Roobarb and Custard for a BBC2 series called *Love 1970s*. This 10-part series premiered in late July and according to its producer, is the “definitive guide to the decade that changed the world and its trousers.” Sounds fun!

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**The Insider** welcomes all correspondence. Send letters via e-mail to editor Michelle Street at [bcdigest@soltec.com](mailto:bcdigest@soltec.com) or by snail mail to: *The Insider*, c/o Greg Parsons, BBC Worldwide Americas, 747 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803. Include your full name and location. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. **The Insider** reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think!

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## In The News



**Dame Judi Dench**, star of the hit sitcom *As Time Goes By*, was recently presented with the Benjamin Franklin Medal by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers, and Commerce.

The medal, which has been presented annually since 1956, is given to a person who has forwarded the cause of Anglo-American relations in the arts, manufacturing or commerce. Dame Judi was chosen because of her sterling work on the stage, screen, and of course, her role as Jean Pargetter on *ATGB*. Past honorees include **Sir David Attenborough** and business executive **Paul Mellon**.

Also honored recently was **Wendy Richard**, who was named an MBE (Member of the British Empire) on the Queen's Birthday Honors List. Richard, best known as the saucy Miss Brahms on *Are You Being Served?* was also honored for her work as Pauline Fowler on the popular soap *EastEnders*.

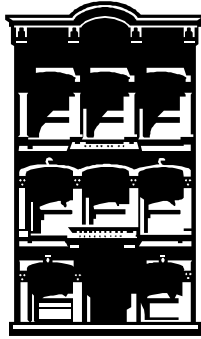
*Brittas Empire* and *Red Dwarf* star **Chris Barrie** has been a busy little Smeghead lately with a couple of new projects in the works. One is *Martin Festival*, about a London policeman who moves to a small village. The other is *Foley*, written by Roy Clarke of *Keeping Up Appearances* and *Last of the Summer Wine*. Barrie will portray the title character, a former cop turned private detective.

Also in the works is a sitcom with the power pairing of *Waiting for God* star **Stephanie Cole** and **Richard Wilson** from *One Foot In The Grave*. The series is entitled *Other Animals* and Cole plays a retired schoolteacher who needs to find a way to keep active. Wilson plays her husband, a freelance writer who just wants a quiet life. A pilot, written by *Waiting for God* author Michael Aitkens, has been filmed and the chances for a full series look very promising.

No, your ears are not deceiving you. In case you're wondering those are indeed the voices of *Absolutely Fabulous* stars **Julia Sawalha** and **Jane Horrocks** in the hit movie *Chicken Run*. The animated feature is the brainchild of *Wallace and Gromit* creator Nick Park and also features the voice of **Mel Gibson**.

# ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

## The Ins and “Outs” of Life at Grace Brothers Ground Floor Introduction



### *Ground floor perfumery, stationery, and leather goods...*

Everyone knows the first line and hardcore fans can easily finish the opening theme to *Are You Being Served?* They can also tell you that the voice heard is that of Stephanie Gathercole, who played Mr. Rumbold's first secretary. In a pinch, they can probably also tell you what color Mrs. Slocombe's hair was in any given episode and recite good chunks of the dialogue verbatim.

*Are You Being Served?* inspires that kind of rabid loyalty amongst fans, who never tire of its lasciviousness laced with innocence, the outrageous characters and costumes, the chemistry of the cast, and its contagious sense of fun.

On the other hand, it must be said that *AYBS?* inspires the opposite reaction in a lot of people. There seems to be no middle ground – you either really love it or you absolutely despise it.

What is there not to like, according to its detractors? It is not politically correct - leering and smutty in a Benny Hill sort of way. The jokes are old, obvious, cheap, and tedious, not to mention the fact that the scripts rely on innuendo as well as stereotypes such as the effeminate Mr. Humphries and the battle-axe Mrs. Slocombe, who was as brassy as her ever-changing hair color.

Nevertheless, for years the adventures of the staff at Grace Brothers has reigned as the most popular Britcom

shown on PBS stations and there is no denying that along with *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *AYBS?* is the program that most comes to mind when Americans hear the phrase British comedy.

*AYBS?* is just one of the many programs from the factory that is writer/producer/director David Croft. Croft has collaborated with a number of writers during his long and illustrious career, and this time he worked with Jeremy Lloyd.

Lloyd came up with a pilot called *Fun in Store* after he returned to England from a stint in California writing for *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*. For inspiration, Lloyd drew on memories of his tenure as a sales assistant at Simpson's Department Store - a job he lost when he was caught selling soft drinks from a fitting-room.

Croft liked the idea a lot but changed a few things (such as adding the women's department), called in a few debts he was owed, and *Are You Being Served?* sprang to life. The pilot was shown as a one-off as part of the *Comedy Playhouse* series.

The airing of the pilot was tinged with sadness because it was shown as a last minute replacement when the massacre of Israeli athletes caused a postponement of

the Olympics. It wasn't until almost a year later that the series proper began.

Croft chose his cast wisely and for the most part they were actors he'd worked with before and each cast member became indelibly identified with their role.

*AYBS?* harkens back to a time in British society when everyone knew his or her place and there was little questioning of authority or the hierarchical structure of society. At Grace Brothers, the division between the management and the rest of the staff was strictly adhered to, even down to having separate canteens and washrooms.

Top dog was **Young Mr. Grace**, the frail owner of the store who came equipped with a stream of sexy nurses and secretaries. When Harold Bennett became too ill to continue in the role, his place was taken by Kenneth Waller as his brother, **Old Mr. Grace**.

Next in this pecking order was **Mr. Rumbold**, the store manager, who often found himself having to mediate staff quarrels but somehow never getting the story quite right. His physical appearance makes the staff treat him sometimes like the unattractive teacher students made fun of at school, but you get the impression that he's a decent sort, though maybe not authoritarian enough for such an important position.

High-ranking person on the sales floor was **Captain Peacock**, whose job it was to direct customers to the appropriate department and clerk. Though he was only in the catering corps, Captain Peacock took his military background and authority seriously, even though his eye for the ladies sometimes got him in trouble.

There was even a pecking order among the sales force. Overseeing the men's department was **Mr. Grainger**, a grandfatherly figure who had a tendency to catch 40 winks during staff meetings and while at the counter. After he left, he was replaced by a series of employees including **Mr. Tebbs** and **Mr. Goldberg**.

Mr. Grainger oversaw two men. First, the gregarious, ever-cheerful **Mr. Humphries**, whose mincing walk and sometimes flamboyant attire made him a magnet for attention and laughs. Mr. Humphries was a very social

person, close to his mother, and definitely someone you'd like to invite to a dinner party.

Every sitcom needs a charming ladies man and **Mr. Lucas** filled that bill. Not that he ever got very far with the ladies at Grace Brothers, mind you, but he sure had a good time trying. Mr. Lucas also served as the official Grace Brothers behavior problem, smoking when he shouldn't and attempting to explain why he was late or running in at the last minute.

When Mr. Lucas left, his spot as the thorn in Mrs. Slocombe's side went to **Mr. Spooner**.

Ladies' Separates and Underwear was headed by **Mrs. Slocombe**, a sharp-tongued woman of a certain age who still had an eye for the men.

She could often be heard gossiping about her nights out with her junior assistant, **Miss Brahms**, who herself seemed to have a very active social life. Beautiful and sexy, Miss Brahms could definitely hold her own and shut down any undesired male attention, which usually came from Mr. Lucas.

The maintenance men occupied the bottom rung at Grace Brothers. **Mr. Mash** was first, followed by **Mr. Harman**. They were the "untouchables" in this caste system, not even allowed on the sales floor when the store was open. However, they were the voice of rebellion and anarchy in this system and they secretly knew that they were more important than probably anyone else in the store.

The interplay between these various characters and allowing the eccentricities of each to shine through is part of the reason why *AYBS?* was so successful. Despite the fact that yes, it is definitely not politically correct, at its core is an accurate portrait of Britain at the time.

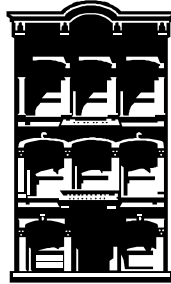
*AYBS?* gave us no moral quandaries amongst the laughs and nothing more thought-provoking than whether or not Mr. Humphries is gay (and we're not going there), but that's ok. There's nothing wrong with harmless, innocent, silly fun, and that is what *AYBS?* provided in abundance and why after 25 years it is still so widely loved. So get on the elevator (or should I say lift?) to learn more about *AYBS?*

*...wigs and haberdashery, kitchenware and food.*

*Going up...*

## Are You Being Served?

# First Floor The Cast



## *First floor telephones, gents ready-made suits....*

You know the characters, now here's a chance to learn about the actors who brought them to life. There were ten seasons in all and the cast had a number of changes throughout its run, especially in the menswear department.

### ***Mollie Sugden as Mrs. Slocombe***

**Born:** Keighley, Yorkshire on July 21, 1922

**Trained at:** Guildhall School of Music and Dance, where her naturally northern accent became quite posh. Good training for Mrs. Slocombe, who had a tendency to put on airs.

**You might not know that:** In real life, she is the mother of twins.

### ***Wendy Richard as Miss Brahms***

**Born:** July 20, 1947 in Middlesbrough.

**Trained at:** Italia Conti Stage Academy.

**You might not know that:** She is a breast cancer survivor. Diagnosed in 1996, she went through an operation and radiotherapy to cure her of the disease.

### ***John Inman as Mr. Humphries***

**Born:** June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1935 in Preston, Lancashire.

**Got his start:** In a production called *Freida* at The South Pier Pavilion, Blackpool,.

**You might not know that:** He has an official web site at [johninman.co.uk](http://johninman.co.uk) that keeps fans updated on all his activities.

### ***Trevor Bannister as Mr. Lucas (Seasons 1-6)***

**Born:** Durrington, Wiltshire

**Trained at:** London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

**Left show because:** His commitment to touring in the play *Middle-Age Spread* conflicted with the AYBS? shooting schedule.

**You might not know that:** Previous to AYBS?, Bannister had already become a star playing a character called "Heavy Breathing" in a popular sitcom about garbage collectors called *The Dustbinmen*.

### ***Nicholas Smith as Mr. Rumbold***

**Born:** Barnstead, Surrey, in 1934.

**Trained at:** Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.

**You might not know that:** He is a very accomplished musician and singer who has written a number of string quartets.

### ***Frank Thornton as Captain Peacock***

**Born:** Frank Thornton Ball on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921 in London.

**Trained at:** London School of Dramatic Art.

**You might not know that:** Thornton joined the cast of the long-running sitcom *The Last of the Summer Wine* for several seasons during the absence of Brian Wilde.

### ***Arthur Brough as Mr. Grainger***

**Born:** Frederick Arthur Baker in Petersfield in 1905.

**Trained at:** Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

**You might not know that:** He gave Trevor Bannister his first big break when he asked a young Bannister to appear as the lead in a production put on by his repertory company.

### ***Harold Bennett as Young Mr. Grace***

**Born:** Hastings in 1899.

**Got his start:** In amateur productions

**You might not know that:** He really didn't find success as an actor until he was in his 70s and had retired from his job as a designer/draughtsman with a lighting company.

**Larry Martyn as Mr. Mash** (*Seasons 1 through 3*)

**Born:** London, 1934.

**Got his start:** Working in variety shows as a singer and comedian.

**Left series because:** He had already committed to doing another series.

**You might not know that:** He served with a parachute unit during the war and continued that activity as a hobby throughout his life.

**Arthur English as Mr. Harman** (*Seasons 4-10*)

**Born:** Aldershot, 1919.

**Got his start:** As a music hall comic and radio comedian.

**You might not know that:** He was married for a while to a dancer 35 years his junior. His own father had done exactly the same thing and Arthur was not born when his father was 65.

**Kenneth Waller as Old Mr. Grace** (*Season 8*)

**Born:** Huddersfield, 1927.

**Got his start:** Acting in various repertory companies.

**You might not know that:** He was only 53 when he played "Old" Mr. Grace. He also played a much older character (Grandad) in the popular sitcom *Bread*.

**James Hayter as Mr. Tebbs** (*Season 6*)

**Born:** India in 1907.

**Trained at:** Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

**Left show because:** He voiced a commercial for Mr. Kipling cakes, and someone somewhere decided that his being on *AYBS?* didn't quite mesh with the image of the voice behind the Mr. Kipling cakes.

**You might not know that:** He played Alfred Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* for five years on London's West End.

**Mike Berry as Mr. Spooner** (*Seasons 8 – 10*)

**Born:** Michael Bourne in 1943.

**Got his start:** As a pop singer who after years scored with a hit single called *The Sunshine of Your Smile*.

**You might not know that:** His group, Mike Berry and the Outlaws, once had The Beatles as an opening act. Lennon offered to write a song for him, but he declined.

**Alfie Bass as Mr. Goldberg** (*Season 7*)

**Born:** London, 1921.

**Got his start:** Acting at The Unity Theatre.

**You might not know that:** He appeared in over sixty films, including the classic *Lavender Hill Gang*.

## Grace Brothers R.I.P.

Those from the cast who have passed away:

Arthur Brough in 1978, only six weeks after the death of his wife.

Harold Bennett in 1981, of a heart attack.

James Hayter in 1983.

Alfie Bass in 1987.

Milo Sperber (Mr. Grossman) in 1992.

Larry Martyn in 1994.

Arthur English in 1995.

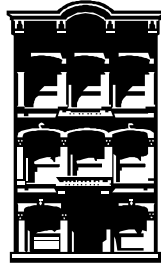
*shirts, socks ties, hats, underwear and shoes*

*Going up...*

# Are You Being Served?

# Second Floor

## Great Moments in Grace Brothers History



*Second floor carpets, travel goods and bedding...*

### **1973: Season One**

- Mr. Lucas learns the art of “kneeing” in *Dear Sexy Knickers*.
- The staff bonds as a transit strike forces them to spend the night at the store in *Camping In*.
- Joanna Lumley (the former Mrs. Jeremy Lloyd) makes the first of her appearances on *AYBS?* as the woman demonstrating *His and Her* perfume.

### **1974: Season Two**

- The staff is forced to work under very chilly conditions, but finds creative ways to stay warm in *Cold Comfort*.
- Security cameras help find out who’s doing the stealing in *Big Brother*, but the staff soon wearies of being watched.

### **1975: Season Three**

- Captain Peacock takes a short-lived trip to executive level in *Up Captain Peacock*.
- Mrs. Slocombe also takes a short-lived trip to executive level when she mistakenly thinks she’s the object of Young Mr. Grace’s wedding proposal in *Wedding Bells*.
- The staff celebrates *German Week* with one of their very best silly dances.

### **1976: Season Four**

- Now it’s Mr. Grainger’s turn to try life at the top in *Forward Mr. Grainger*. The rest of the staff, however, doesn’t particularly like his personality change.
- The first of Captain Peacock’s marital woes appears in *Oh What A Tangled Web*, when he is wrongfully accused of cheating on his wife with Mr. Rumbold’s secretary.

### **1977: Season Five**

- Tiddles gives birth at Grace Brothers in *Mrs. Slocombe Expects*.
- The staff are given a new view of the store when they take over the toy department in *A Change Is As Good As A Rest*.
- Young Mr. Grace marks his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in *Founder’s Day*.

### **1977: The Movie**

- The staff receives a well-deserved holiday on the Costa Plonka but get caught up in a revolution during *Are You Being Served? The Movie*. (Yes, that is Andrew Sachs, better known as Manuel from *Fawlty Towers*, playing another Spaniard.)

### **1978: Season Six**

- Mr. Tebbs joins the menswear department in *By Appointment*.

- Mrs. Slocombe suffers another romantic setback when left at the altar by her Greek fiancé in *Do You Take This Man?*
- Young Mr. Grace celebrates another birthday and is entertained by the staff in *Happy Returns*.

### **1979: Season Seven**

- Mr. Goldberg replaces Mr. Tebbs in the menswear department, much to the dismay of Captain Peacock, in *The Junior*.
- It's Mrs. Slocombe's turn to move up the ladder temporarily when she replaces an ill Mr. Rumbold in *Mrs. Slocombe, Senior Person*.
- The staff ends up manning the cafeteria after they rebel against the canteen workers in *Anything You Can Do*.
- Mr. Lucas bows out after *The Punch and Judy Affair*.

### **1980-1981: Bones Brothers**

- Australia opens its own "branch" of Grace Brothers with a successful adaptation called *Bones Brothers*. John Inman reprises his role as Mr. Humphries but no other original cast members take part in this series. The scripts were based on episodes of *AYBS?* and adapted by Jeremy Lloyd.

### **1981: Season Eight**

- More marital woes for Captain Peacock when he suspects his wife of having an affair with Mr. Rumbold in *A Personal Problem*.
- The staff rebels when they are asked to take a pay cut in *Sit Out*.
- Could Mr. Humphries be the *Heir Apparent* to the Grace Brothers fortune? Only his mother and Old Mr. Grace know for sure.

### **1983: Season Nine**

- Mr. Humphries has a falling out with his mother and leaves home in *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- The staff once again fears that they won't get an increase in pay and that the Japanese are going to take over the store in *Monkey Business*.
- Mrs. Slocombe loses her pussy and begins to see Mr. Humphries as a viable substitute for her affections in *Lost and Found*.

### **1985: Season Ten**

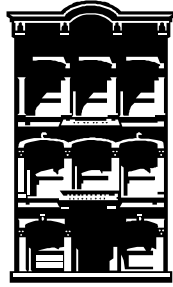
- Will her illness and the store's new early retirement policy signal the end of Mrs. Slocombe's career? After working with her replacement, the staff hopes it's not *Goodbye Mrs. Slocombe*.
- Grace Brothers stays open "after hours" to make more money in *The Night Club*.
- Mr. Spooner may not be popular with the management at Grace Brothers because of his tardiness, but he appears on television and becomes *The Pop Star*.

### **1992 – 1993: Grace and Favour/Are You Being Served? Again!**

- Grace Brothers closes and the staff finds that their pension money was used by Young Mr. Grace to buy a run-down manor house. Young Mr. Grace has now passed away from a heart attack brought on by his nurse, Miss Lovelock, so the house has been made into a hotel run by Mr. Rumbold. The staff has no option but to try and run it themselves, which they do for two series of **Grace and Favour**. (*Known in the States as Are You Being Served? Again!*)

...materials, soft furnishings, restaurant and teas  
Going down...

# Are You Being Served?



## Third Floor David Croft, Chairman of the Board

By Garry Berman and Michelle Street

**If there's a Britcom showing on your local PBS station, chances are good that the name David Croft is in the credits. If not, someone in the cast or maybe even the director probably got his or her start in a Croft show. *The Insider* takes a look at the career of one of British comedy's most prolific writers/directors/producers.**

### Croft Shows

**Hugh And I (1962-1967)** -- This long-running sitcom was about a bachelor who still lived at home with his mother. Instead of working, however, he would rather plot his get-rich quick schemes. Starred Terry Scott, Hugh Lloyd, and Mollie Sugden as Mrs. Crispin.

**Up Pompeii! (1970)** – Croft produced the first season of the adventures of Ludicrus Sextus, a Roman slave played by the great Frankie Howerd. It carried on the *Carry On* tradition of innuendo and bad gags, but unlike other Croft sitcoms, this is not an ensemble piece, but a star vehicle for Howerd.

**Dad's Army (1968-1977)**—Next to *AYBS?* this was probably Croft's most durable hit series, written with Jimmy Perry. This sentimental favorite among British TV viewers followed the misadventures of an aging, ragtag Home Guard squad doing their best to defend England during World War II. Here Croft established his penchant for creating sitcoms each with a large cast of eccentric characters.

**Are You Being Served? (1973-1985)**--The unforgettable staff of Grace Brothers Department Store, and the ongoing conflicts between the Gentlemen's Ready-to-Wear and Ladies' departments,

enabled *AYBS?* to become one of the most popular of all Britcoms seen in America. Croft created this series with Jeremy Lloyd, who once worked in a department store on which Grace Brothers' was based.

**It Ain't Half Hot, Mum (1974-1981)**--This series, written with Jimmy Perry, is unfamiliar to most Americans, but was another favorite in Britain. Set in India during World War II, the heroes were a motley bunch of performers called the Royal Artillery Concert Party, who find it as difficult to follow army decorum as it is to live with India's climate.

**Come Back, Mrs. Noah (1978)**--This short-lived series (only six episodes), written with Jeremy Lloyd, starred Mollie Sugden as a housewife in the year 2050 who accidentally ended up stranded aboard an orbiting space station called the Britannia 7, along with a TV reporter and a near-incompetent crew. Okay, perhaps the premise was just slightly improbable, but the slapstick sequences kept things hopping, especially when the reluctant inhabitants of the space station encountered unfamiliar technological gizmos. (Gorden Kaye, who opens each episode as a news anchorman, later starred in *'Allo, 'Allo!*)

**Hi-De-Hi (1980-1988)**--Another large, colorful cast of characters greets us as we enter the world of Maplin's Holiday Camp. The year is 1959, and timid Jeffrey Fairbrother must oversee the unpredictable entertainment staff of the resort, as they instigate various schemes, often involving unsuspecting guests. Written by Croft and Jimmy Perry, this long-running series starred the late Simon Cadell (David Croft's son-in-law) as Fairbrother.

**'Allo,'Allo! (1984-1992)**--Set in a small French town called Nouvion during the Nazi occupation, this series followed the exploits of humble cafe owner Rene Artois. Rene's cafe becomes a safehouse (over his objections) for the French Resistance while he must, at the same time, keep the occupying German generals happy.

This is perhaps the only sitcom in TV history that can truly be described as an "epic." With a regular cast of twenty, extensive location shoots, an absurdly complex plot, and almost indescribable silliness, this series reached comic heights that few others have matched

before or since. Written with Jeremy Lloyd, Croft made one of his long-time supporting players, Gorden Kaye, a bona fide star as the hapless Rene.

**You Rang, M'Lord? (1990-1993)**--This series, co-written with Jimmy Perry, was a satire of the famed *Upstairs, Downstairs* drama. Each of the 50-minute episodes found Lord Meldrum and his family, perhaps best described as Upper Class Twits, spending most of their days enjoying the life of the idle rich--that is, when there isn't some unexpected family scandal to deal with. The household servants, under the stern eye of James Twelvetrees, regularly outwitted their employers, but also came to their aid whenever a crisis broke out--which was quite often. The 1920s clothing, cars, and home interiors faithfully recreated the period.

**Oh, Doctor Beeching! (1996-1997)** A small, rural railroad struggles to survive amid 1960s corporate takeovers and the arrival of a new stationmaster. Starred Paul Shane, Jeffrey Holland, and Su Pollard.

## DAVID CROFT FAMILY TREE

Many of the actors David Croft chose to work with had one thing in common and that's a theatrical background. In Britain, the idea of a "repertory company" was well established, with a group of actors working together on a number of different productions.

Croft brought this concept to television and worked with the same people numerous times, allowing him to learn their strengths as a performer and to write to those strengths. Here's a partial list of careers he has helped along:

Come Back Mrs. Noah

**Nicholas Smith**

Up Pompeii! (guest star)  
Are You Being Served?

**Geoffrey Hughes** (*Keeping Up Appearances*)

Up Pompeii!

**Frank Thornton**

Hugh and I (guest star)  
Are You Being Served?

**Ian Lavender**

Dad's Army  
Come Back, Mrs. Noah

**Wendy Richard**

Hugh and I (played Mollie Sugden's niece)  
Dad's Army (played Pvt. Walker's girlfriend)  
Up Pompeii! (guest star)  
Are You Being Served?

**Harold Bennett**

Dad's Army  
Are You Being Served?

**Gorden Kaye**

'Allo 'Allo  
Are You Being Served? (guest star in two episodes)  
Come Back Mrs. Noah

**Mollie Sugden**

Hugh and I  
Are You Being Served?

**Michael Knowles**

It Ain't Half Hot Mum  
Dad's Army

Come Back Mrs. Noah  
You Rang, M'Lord?  
Are You Being Served? (guest star and script writer)

**Donald Hewlett**  
It Ain't Half Hot Mum  
Come Back Mrs. Noah  
You Rang, M'Lord?

**Paul Shane**  
Oh, Doctor Beeching!  
Hi-de-Hi!  
You Rang, M'Lord?

**Su Pollard**

Hi-de-Hi!  
Oh, Doctor Beeching!  
You Rang, M' Lord?

**Penny Irving**  
Are You Being Served?  
Hi-de-Hi! (series 1)

**Bill Pertwee**  
Dad's Army  
You Rang, M'Lord?

**Larry Martyn**  
Are You Being Served?  
Dad's Army



## Are You An AYBS? Fanatic?

Consider yourself a true fan? Here are some signs that you might be a bit over the top.

- ✓ You've written to L'Oreal and suggested they develop a "Mrs. Slocombe" line of hair colors. You even give them a great advertising slogan: "Because I'm worth it...and I am unanimous in that." Bonus points if you carbon copied the letter to Revlon.
- ✓ You own at least one pair of Mr. Rumbold gag ears with matching glasses. Bonus points if you have a spare set for when company comes over.
- ✓ "The Club" has an entirely different meaning to you than the car anti-theft device. To you, it means Episode 2 of Season 6 and the luscious legs of Mr. Tebbs in shorts.
- ✓ Your new green hair color is not a tribute to your former "life" as a punk rocker.
- ✓ You call your travel agent and ask about package deals to the Costa Plonka.
- ✓ Go back to the Ground Floor on pages 3 and 4. Can you give the first names of over half the characters in bold print? Give yourself a point for each one. Bonus points for knowing Mrs. Slocombe's entire name: Mary Elizabeth Jennifer Rachel Yiddell Abergavenny Slocombe.
- ✓ You start out all your love letters with "Dear Sexy Knickers." Bonus points if you continued such a letter with the phrase "I don't half fancy you."
- ✓ You prank call video stores and ask if they have "The Unsatisfied Virgin" for rental.
- ✓ When asked to help plan a wedding, you suggest a full Greek wedding complete with bouzouki player.
- ✓ Your favorite hobby is bursting into rooms and saying "I'm free!"
- ✓ Your favorite meal is a delicious pork pie.
- ✓ You proudly display a collection of Wibbly Wobblies and troll eBay hoping to find a "Fun Time Freddy."



## Made In The USA

## *American Attempts To Copy British Programs Or...*



### *When Good Shows Go Bad*

**The channels change, but the show remains the same.**

“Hey, look ma, another *Friends* clone.”

“Wow! It’s one of those programs where cameras follow “normal” people around and capture their every move. I haven’t seen this before.”

“Isn’t this one of those games that’ll make me a millionaire?”

Someone please tell me. Why is it every time a network has an idea that’s halfway original and clever the others have to jump on the bandwagon? Why are we continuously saturated with a half-dozen versions of the same thing? I hate to use this already used up phrase, but what’s *up* with that?

It certainly can’t be easy to fill airtime 24 hours a day 7 days a week, but the ethic shown by most American networks seems to be that if something succeeds, copy it. In their search for the Next Big Thing, the American networks have not only “borrowed” from each other, but have also consistently raided British television for ideas and inspiration.

The networks this trend back in the 60s, when the satirical news show *That Was The Week That Was* made its way Stateside and gave most Americans their first look at David Frost.

This show was artistically a success, thanks to whip-smart writing by the likes of Buck Henry (who wrote *The Graduate*), but didn’t last very long, probably due to the fact that it was too soon after the Kennedy assassination and America was craving pure escapism.

Since then, US attempts to transfer Britcoms can basically be put into three categories: the good, the bad, and the downright ugly.

#### *The Good*

##### **Till Death Do Us Part – All In The Family**

The best Brit-American translations have no doubt come from producer/director Norman Lear, who began by adapting the groundbreaking Britcom *Till Death Do Us Part*.

The original series dealt with the adventures of one Alf Garnett, played to perfection by Warren Mitchell. Alf was a satire of a ranting bigot and by rummaging around his narrow-minded world-view, writer Johnny Speight gleefully butchered many sacred cows.

There was a similarly profound effect when Lear took the character of Alf and added a few characteristics of his own father to create Archie Bunker of Queens, New York. He also created television history.

*All In The Family* proved that there was an audience who didn’t mind being challenged. During its long run, *All In The Family* dealt with rape, race relations, wife-swapping, abortion and other thorny issues, but never forgot that its primary mission was to make us laugh.

##### **Stephoe and Son – Sanford and Son**

Lear enjoyed another tremendous success with his translation of *Stephoe and Son*. This story of a Cockney rubbish collector and his son (played by Wilfrid Brambell

and Harry H. Corbett) was reset in Los Angeles and the main characters became African-Americans.

It took Lear a while to get this one right. He made two pilots that went unsold, but it was only when he changed the race of the main characters and hired “blue” comic Redd Foxx to play the lead that the series took off.

Lear’s translations are successful for a number of reasons, but underpinning it all is the strength of the original concepts. Plus, the shows made some serious points while featuring some genuinely funny characters. Lear, like his British counterpart Johnny Speight, was not afraid to court controversy, and so made a lasting impact on American TV.

### **Not The Nine O’Clock News – Not Necessarily The News**

When HBO was still a fledging cable channel, one of its first attempts at original programming was a news spoof based on the British classic.

The main difference here was that the US version lacked the strong cast of its UK counterpart. *Not The Nine O’Clock News* had Rowan Atkinson, Pamela Stephenson, Mel Smith and Griff Rhys-Jones. On the writing staff were the likes of Richard Curtis, who would go on to write *Blackadder*, *Vicar of Dibley*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and *Notting Hill*.

On the other hand, most people would be hard pressed to remember anyone from *Not Necessarily The News*, with the possible exception of Rich Hall, who went on to be a cast member of *Saturday Night Live* for a brief time.

Nevertheless, the writing and satire were right on target and in its prime, *Not Necessarily The News* easily rivaled *Not The Nine O’Clock News* in terms of quality.

### *The Bad*

### **Man About The House – Three’s Company**

Strictly speaking, *Three’s Company* may not belong in the bad category because it ran for a long time and was massively popular. True, but that doesn’t mean it was a quality show.

There were many reasons for the success of *Three’s Company*, most of which can be attributed to the show’s likeable cast and the bombshell factor provided by Suzanne Somers.

Interestingly enough, this show, which relied so heavily on innuendo and broad humor, was actually written by some of the people who had worked with Norman Lear on *All In The Family*.

Like the British version, which lasted for six seasons, the popularity of *Three’s Company* led to a couple of spin-offs. *Three’s Company* became *Three’s A Crowd* and followed the exploits of Jack Tripper as he found true love as well as trouble with his true love’s father. In Britain there was a similar spin-off, entitled *Robin’s Nest*.

### **Fawlty Towers – Amanda’s/Payne**

What happens when you try to outdo the all-time classic British sitcom? You learn quickly that you should have left well enough alone.

Between her stint as Edith Bunker’s cousin Maude and her role on *The Golden Girls*, Bea Arthur starred as Amanda Cartwright, the demanding owner of a hotel called Amanda’s By The Sea. During the course of this series she had to deal with fussy guests, travel-guide writers who needed extra attention, and a confused bell-hop of foreign extraction named Aldo.

Sound familiar? Well, ABC never actually admitted that this was based on *Fawlty Towers*, but the comparison was obvious. *Amanda’s* lasted from February to May of 1983 and, unlike its Brit counterpart, was quickly forgotten.

Ditto *Payne*, the recent CBS series with John Larroquette as a character named Royle Payne. Short-lived and ultimately forgettable, this series had neither the wonderful scripts nor the talent of John Cleese to make a go of it.

Recent reports have German television readying up their own version of *Fawlty Towers*. Now **that** will be interesting to see. Do you think there will be any mention at all of “the war?”

### **One Foot In The Grave – Cosby**

Bill Cosby is an enormously talented man, but not even his presence could make a substantial hit of his last CBS series. Had he not been given a ground-breaking contract guaranteeing him a minimum of 44 episodes,

*(continued on page 18, column 2)*

# The Insider Episode Guide

## Chef!

Your reservation is waiting as *The Insider* gives you the best table in the house at Le Chateau Anglais, the finest two-star restaurant with the greatest Chef! in all of Britain. Here's an episode guide to all three seasons of this flavorful sitcom. You can read more about Chef! and its star, Lenny Henry, in this issue's Insider Profile.

### Season One

**Episode 1: Personnel.** In this episode we meet Gareth Blackstock, the temperamental (and some might say simply mental) chef at Le Chateau Anglais. His extraordinarily high standards are in danger of being lowered when management makes budget cuts. The answer to Gareth's prayers comes in the form of his childhood friend Everton, who volunteers to be sous chef at Le Chateau.

**Episode 2: Beyond the Pass.** Gareth and his wife Janice (the one with the business savvy) get the chance to become owners of Le Chateau. However, this cannot be accomplished without a visit to the bank manager. Can Gareth keep his arrogance and temper under control during their visit?

**Episode 3: Subject to Contract.** Gareth and Janice must make some financial sacrifices to buy Le Chateau, so they have to sell their cottage in the country. Gareth decides that the restaurant needs more publicity, so he invites the press into his kitchen. However, this publicity ploy loses some of its glamour when Everton loses something in the veal stew.

**Episode 4: The Big Cheese.** Le Chateau is thrown into major turmoil when famous chef Albert Roux decides to dine at the restaurant. Gareth has to ensure that everything—especially the cheese—is perfect.

**Episode 5: Fame is the Spur.** Gareth is set to have his fifteen minutes of fame when Janice arranges for him to be on the program *Kitchens Live*. However, changes from the show's producer and some crayfish interfere with Gareth's plans for celebrity status.

**Episode 6: Rice And Peas.** Gareth faces his biggest challenge from his sternest critic – his father, Quentin. The problem is, his father wants West Caribbean food, so Gareth has to rely upon Everton to save the day.

**Christmas Special: A Bird in the Hand.** A disagreement with his regular poultry supplier leads Gareth and Janice on a wild goose chase – not for geese, mind you, but for Christmas turkeys.

### Season Two

**Episode 1: A River Runs Through It.** As business continues to thrive at Le Chateau the staff is overworked and Gareth hires legendary chef Gustave LaRoche. However, it appears that a lot more wine is going into Gustave than into the food.

**Episode 2: Time Flies.** Janice might possibly be pregnant, which sends Gareth into a tailspin wondering how he could manage to be a father and Chef!

**Episode 3: Do The Right Thing.** In his all-consuming drive for the best, Gareth and Everton have dealings with a dodgy poacher who deals in partridge.

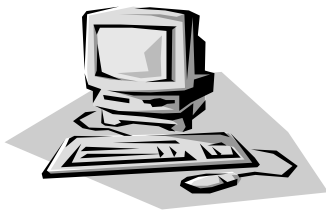
**Episode 4: A Diploma of Miseries.** Gareth's appearance on a talk show gets him in major trouble with Janice when he makes an unflattering comment about her culinary abilities. Well, she shouldn't have talked him into going on the show in the first place, should she?

**Episode 5: Masterchef.** It's Everton's turn to hog the spotlight when he creates his own signature dish. His boss, however, is none too happy about this.

*(continued on page 19, column 2)*

#### Chef! regular cast members:

Gareth Blackstock...Lenny Henry  
Janice Blackstock...Caroline Lee Johnson  
Everton...Roger Griffiths  
Piers (Season 1)...Gary Parker  
Lucinda (Season 1)...Claire Skinner  
Gustave (Season 2)...Ian McNeice  
Gustave (Season 3)...Jeff Nuttall  
Cyril (Season 3)...Dave Hill  
Savannah (Season 3)...Lorelei King



## SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

### Web Reviews by David Bibb

#### The AYBS? Virtual Video Vault

<http://www.geocities.com/~emilyj>

This terrific site is a labor of love from a very devoted *AYBS?* fan named Emily Jackson. The pages contain one of the most complete episode guides you'll find on or off the Net as well as ratings for each episode, trivia, downloads, and links.

Not much to write home about graphically, but keep looking and there are lots of hidden treasures.

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

#### Lenny Henry Headquarters

<http://homepages.infoseek.com/~chefjunkie/index3.html>

The graphic design is a bit busy, shall we say, but the author of this page, D.B. Dickerson, is a true fan of the *Chef!* star. This site includes a brief biography, links, pictures and videos for download, and some rare snippets of Lenny in *True Identity* and another lesser known film, *The Suicide Club*. There's also a link to send Lenny e-mail.

High marks for enthusiasm and information, but unfortunately, the site is a bit hard on the eyes.

**Rating: 3 mouse clicks**

#### Chef! Site

<http://www.siegler.net/chef/>

One of the first and most comprehensive sites containing the usual: a complete episode guide, links, and a message board for fans to communicate. There's also a run-down of the show's premise, character sketches, and easy links for those who want to purchase the videos.

The graphic layout is simple and effective. Simply put, this is a must visit for anyone wanting to know more about this popular sitcom.

**Rating: 3 mouse clicks.**

#### The AYBS? Executive Kharzi

<http://www.angelfire.com/or/mendips/aybs.html>

This graphically intensive site is worth a visit for the *AYBS?* fan fiction as well as a special salute to James Hayter, and his *AYBS?* alter ego, Percival Tebbs.

While at this site you can also communicate with other fans at The Canteen Message Board and there's also a good selection of links for further exploration.

### Also Recommended

#### Minki's AYBS? Shrine

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

#### Official Chef! Site

<http://www.bbcamerica.com/programs/chef.html#>

#### Lenny Henry Page

<http://members.tripod.com/~cmarshall/lenny.html>

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

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



*Lenny Henry (cont'd. from page 1)*

Winnie Henry drummed into her children the need to fit in at any cost as well as a fierce ambition. "Keep your feet on the ground and work hard" was the motto she lived by and she instilled that ethic in her children. Her strong Jamaican accent and personality would be present in many of Lenny's routines.

Lenny's father, Winston, also worked very hard and his long days on the job did not leave him much time to be a major influence in his son's life.

Lenny's natural ability as a comic and a superb mimic was honed by performances in the schoolyards, playgrounds, and parks of Dudley, where he became something of a local legend at an early age. In fact, most things came to Lenny at an early age. In 1975 he got his first big break with an appearance on the *New Faces* talent competition. He was all of 16 years old.

Lenny lost the *New Faces* competition in the final round, but it was nonetheless a very successful debut and signaled that his show business career was under way. He left his job as an apprentice electrician and began performing in clubs, often accompanied by his mother.

As usual with touring comics, it proved to be a mixed bag. Some gigs went over very well while on one occasion the audience consisted of three people.

While still in his teens, Lenny was the very first black man to become part of the *Black and White Minstrel Show*. The Minstrels did variety performances including Eddie Cantor style blackface and Lenny told the audience during his first performance, "They picked me because they thought they could save on make-up."

Lenny's material for the Minstrel show was almost entirely racially based. He would wipe sweat from his forehead and say it was chocolate. Hecklers were put down with the threat that he might move in next door to them.

However repulsed he was by the concept and the material, the five years he spent with the Minstrels proved an excellent training ground and experience for the young Lenny, who had become a star overnight but still had a lot to learn.

Fast forward to 1981. Lenny's career was continuing to progress as, among other things, he played the eldest son on *The Fosters*, a British knock-off of the popular American sitcom *Good Times*. However, he was about to go through profound changes both personally and professionally because 1981 is when Lenny met Dawn.

It was not, however, love at first sight. Dawn French wasn't too keen on the man who would become her husband when they first met. She was part of the politically correct "alternative" movement and unafraid to tell him that she was appalled at much of the material he chose to do.

With her help, Lenny changed into the very epitome of political correctness. Dawn would stand in the wings during his gigs and take notes on what material worked and what didn't. They became something of a comedy team and together chose projects worthier of his talent. Lenny also gained the confidence to look inside himself and his own experiences for his comedy rather than rely on stereotypes and simple impressions.

A terrific showcase for the new characters he was developing came when he appeared with Tracey Ullman in the fast-paced sketch comedy show *Three of a Kind*.

The third person in this trio was David Copperfield (no, not the magician) and the list of writers on this show included a pre *Red Dwarf* Rob Grant and Doug Naylor. The show didn't last long, but it was nevertheless a strong signal that Lenny was a force to be reckoned with and it led to his own series.

**My marriage is a very, very wonderful thing. She makes me laugh a lot, intentionally. She's a very funny woman, on and off stage. She's good at listening too, and tells me off when I tell corny jokes."**

*Lenny on Dawn and marriage*

Three years later, in October of 1984, he and Dawn were married at St. Paul's Church in Covent Garden with 350 people in attendance. However, married life did nothing to diminish the ambitions of two very driven people.

That year also saw the debut of *The Lenny Henry Show*, which combined his impressions (most notably a fabulous send-up of Michael Jackson) with his own growing roster of original characters. These included the soulful song stylings of lady-killer Theophilus P. Wildebeeste and DJ Delbert Wilkins, a hustler who was not quite as cool as he thought.

Subsequent series (especially *Lenny Henry Tonite*) allowed Henry to explore these characters in depth as the series changed from a sketch comedy format to full-length episodes focusing on individual characters.

Henry's talent is not solely limited to character-based comedy. Music has always been one of his passions and turns out that Lenny is also a mighty fine singer. His performance of *My Girl* at the Hysteria benefit is

very impressive and in the 1999 TV movie *The Man* he really gets to show off his singing chops playing a travel agent who wants to become a musical star.

**He doesn't want to be England's version of Richard Pryor or England's version of Eddie Murphy. He just wants to be England's version of Lenny Henry.**

*Dawn French on Lenny*

His versatility combined with the not entirely correct view of him as "the English Eddie Murphy" finally got Hollywood knocking at his door. This was something he'd been working towards for years and his dream appeared to be coming true when he landed a three-picture deal with Disney.

In a sense, the pairing was perfect since Lenny exudes the kind of likeability and good humor that would work well in a Disney film. So as the 90s began, he seemed poised to become one of the few English comedy stars to cross over to fame in the States.

Unfortunately, Lenny's experience in Hollywood mirrored that of his friend Rik Mayall, whose manic energy had previously been wasted in his bid for movie stardom, the dire *Drop Dead Fred*.

Lenny's first picture for Disney, *True Identity*, turned out to be an equally dismal failure. He played Miles Pope, a struggling black actor who has to hide from the Mob and to do so disguises himself as a white man.

Lenny actually received a number of good reviews for his work in this film, but since it failed to perform at the box office he was let go from his contract.

"It's their loss, really," he said. "Unfinished business because I'd like to do a really brilliant comedy film and have them go mad over it."

However, when one door closes, another opens. During he and Dawn's extended stay in America while filming *True Identity*, his family sent Lenny magazines from home containing articles about the new breed of British chefs who were becoming celebrities and, as such, felt entitled to indulge in the kind of obnoxious, excessive behavior associated with rock stars.

From this simple premise came Lenny's strongest role to date, that of Gareth Blackstock in *Chef!* The scriptwriter, Peter Tilbury, took as his inspiration John Burton-Race, owner/chef of a two-star restaurant called L'Ortolan.

Tilbury spent a lot of time with the real life chef and used many of Burton-Race's own experiences as the basis for the show's plotlines.

Henry also did plenty of his own research, made easier by the fact the L'Ortolan is located a short walk from his home near Reading. Burton-Race wasn't fazed by Lenny's celebrity status and made him muck in from day one of his training, proving as difficult a taskmaster in real life as the fictional Gareth Blackstock.

"John is Elvis," Lenny said in an interview, "he's the main attraction but his kitchen, his show, can only be as strong as the weakest link."

The weak links are certainly not tolerated well in Gareth Blackstock's kitchen. His sous-chef Everton (played by Roger Griffiths) takes the brunt of Gareth's abuse, placing him in a similar situation to Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*.

The one person who seems to have at least a small bit of control over Gareth is his wife Janice, played with warmth, intelligence, and dignity by Caroline Lee Johnson. She is the logical anchor who tries to keep the couple afloat emotionally and financially. However, in the third series, she can finally take no more of Gareth and the couple splits, only to reunite in the final episode.

It is a shock to those who have followed Henry's career from the start to see the normally easy-going, likeable Lenny dishing out abuse and vitriol worthy of Basil Fawlty or Edmund Blackadder. Yet Gareth is a much more complex, sympathetic character in Lenny's hands than he might have been in those of anyone else.

**We try very hard to make sure that when one of us is working the other is at home, so one of us can put Billie to bed and tell her a story. We have help, but most of the time one of us is there.**

*Lenny on raising his daughter Billie*

The past several years have seen Lenny going through a number of changes. Maybe the fact that he and Dawn adopted a biracial child in 1991 forced him to grow up a bit and realign his priorities. Nevertheless, since finishing the three series of *Chef!* it appears he wants to transform himself.

Yes, Lenny wants to be taken seriously and lately seems determined to turn himself into a dramatic actor. To that end, he took on the role of Ian George, the headmaster of a struggling inner city school in the drama *Hope and Glory*, which has just started its second season.

He's also become quite the adventurer à la Michael Palin. In *Lenny's Big Amazon Adventure* he explored

the rain forest and in the upcoming *Lenny's Big Atlantic Adventure* he crosses the "big pond" accompanied by Tony Bullimore, an Australian who came close to being lost at sea himself.

This should be good, given the fact that the two men had to be rescued in the middle of the ocean. *Lenny's Big Atlantic Adventure* will be shown in the UK in September, with transmission in the US following shortly thereafter.

What else is on his plate? He is also reportedly writing a feature film and has signed for a third season of *Hope and Glory*.

Though family life seemed to have slowed him a bit, Lenny Henry remains a restless bundle of energy in a baggy suit whose talent is even larger than his 6'2" frame. Whether in another sitcom, drama, or in the middle of the Atlantic, fans will savor his unique talents for many years to come.



## SERIOUS PROFESSION

### More Lenny Henry Career Highlights

**1985** – Lenny becomes involved with the UK charity **Comic Relief**. This organization, set up by writer Richard Curtis, has been in the forefront of raising money for disadvantaged people in the UK and Africa.

**1987** – Lenny starts up Crucial Films, a production company whose mission is to encourage black talent in the film and television industries. Crucial will later be involved with producing the first black sketch comedy show (*The Real McCoy*) and also *Chef!*

**1989** – The world premiere of *Live and Unleashed*, a critically acclaimed full-length film featuring Lenny singing, dancing, and doing his stand-up act.

**1990** – Lenny is named Show Business Personality of the Year by the Variety Club of Great Britain. He also visits Uganda to make films for Comic Relief.

**1995** – Lenny publishes a children's book called *Charlie and the Big Chill*, which started out as a bedtime story for his daughter.



(*Made In America* – continued from page 13 )

this program might not have lasted as long as it did.

The problem is, they took *One Foot In The Grave*, which is a somewhat dark but brilliant blend of humor, tragedy, and pathos, and niced it up.

It was a poor match from the start. *One Foot's* main character, Victor Meldrew, is grumpy and unlikeable, and Cosby gave us a kinder, gentler Victor. Plus, Cos is a wonderful comedian, but Richard Wilson (who played Meldrew) is a brilliant comic actor and there's a big difference. Wilson's indelible portrait of a man trying to cope when society thinks he's no longer useful, along with David Renwick's incredible roller coast scripts, make *Cosby* pale in comparison to *One Foot*.

### THE UGLY

#### Men Behaving Badly

This project was also doomed from the star when once again, American television ruined the whole thing by nicing it up.

The boys on the Brit version of *MBB* (played by Martin Clunes and Neil Morrissey) were allowed to indulge shamelessly in loutish (but nevertheless very funny) behavior. Americans are perceived by the networks as not responding well to characters who are unpleasant, so with the edge of the original missing, the American version didn't last long, despite a "retooling" in its second season.

### AND PILOTS THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT

#### Beans of Boston - Are You Being Served?

On paper, this one looked like it might have worked. The proposed cast looked good, with *Magnum PI's* suave, sophisticated John Hillerman as Captain Peacock, and Charlotte Rae from *The Facts of Life* as Mrs. Slocombe. However, Alan Sues (from *Laugh-In*) was apparently quite miscast as Mr. Humphries. However, with John Inman's camp, over-the-top performance so clearly established, it would've been a tough role for anyone to take on.

**Absolutely Fabulous** – The rights to make an American version of the adventures of the drug-addled, boozing basket-cases Patsy and Edina were sold by creator Jennifer Saunders to Roseanne and all seemed to be full-steam ahead.

However, as with almost anything Roseanne touches, this project got bogged down in controversy and when she

refused to tone it down for the networks, the program never found a home and the project was dropped.

### Red Dwarf

Not just one, but two, pilots were made in an attempt to bring *Red Dwarf* to America. The first was made in 1992 and included such changes as Lister being a Caucasian good guy and Rimmer's trademark "H" being replaced with a marble. Robert Llewellyn, reprising his role as Kryten, was probably the best thing in the pilot, but on the whole, it must be said that America changed what made the British version special.

#### WASTED TALENT

Not only does America seem clueless about what to do with the British shows they import, but talent from the UK has also been largely wasted on US television. The wonderful Billy Connolly has gotten two chances at sitcom success (in *Head Of The Class* and *Billy*), which unfortunately did nothing to showcase his extraordinary talent as a monologist.

Connolly's significant other, Pamela Stephenson (from *Not The Nine O'Clock News*), was wasted during her year as a cast member on *Saturday Night Live* and similar fates were met by Peter Cook (who played a butler on *The Two Of Us*) and Dudley Moore.

The only one who may have escaped this is Tracey Ullman, but maybe this is because she's steered clear of the major networks. Her first series was on FOX and now she has established herself at HBO, garnering numerous Emmy Awards for her latest series, *Tracey Takes On*.

#### THE FUTURE

The list could go on and the trend of "borrowing" from Britain shows no signs of slowing. The good news is that producers seem to have moved on to game shows rather than sitcoms. *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* originated in Britain, as did Comedy Central's new game show *Don't Forget Your Toothbrush*, which is where contestants indulge in all kinds of foolish behavior in an attempt to win an all-expenses paid trip to an exotic location. Even reality-based programs are now fair game. Next up is a Brit adaptation of the summer hit *Survivor*.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: if America and Britain are to continue this somewhat incestuous relationship, they would do well to remember the old wisdom that if you can't outdo the original, you shouldn't even try.



(*Chef! Episode Guide. Continued from page 14*)

**Episode 6: Private Lives.** When it rains, it pours, and everyone at Le Chateau seems to be having personal problems at the same time. It's Gareth's turn to lend a kind shoulder, which he does only to keep his staff on task.

**Episode 7: England Expects.** Gareth enters a cooking contest held in Lyon, France. The only hitch is that the meal has to consist of ingredients native to England, but he is determined to be Number 1.

#### Season 3

*Note: These episodes are untitled.*

**Episode 1:** Gareth's life begins to crumble when he has to transfer ownership of Le Chateau to a businessman named Cyril. At the same time he loses Janice, who is tired of playing second fiddle to the restaurant. He also has to put up with the relentless name-dropping of his new American employee, Savannah.

**Episode 2:** Cyril uses his owner's influence to get a job at Le Chateau for his daughter Renee. Unfortunately, disaster looms when the only thing Renee proves capable of doing is stealing the heart of Everton.

**Episode 3.** Gareth's heart is breaking over the thought of his pending divorce, but Cyril forces him to put on a happy face and mingle with customers at Le Chateau. His ability to relate to customers, however, becomes dependent on how things are going with Janice.

**Episode 4.** Gareth's father returns with a new girlfriend. The girl in question, however, is young enough to be his father's daughter, which doesn't please Gareth.

**Episode 5.** An old flame, Rochelle, makes a reappearance in Gareth's life when he caters the wedding of Everton's cousin. However, Janice also reappears to confuse the situation.

**Episode 6.** Should Gareth go to Jamaica to patch up things with Janice or should he fly off for a romantic weekend with Rochelle? There's not only that decision to make, but the pressure of finding someone to run the kitchen during his absence.

