



PRESIDENT'S AWARD

for impact on media

Laughter to Last a Lifetime, or Several

How President's Award Winner Carl Reiner Has Kept Generations in Stitches and Changed the Face of Comedy



BY PATT
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IT IS A scientific fact that at least 8.4 percent of all the laughs you have ever laughed since you were born have been generated by Carl Reiner. You can look it up.

"The New Yorker" ran a cartoon in the 1940s, showing a couple of matrons walking past a movie theatre, and one says to the other, "You know, I saw a movie that didn't have Ingrid Bergman in it."

Same idea: just try to find a comedy bit in the last 60 years that doesn't have Carl Reiner's fingerprints on it.

First it was on Broadway, where his audiences went home repeating the jokes as well as humming the tunes from the shows he appeared in. Then he made the entire television nation laugh, with "Your Show of Shows" and then "The Dick Van Dyke Show." Mr. Reiner created "The Dick Van Dyke" show, wrote for

it, directed it, and of course performed in it, as the rarely seen but comically tyrannical Alan Brady.

The man is a media machine. The stage ... television ... and records. In the groundbreaking "2,000-Year-Old-Man," he plays the straight-man interviewer to the two-K birthday boy, Mel Brooks.

The first of the five records about the miraculously two-millennia-old man was made 52 years ago, which is like 2,000 years in the world of comedy, but it is a timelessly popular bit that aspiring comics will often say is what got them into comedy in the first place.

It has never been out of print, and the last album in the series won a Grammy for spoken word performance. A Grammy is an award shaped like a golden gramophone, which the 2,000-year-old man probably bought when it was patented in 1887.

Lifetimes

To this Mr. Reiner has added nine Emmy awards—and the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor.

And then there's his role of director. Although there is no photographic record of him ever donning the jodhpurs and boots getup of Cecil B. DeMille, Mr. Reiner directed 15 movies, whose cast members include George Burns, Lily Tomlin, Ruth Gordon, and his co-writer Steve Martin.

Fifteen movies, and all of them talkies—which is only four fewer talkies than DeMille ever directed.

He has acted on the big screen in about a dozen films; not content with confining himself to comic roles, Mr. Reiner recently undertook to become the sinister Saul Bloom in the *Ocean's Eleven* film series.

As for writing, how many typewriter ribbons has Carl Reiner gone through? He's credited with more than a half-dozen screenplays, starting with a Doris Day movie, *The Thrill of It All*. That's even before he got to the first of his dozen books.

The latest is called *I Remember Me*, and here too he ventures into a new medium. Because *I Remember Me* is also an e-book that features his home movies in a touch-screen popup.

If you want to see Mel Brooks in swim trunks on the beach on Fire Island, this is your opportunity. To this day, Mr. Reiner and Mr. Brooks can sometimes be found of an evening, sitting on the Reiner sofa, watching television programs which are bound to be



Chris Buck/The Hollywood Reporter

Opposite page: Carl Reiner started his directing career on "The Dick Van Dyke Show." Reiner helped produce, write, and direct many films, including: *The Jerk*, *All of Me*, *Where's Poppa?* and *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*.

PRESIDENT'S AWARD CARL REINER



Above: In 2011, Reiner played the con man Saul Bloom in Steven Soderbergh's remake of *Ocean's Eleven*. He also reprises the role in the sequels, *Ocean's Twelve* and *Ocean's Thirteen*.

Right: Carl Reiner, and long-time friend, Mel Brooks have released five comedy albums together. In 1998, their album, *The 2000 Year Old Man In The Year 2000*, won Best Spoken Comedy Album at the 41st Annual Grammy Awards.



less amusing than what these two have to say about them.

Mr. Reiner has been acting ever since Harry Truman was in the White House—and once he actually acted in the White House, for President Eisenhower's birthday. During the deep-freeze years of the Cold War, in the ballroom of the White House, he gabbled away to the guests in double-talk Russian, which is one of his trademarks—to the great mystification of one of the guests, the president of Mexico.

Where did all this wit, where did all these wits, come from?

From the Bronx, where he was born—such a funny word, Bronx.

From parents who loved music and humor, and kept a radio to make sure it had both.

From a father whose sang-froid allowed



Carl Reiner wrote and starred in a pilot called "Head of the Family" in 1959, but it didn't sell. Two years later, the pilot was recreated as "The Dick Van Dyke Show." Reiner wrote 40 out of the 60 scripts for the first two seasons.

him to drill and fill his own tooth.

From the United States Army, which, in its infallibility, trained him to be a French translator and then sent him to Hawaii.

And from his three children and his adored Estelle, his ukulele-playing, still-life-painting, nightclub-singing, movie-scene-stealing wife. Of her, he wrote after she died, "I think I became a writer because of my need to tell Estelle who and what I cared about, what bugged me and what I found funny."

Imagine how crammed his wallet must be, full of membership cards from just about every guild in Hollywood.

His star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame was put there 53 years ago, in the original batch ever installed. And it is, fittingly, right next to that of another renowned American humorist, Will Rogers.

Are you getting the drift? There is no stopping this man. And if there's an award for best comic tweet, he'll wind up winning that too – although who would ever want to limit Carl Reiner to just 140 characters? 🐦