

DENNIS MAIN WILSON

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- BORN. Yes.....1st May,1924. At Dulwich, London, England.
- PARENTS. Two....Scottish engineer father. English mother.
- EDUCATION. Grammar school. Left at 17 when Government announced that all potential University talent would be called up at 18½. Decided to try to mature before possible immature,premature, inexperienced death.
1941. (Post Modern languages at Grammar school)
Joined BBC European Service as junior PA.
1942. BBC European Service (a full PA at 18) working on Anti-Nazi satirical propaganda programmes designed to undermine the will of the German people.
- (Better than any University tutors - the concepts and scripts were devised and written by the then young Hugh Carlton Green, Dick Crossman, Alan Bulloch and Professor Lindley Fraser.)
- This was real "Alternative Comedy". (As opposed to today's comedy where the only enemy is our own society)
1942. At 18 had experienced the power of broadcasting.
By 18½ had experienced the absolute power of intelligent humour.
- 1942/3. Called up to serve God, King and country for the duration.
1943. King (or God) send me to Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.
Commissioned into the Inns of Court Regiment.(Armoured cavalry)
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- 2** 1943/44. Trained for D-Day landing in Normandy. Formed mobile,armoured "Dirty tricks" unit.
1944. Seconded to the General Staff of General Sir John Crocker.
(General commanding British 1st Corps for the Normandy landing.)

(My good luck. Had I landed on the same beach as my Regiment on D-Day, I wouldn't be here writing this CV)
1945. Two-pip subaltern on Sir John's Staff as his liaison/bodyguard.
(He believed in getting involved in the front line - with his Corps Commander's flag flying. Good morale for the troops - a sitting duck for German snipers - Nerve wracking if you were trying to look after him)
- May '45. Seconded to Control Commission for Germany, promoted to Captain.
Made 'Unterrhaltunschef of the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk"
(Head of Light Entertainment) under Hugh Carleton Greene.
- 1945/47 De-Nazification of Radio Hamburg. Introduced new 'liberated' entertainment programme concepts, with uncensored comedy and modern big band dance music to replace their diet of Dr.Goebbels propaganda, marching songs and Wagner.

1947. Demobilized. Rejoined BBC in Variety Department.
Put in charge of auditioning returning ex-Servicemen.
Found plenty of talent (Including LAC Bob Monkhouse)
- 1948 Started "Opportunity Knocks" with Hughie Green.

Started the George Mitchell Glee Club.(Later took them
to Television where they became the "Black & White Minstrels")

Found Peter Sellers at the Windmill.

Found Tony Hancock at the Forces Nuffield Centre.

Produced many variety shows with the new in-coming talent.
Joined in with the early "Goon" gang in Jimmy Grafton's pub.
(Harry Secombe, Michael Bentine, Spike Milligan, Alfred Marks,
Peter Sellers etc.etc.)
- 1949 Many variety productions - all with 'new' writers and artists.
- 1951. Individual 'Special' star shows with among others:-

Bob Hope. (Plus a series with him - script by Monkhouse)
Mel Torme.
Josef Locke.
Hoagy Carmichael. (His life story in a musical documentary)

Big Band Shows with the Ted Heath and Stanley Black Orchestras.

The running battle to get the "Goon Show" on the air air.....
- May 1951 We win! First series of "The Goon Show".The BBC insist that
it is called "Crazy People". (17 episodes)
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- October Took over failing series - "Happy Go Lucky" with Derek Roy and
Tony Hancock.
Fired the writers and most of the cast.(Brought in Benny Hill)

Brought in unknown twenty year-olds - Ray Galton and Alan Simpson
as new writers for Hancock.
We never looked back.
- 1952
January. Second series of "The Goon Show". (25 episodes)
- August Series - "Forces All-Star Bill". (8/60-minute spectaculars)
- October Series - "All-Star Bill". (13/60 minute spectaculars)
- 1953and so on. All-star one hours plus big band shows until:-

"Top of the Town" starring Terry Thomas(13/60 minute spectaculars)

- 1953 "Here comes the Pleasure Boat". (Series built to lead up to the Coronation Week - introducing a young lady called Julie Andrews)
- 1954 "Star Bill" - 60 minute production spectacular series from the Garrick Theatre with Tony Hancock resident. Scripts by Galton & Simpson. Guests included Jack Buchanan, Dennis Price, James Robertson Justice, Jimmy James et al. (10 programmes)
- 1954 - "Hancock's Half Hour" - First series. (16 shows)
(plus my new discovery - Kenneth Williams)
- April '55. "Hancock's Half Hour" - Second series. (12 shows)
- October '55 "Hancock's Half Hour" - Third series. (20 shows)
- 1956.
- "BBC World Theatre" (90 minutes) - I adapted H.G.Wells' "The Man Who Could Work Miracles" as a starring vehicle for Tony Hancock. (Cast included Dennis Price, Robert Eddison, Warren Mitchell, Alfie Bass, Hattie Jaques, Kenneth Williams)
- 1956/57 "Hancock's Half Hour" - Fourth series. (20 shows)
- 1957 - TO BBC TELEVISION. (A shortlist of major productions)
onwards.
- "The George Mitchell Glee Club" - last of series was a Black and White Minstrel show. Led to the world-famous series.
- "6 Five Special" - the first-ever pop music series. (I was co-producer with Jack Good for a year)
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- 4** X "The Rag Trade" - the first all-girl-lead comedy series. (With Miriam Karlin, Sheila Hancock, Barbara Windsor, Esma Cannon v. Peter Jones and Reg Varney.
- live genre* X "Scott On....." 60 minute series of storyline spectaculars starring Terry Scott. It was the launch pad of his TV career.
- X "Here I come whoever I am". A one-off tragi-comedy written by Marty Feldman. Starring Bernard Cribbins.
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- 5** X "Meet Sammy Davies Jr." A one hour live ad lib with Sammy. (It made me a celebrity in New York!)
- "The Dick Emery Show" - sketch series starring Dick E.
1966. "Till Death Us Do Part" - First series. (BBC 1)
- "Meet Sammy Davis Part 2". (Follow-up to last year's)
- 1966/67. "Till Death Us Do Part" - Second series.

1966. "A series of Bird's". (BBC 2) An experimental comedy series written by and starring John Bird and John Fortune, with Michael Palin and Terry Jones.

1967/68. "Till Death Us Do Part" - Third series.

1968. *Shed at night - Cioffi*
First series - "Marty". Starring vehicle for Marty Feldman. Film and studio wild advanced comedy.

(Scripts; Marty Feldman & Barry Took, John Cleese & Graham Chapman Michael Palin & Terry Jones, Bill Oddy & Tim Brooke-Taylor.)

1968/69. Second series - "Marty".

1969. AWARDS - Producer's Guild Award - Comedy Producer of the Year. (For both "Till Death" and "Marty")

"Sykes and a" (Long running comedy series written by and starring Eric Sykes with Hattie Jaques and Richard Wattis.

Tu Bulet
1969/70. "Barry Humphries' Scandals". Film and studio sketch series. Starring vehicle for new up-coming Australian genius.

AWARD - Montreux Television Festival.
"Marty" wins "Silver Rose".

1970
X "Mind your own Business" - experimental comedy pilot written by Tony Bilbow. (Fabulous script - turned down for series - it sent up racism!)

X "Up the Polls" - Script Johnny Speight from an idea of mine. Live on-air on Election night it started one minute after the polling booths closed. Wild, anti-all-politicians.

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X "Don't ring us - We'll ring you". Pilot North of England comedy show set in a Lancashire Working Men's Club. Starring Sandy Powell, Norman Rossington and John Junkin. (They loved it up North - hated it down South)

X "Sykes and a Big, Big Show". Six surreal fantasies written by and starring Eric Sykes. (Included sailing a Royal Navy submarine up the Thames and into the Bakerloo Line.) Probably the best thing Eric has ever done. It encouraged him to make "The Plank".

1971
X "Them" - Six-part comedy series starring Cyril Cusak and James Booth as two 'gentlemen of the road' tramps. Script by Johnny Speight. Beautiful! Graphics by Stanley Franklin.

"Private Eye Revue" - One hour comedy documentary to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Private Eye. With Spike Milligan, Willy Rushton, et al.....

1972. "Sykes and a" (Continuation series with Eric Sykes, Hattie Jaques, Richard Wattis, Deryck Guyler - Peter Sellers as guest star)
- "No peace on the Western Front". (One-off bitter WW1 comedy) (Starred Warren Mitchell and Ronnie Fraser.)
- "Till Death Us Do Part" - Fourth series.
- X Royal Command Variety Show - Palladium.
("Till Death" sketch for Queen Mum)
1973. (First book published - co-wrote with Johnny Speight)
- "Marty Together Again". Series starring Marty Feldman, James Villiers and Derek Griffiths.
- X X (A mad attempt at advanced thinking-man's comedy, written jointly by Marty Feldman and Johnny Speight. Some of it was brilliant, some fell flat. A lot of it was censored and never broadcast)
- 1973/74. "Till Death Us Do Part" - 5th series.
- X "Cambridge University Footlights" - (I get them a month at the Comedy Theatre - and do it as an OB on BBC2)
Starring Griff Rhys Jones. Clive Anderson, Tony Slattery etc.
- 1974/75. X "Till Death Us Do Part" - 6th series. (+ Pat Hayes & Alfie Bass)
- "For Richer For Poorer" - One-off comedy starring Harry Corbett and Don Henderson. Script by Johnny Speight.
- 1975/76. "Till Death Us Do Part" - 7th series.
1976. X "Mr. Big". New major comedy series starring Peter Jones and Prunella Scales.
1977. "Mr. Big" (Second series)
- X (Meet scenehand John Sullivan - read his script - buy it and persuade BBC to put him under contract as a scriptwriter)
- X "Citizen Smith" - New comedy series written by John Sullivan. Starring Robert Lindsay.
- Become member of Board of Governors - Greenwich Theatre.
1978. "Citizen Smith" - Second series.
- us/ina X "Tea Ladies" - Pilot set in House of Commons - J. Speight script. (Leading star - Irene Handl taken ill. Potential never used)
1979. "Citizen Smith" - Third series.
- (First demonstration of "Quantel!")

- 1979/80. "Time of my Life" - (Found another comedy author - Jim Eldridge)
A new series starring Mark Kingston - from "Educating Rita."
Eldridge now established BBC writer.
- 7 1981. X "Marty Feldman Specials"
"Roger doesn't live here Anymore". New comedy development to
persuade BBCTV to do comedy programmes without a cackling
studio audience.
Very successful series.. It starred Johnathan Pryce
Script by John Fortune.
1982. Cambridge University Footlights.
(This time starring - Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie and Emma Thomson.)
"L. for Lester". (New comedy discovery - author - Dudley Long)
(Visual comedy film series starring Brian Murphy & Hilda Braid)
(BBC wanted it in a hurry - Murphy only 'star' available - pity -
- the scripts were brilliant - author gave up)
1983. Prompted by Dandy Nichols - Suggested "In Sickness and in Health"
to BBC. (I swear she knew she was dying - see studio photo.)
Idea accepted vaguely by Head of Comedy.

I resign from BBC after 40 years. We're both pissed off with
each other.

The Head of Comedy gets the boot.

The new H.O.C. commissions "In Sickness..." And pays for it.
CHANNEL 4.
Directed "The Lady is a Tramp" series. Script - Johnny Speight.
Starring Patricia Hayes and Pat Coombs.
(By Channel 4 standards it got very high ratings. Loved the show.
Hated the unprofessionalism of the channel)

Decided to use 40 years of comedy experience to write a history
of British comedy - big task.
1985. BBC World Service commission 13-part history of British comedy.
1986. BBC Radio 4 pick it up and use it again with Russell Davies.
- 1987+++++ Now devote all time to an encyclopaedia of "British Popular
Humour" - as opposed to academic, intellectually narrow version.
It's a book - a TV series - a radio series - all in one.
1990. Join YEYtv to further that aim - and make new comedy to boot.