

Entertainment Outlook

Talking with CARL REINER

Three decades each brought milestones in the career of writer-director-actor Carl Reiner.

In the 1950s, Reiner starred with Imogene Coca and Sid Caesar in the landmark TV comedy "Your Show of Shows."

In the 1960s, he created, wrote and co-starred in the classic "Dick Van Dyke Show," and he turned his best-selling autobiographical novel, "Enter Laughing," into a hit Broadway play.

In the 1970s, Reiner moved over to the big screen and directed some of that decade's most successful comedies, including "The Jerk" (1979) with Steve Martin and "Oh, God!" (1977), starring George Burns as you-know-who.



Carl Reiner

The Bronx-born son of a watchmaker, Reiner, now 66, continues his film work with "Bert Rigby, You're a Fool." He wrote and directed this musical comedy about a humble English miner who wants to become Hollywood's new Fred Astaire.

Here Reiner talks about the golden days of TV, his favorite current shows, and his battles with network censors.

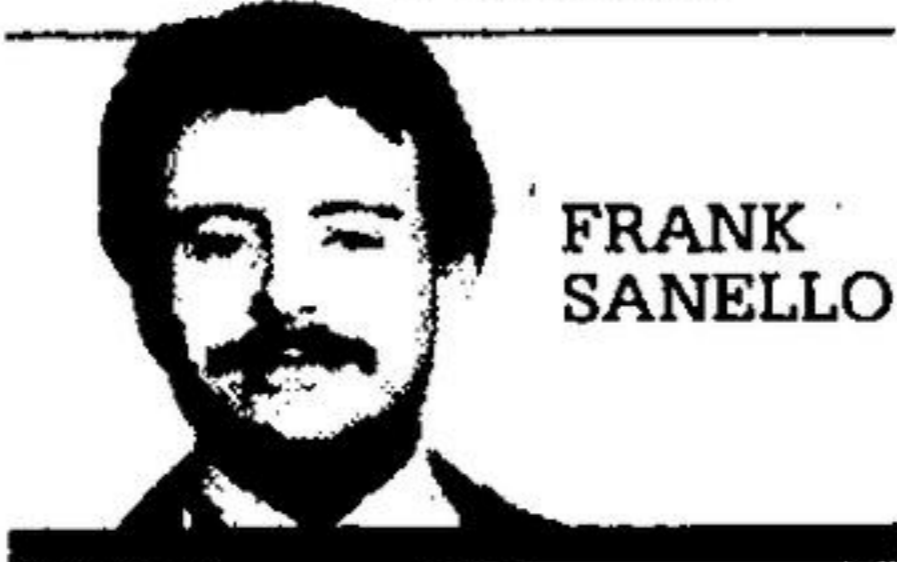
Q. How did an American writer-director come to create such a British-themed film as "Bert Rigby, You're a Fool"?

A. I may do a picture about how this picture came to be. It's like a bad Hollywood movie. My wife and I went to see "Me and My Girl" (a musical imported from Britain). We saw this guy jumping around on stage with all the moves of Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire combined! I was really swept off my feet. I said to my wife, "This guy should be in movies! Why haven't we seen him before?" So I wrote "Bert Rigby" for him.

Q. Recent movie musicals like "A Chorus Line" have bombed. Did that worry you when you decided to mount a musical film?

A. I never think about those things. Studios do. All I think about is, is it valid material? The really great movies we adore came about because

STAR SPEAK



FRANK SANELLO

somebody had this idea from their gut, and they put it on screen. Usually there isn't any precedence to great works of art, not that "Bert Rigby" is a great work of art, but it's a great work of craft.

Q. What was the origin of "The Dick Van Dyke Show"?

A. I was just writing about my own days on "Your Show of Shows." Re-

viewers at the time said ("Dick Van Dyke") was the first show to show what it really was like to go to work.

Q. When you watch "Dick Van Dyke" in reruns, are the shows as funny as they seemed then?

A. I've taped them all. I looked at one yesterday. I roared like I had nothing to do with it. I almost forgot I wrote the first 40 shows. The only thing that doesn't hold up is Mary Tyler Moore's role, because women's role in society has changed. Every so often, things come up where Mary decides not to be a dancer and continue to be a housewife. Today I'd never dare write that.

Q. Was the golden age of TV in the '50s really that golden, or have our memories of it enhanced it over the years?

A. Nobody has ever done a revue on

"TV has always had the same percentage of excellence — about 2 percent."

— Carl Reiner

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TV as good as "Your Show of Shows." Carol Burnett and "Saturday Night Live" have come close. Luckily, we got together the best people in TV at that point, and nobody has ever been able to assemble such a cast again.

A. I wrote an episode where their son walks in on them in the bedroom. We didn't show anything, but it was implied they had been making love. The network said it wasn't in Dick Van Dyke's image. I said, "Listen, I created that image. I know what it is." Today that scene would be considered mild.

Q. What's your opinion of TV today?

A. I believe TV has always had the same percentage of excellence — about 2 percent. You just have to sort through a lot of junk to get to the 2 percent. "Cosby" is sometimes just brilliant. "In the Heat of the Night" just had a thoughtful piece on capital punishment — no preaching, just stating what it is. "Lonesome Dove" was a milestone. I like "The Wonder Years."

Q. How has TV changed since you began in the '50s?

A. One obvious thing: You can say anything you want on TV. I hosted the first "Young Comedians" show on HBO 10 years ago. I remember saying (expletive) on the air! After years of putting Mary Tyler Moore and Dick Van Dyke in twin beds and not being allowed to say "pregnant," I just had to say (expletive) on TV!

Q. Why did you walk off the second "Dick Van Dyke Show" in 1973?

Q. You played the egomaniacal but seldom-seen TV star Alan Brady on the original "Dick Van Dyke Show." Why did you have such a small role?

A. I was too busy writing. While they were staging that week's show, I was writing the next week's. I just wrote myself in every few weeks. I used to just show my back to the audience so they'd think Alan Brady was somebody more important than Carl Reiner.

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