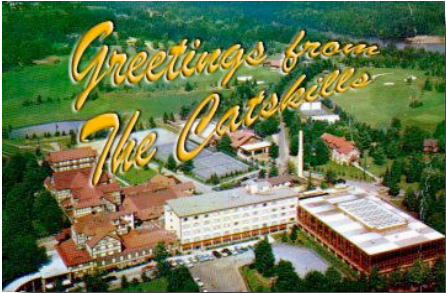


When Comedy Went to School

A TELEVISION/THEATRICAL DOCUMENTARY FILM



The Catskill hotels provided a comedy boot camp for American humor--basic training for a generation plus of our most gifted comics, who tickled countless funny-bones and influenced most of popular entertainers.



As we move deeper into the 21st century, it's apparent that some of the most familiar figures in American culture are its comedians: Jay Leno and David Letterman standing astride the late night television audiences; Billy Crystal, Whoopi Goldberg, Chris Rock hosting the nation's most spectacular award shows, former stand-up comics like Bill Cosby, Drew Carey, Ray Romano dominating TV sit-coms, Jon Stewart, Dennis Miller, "Saturday Night Live" constantly satirizing the nation's politics, with mad-caps Lucille Ball, Jonathan Winters having long since achieved cult status. How did it come to be that a nation that started



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the 20th century laughing at barnyard jokes of folk humorists, ended enthralled by the urbane parodies of Jerry Seinfeld? From Will Rodgers to Robin Williams? Go from Jack Benny to Woody Allen?



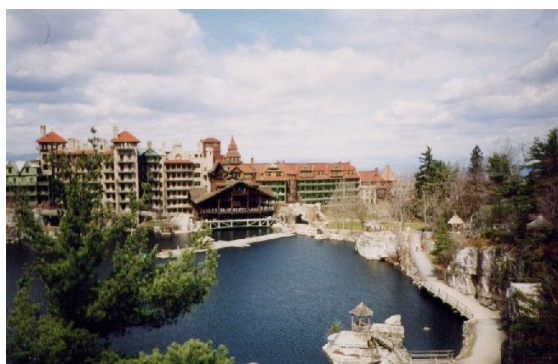
"When Comedy Went to School" will be an original documentary that will examine the unique environment that produced dozens of comedy legends. From post World War II to the late 60's, the Catskill hotels provided the settings for the most important and fascinating period in the development of contemporary American humor.

During that time, comedy went to school....and what a graduating class! The program will feature interviews among such illustrious Catskill 'graduates' as Sid Caesar, Don Rickles, Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, Jerry Lewis, Jackie Mason and Joan Rivers. The program will take full advantage of the rich archival and broadcast material that capture the comics in their youth, their prime, their later years.



Additionally, other on-camera guests will include: Dr. Phil Brown, Founder and President of the Catskills Institute, Sociology Professor, Brown University, Tania Grossinger, author "Growing-Up at Grossinger's", Crazy Tyron, Kutshers Resort's current Tumbler/Activities Director, a

hilarious roundtable discussion at the Friars Club between seasoned Catskill comics Pat Cooper, Mal Z. Lawrence, Stewie Stone and Dick Capriand we can't forget 90 year-old Mickey Freeman, still doing stand-up...."There was so much sour cream in the dining room I thought there was a blizzard!" And many other notable candidates, all so very eager to share their experiences and memories.



We'll go on location to the Catskills' hotels/sites where they started....perhaps see excerpts from their earliest acts; visit Tilly's, a 1950's Diner in Monticello, New York, still fully operational, a perfectly preserved throwback in time where many of the comedians met after their shows to hang-out, swap stories....try to top each other.

During the show our comics will share their colorful, insightful and vastly entertaining stories as they transport us back to their roots----oftentimes sparking and embellishing one another's memories and anecdotes.





As vaudeville in the 1930's expired, unable to compete with rising costs and the proliferation of motion picture houses, comedians sought an outlet for their developing talents. The New York upstate hotels (Sullivan and Ulster Counties) numbering in excess of 900 were collectively known asThe Catskills.

These hotels and lodges, catering almost exclusively to Jewish clientele, provided a vital proving ground. They offered a range of unprecedented facilities whereby comics could gain exposure, work on developing a style, hone material, check-out the competition----bomb and still not be banished forever.



Post World War II, The Catskills attracted more diverse, sophisticated guests, well-traveled New Yorkers and convention groups. Theatre-style stage shows evolved into night club settings, requiring performers to become more adaptable--'work' small groups/large crowds every night. They were the toughest audiences in the world. You had to bang 'em" or they walked."

The young comics watched, and listened and learned and changed American humor forever. Gone was the traditional set-up, pay-off style---Old World Humor--joke telling. Innovative acts incorporated characters. social commentary,



stream-of-consciousness delivery, taking risks. The act was about them. Triple-punch lines, emotional tags, callbacks, a set list, transitions like Haiku....new, improved stand-up techniques for a demanding audience refusing to just 'hear jokes'.



Originally, "comics in-training" (see bellhops, busboys, waiters) were known as "porch clowns", also "tumblers", a Yiddish word. Create tumult, excitement...anything, everything to get a laugh, amuse the guests. Whatever it took. Physical comedy, impressions, mime....just get there attention and keep it! Danny Kaye was fired after one day as a tumbler.



"Much too crazy!" was the word. A "tumbler too crazy?"....he must have been something! Lenny Bruce and Buddy Hackett worked as busboys, bunked together...I'd like you to meet my roommates. Irving Kniberg and Joseph Levitch worked there as teens, better known as Alan King and Jerry Lewis.

Some bellhop named Aaron Schwatt had large buttons on his uniform, bright red hair..."I'll call myself Red Buttons...what the hell!". Sid Caesar was a pretty fair saxophone player...pretty fair also at creating characters, skits, especially when teamed with Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks pre-"Show of Shows." George Jessel made his last insulting remark up there...Don Rickles his first. Mort Sahl, Henny Youngman, Jackie Mason...the list goes on.



Edmund Kean, a noted 19th Century Shakespearean actor, as he lay on his deathbed was asked how he was feeling, he replied, "Dying is easy, comedy is hard!" Perhaps. However, one thing is certain, those Catskill Comics sure made living a lot more fun It's long past due to honor them and their Alma Mata.

When Comedy Went to School

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