

THE BILL DANA ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

**A Finding Aid for
The Bill Dana Oral History Interview Collection
At
Emerson College Library**

Finding Aid prepared by Jenni Matz
Emerson College
Boston, MA
2007

Contact info: www.emerson.edu/comedy

Finding Aid encoded by: Kerry Adams

Latest Revision: 5-30-07

Collection Summary:

The collection of interviews covers subjects relating to the study, history, and craft of comedy performance, writing, and producing. The Interviewees range in age and background but generally are of the comedic profession as comedy actors, comedy writers, stand-up comedians, comedy directors, comedy producers, comedy agents, and comedy managers.

Extent:

The collection consists of 67 videocassettes (approximate running time 120min ea) on ½ VHS (dubbed from masters originally shot on DVcam) of 64 Interviews conducted between 2005-2007 by Bill Dana and Jenni Matz.

64 paper corresponding transcripts (29cm)

There is a DVD compilation reel (“**American Comedy Archive Oral History Interview Excerpts**”) featuring excerpts from some of the interviews. Version 1 runs 10 minutes in length; Version 2 runs 30 minutes in length. Edited by Jenni Matz.

Status:

Available by Appointment with the Emerson College Archivist.

VHS tapes are in-house; use only by appointment with Archivist.

Restrictions on Use: Varies.

Reproduced with permission only.

Note on Access: Interested researchers may view some transcripts online at

<http://www.emerson.edu/comedy/histories/Oral-History-Transcripts.cfm>

For other transcripts, or to view the complete videotaped interview, please contact the Archivist with the name of the Interviewee whose interview you are interested in. For now most requests can only be accommodated with an in-person visit to the Archives, by appointment.

Repository: Emerson College Library Archives

Call Number: arranged alphabetically by Interviewee’s last name

Abstract:

This collection consists of Oral history audio-visual interviews conducted by comedian Bill Dana and Archivist/Historian Jenni Matz with comedians, directors, writers, producers, agents, and experts on comedy. The interviews were originally recorded on DVcam tapes from February, 2005 through May, 2007 and duplicated at Emerson College. The American Comedy Archives was established at Emerson College in 2005 to acquire, preserve and make available primary source material that documents the professional activities of the ground breaking individuals who have written, produced or performed comedy for radio, television, motion pictures or live performance.

The American Comedy Archives collection also includes manuscripts, photographs, video and film materials, as well as this oral history collection. (See “Related collections”)

The project is the brainchild of Bill Dana, a 1950 Emerson graduate with a distinguished career in comedy as a performer, writer and producer.

Subjects/ Selected Search Terms:

[Comedy.](#)

[Stand-up comedy.](#)

[Television comedy writers.](#)

[Commedia dell'arte.](#)

[Tragicomedy.](#)

[Oral history.](#)

[Comedians United States.](#)

[African American comedians.](#)

[Hispanic American comedians.](#)

[Jewish comedians.](#)

[Male comedians.](#)

[Women comedians.](#)

Added Entries:

Arthur, Beatrice,

Begley, Ed,

Berman, Shelley,

Black, Lewis, 1948-,

Brill, Edwin S.,

Carter, Jack, 1922?-,

Cavett, Dick,

Conway, Tim,

Corey, Irwin,

Crosby, Norm,

Dana, Bill, 1924-,

Di Bona, Vincent,

Diller, Phyllis,

Denoff, Sam, 1928-,

English, Diane,

Feldon, Barbara,

Friedman, Budd,

Gelbart, Larry,

Greene, Shecky,

Gregory, Dick,

Grodin, Charles,

Harrington, Pat, 1929-,

Hefner, Hugh M. (Hugh Marston), 1926-,

Herzog, Doug,

Henry, Buck,

Johnson, Arte, 1934-,

Kalish, Irma,

Kalish, Austin,

Kanter, Hal,
Knotts, Don, 1926-2006,
Lear, Norman,
Rose Marie, 1923-,
Marshall, Peter, 1927-,
Martin, Dick, 1922-,
Masada, Jamie,
Mason, Jackie,
Matz, Jenni,
McCann, Chuck,
Meadows, Jayne, 1926-,
Mencia, Carlos,
Murray, Jan, 1916-2006,
Murray, Howard,
Newhart, Bob,
Nye, Louis,
Owens, Gary,
Paige, Janis,
Persky, Bill,
Poston, Tom,
Reiner, Carl, 1922-,
Riley, Jack, 1935-,
Roberts, Tony, 1939-,
Rodriguez, Paul,
Rooney, Andrew A.,
Sandrich, Jay,
Schlatter, George, 1932-,
Shapiro, George,
Stern, Leonard,
Storm, Howard,
Van Dyke, Dick,
Van Patten, Dick,
Vilanch, Bruce,
White, Betty, 1924-
Willard, Fred, 1939-,
Winkler, Henry, 1945-,
Winters, Jonathan,
Yankovic, Al, 1959-

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Provenance:

Bill Dana, Emerson Class of 1950, approached the President and Board of Trustees at Emerson College about founding a comedy archives at the college in the early 2000s. In 2005, Emerson's Assistant Director for Access Services and Archivist Robert Fleming began to organize the effort to begin this program. In February, 2005, Archivist and Filmmaker Jenni Matz was hired to help manage and produce the oral history interviews and the comedy archive project. In February, 2005, Dana and Matz began interviewing the "living legends of comedy" in New York City. The first interview for this collection was conducted by Jenni Matz with Bill Dana on February 21, 2005 at The Cutler Majestic Theater in Boston. The first interview by Dana and Matz as an interview team, took place February 23, 2005 with Dick Cavett in New York City. Soon thereafter, a list of potential interview subjects was created by Dana, Fleming, and Matz. Interview subjects were contacted with the help of Mr. Dana, who, as a longtime performer and noted comedian himself, had direct access to his colleagues.

Interviews were arranged and researched by Matz. Interview questions were conceived by Matz and Dana, with supervision by Fleming. Local crews were hired and for the majority of the interviews, shot by John Stephenson (another Emerson alum) on DVcam and usually in the home of the interviewee.

Lance Kyed at Emerson was consulted on the preservation issues for the digital media. Masters were duplicated by Kyed and his staff at Emerson to DVcam and a viewing copy made on VHS and DVD. The master is stored off-site. The entire interviews were also digitized and captured to RAID drives as QuickTime files using Final Cut Pro. Over the next two years, a total of sixty-four interviews were conducted and shot. During the course of that time, additional items were collected by some of the interview subjects and other supporters of the Archives.

Related collections include: The Bill Dana Manuscript Collection, The Howard Storm Script Collection, the Rev. Warren Debenham Comedy Novelty Collection, The Phil Leslie Collection, The Kevin Bright collection; and related comedy books, LPs, and artifacts.

Copyright Status:

The status of copyright in the unpublished works of Emerson College is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C).

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Interview with (Interviewee Name), The Bill Dana Oral History Collection at the American Comedy Archives, Emerson College, Boston MA.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The persons selected for inclusion in this oral history collection had a direct influence on the history of the comedic arts in the United States. Their professions range from performers, stand-up comedians, comedy agents and managers, comedy club owners, television or film comedy producers and directors, comedy writers (for film, television, or live performance), and humorists.

TIMELINE

All interviews were conducted jointly by Bill Dana and Jenni Matz except where noted.

Date	Interview with	Location
1. Feb 21, 2005	Bill Dana	Boston, MA*
2. Feb 23, 2005	Dick Cavett	New York City
3. Feb 23, 2005	Charles Grodin	New York City
4. March 7, 2005	Louis Nye	Los Angeles, CA
5. March 8, 2005	George Schlatter	Los Angeles, CA
6. March 8, 2005	Shelley Berman	Los Angeles, CA
7. March 9, 2005	Don Knotts	Los Angeles, CA
8. March 9, 2005	Hugh Hefner	Los Angeles, CA
9. March 10, 2005	Larry Gelbart	Los Angeles, CA
10. March 11, 2005	Tom Poston	Los Angeles, CA
11. March 11, 2005	Betty White	Los Angeles, CA
12. March 14, 2005	Gary Owens	Los Angeles, CA
13. March 14, 2005	Jonathan Winters	Santa Barbara, CA
14. March 15, 2005	Peter Marshall	Los Angeles, CA
15. April 7, 2005	Jackie Mason	New York City
16. April 8, 2005	Irwin Corey	New York City
17. April 8, 2005	Tony Roberts	New York City
18. April 8, 2005	Bill Persky	New York City
19. May 26, 2005	Buck Henry	Los Angeles, CA
20. May 26, 2005	Norman Lear	Los Angeles, CA
21. May 27, 2005	Janis Paige**	Los Angeles, CA
22. May 27, 2005	Sam Denoff	Los Angeles, CA
23. May 31, 2005	Bea Arthur	Los Angeles, CA
24. May 31, 2005	Ed Begley, Jr.	Studio City, CA
25. June 1, 2005	Howard Storm	Los Angeles, CA
26. June 1, 2005	Leonard B. Stern	Los Angeles, CA
27. June 2, 2005	Jack Carter	Los Angeles, CA
28. June 2, 2005	Arte Johnson	Los Angeles, CA
June 3, 2005	Bill Dana*	Los Angeles, CA
29. June 3, 2005	Pat Harrington	Los Angeles, CA
30. June 6, 2005	Hal Kanter	Los Angeles, CA
31. June 6, 2005	Jay Sandrich	Los Angeles, CA
32. June 6, 2005	Shecky Greene	Los Angeles, CA
33. June 7, 2005	Fred Willard	Encino, CA
34. June 8, 2005	Phyllis Diller	Los Angeles, CA
35. October 15, 2005	Dick Gregory	Washington, D.C
36. October 18, 2005	Barbara Feldon	New York City
37. October 18, 2005	Eddie Brill	New York City
38. October 19, 2005	Andy Rooney	New York City
39. October 19, 2005	Lewis Black	New York City
40. January 15, 2006	Dick Van Dyke	Malibu, CA

41. January 17, 2006	Carl Reiner	Los Angeles, CA
42. January 17, 2006	Jan Murray	Los Angeles, CA
43. January 18, 2006	Jayne Meadows	Los Angeles, CA
44. January 18, 2006	Tim Conway	Los Angeles, CA
45. January 19, 2006	Vin diBona	Los Angeles, CA
46. January 19, 2006	Norm Crosby	Los Angeles, CA
47. January 20, 2006	Henry Winkler**	Los Angeles, CA
48. January 24, 2006	Dick Van Patten	Encino, CA
49. January 24, 2006	Rose Marie	Encino, CA
50. January 25, 2006	Budd Friedman	Los Angeles, CA
51. January 27, 2006	Dick Martin	Malibu, CA
52. February 6, 2007	Bob Newhart	Los Angeles, CA
53. February 5, 2007	Doug Herzog	Los Angeles, CA
54. February 7, 2007	Austin “Rocky” and Irma Kalish	Encino, CA
55. February 8, 2007	Diane English*	North Hollywood, CA
56. February 8, 2007	Howard Murray	Studio City, CA
February 10, 2007	Bill Dana ***	Los Angeles, CA
57. February 10, 2007	Weird Al Yankovic	Los Angeles, CA
58. February 12, 2007	George Shapiro	Los Angeles, CA
59. February 13, 2007	Chuck McCann	Los Angeles, CA
60. February 14, 2007	Jack Riley	Los Angeles, CA
61. February 15, 2007	Bruce Vilanch	Los Angeles, CA
62. February 15, 2007	Carlos Mencia	Los Angeles, CA
63. February 19, 2007	Jamie Masada	Los Angeles, CA
64. February 19, 2007	Paul Rodriguez	Los Angeles, CA

* Interview conducted by Jenni Matz, solo

** Interview conducted by Robert Fleming

*** Interview conducted by Jeff Abraham for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (interview shared with ACA at Emerson).

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The oral histories contained in this collection exist as conversations between comedy experts, aficionados and noted celebrities in the comedic arts and their respected colleague Bill Dana (in collaboration with researcher Jenni Matz) on the subject of the craft of comedy. The birth of the joke, the creative process, the nature of show business, the beginning of a career in entertainment, the highlights of their creative lives, are among the topics generally discussed and reflected upon.

- **Highlights:** This collection contains the last-known in-depth interviews with noted comedians Don Knotts, Tom Poston, Louis Nye, and Jan Murray before their passing. Knotts, Poston, and Nye were best-known collectively as the “Men in the Street”; comic personalities on Steve Allen’s “Tonight Show” on NBC in the 1950s and 1960s. Jan Murray was a game-show host and Catskills stand-up comedian of the 1950s and 60s.

SERIES DESCRIPTION NOTE: (overview: general to specific)

The collection is arranged alphabetically by the interviewee's last name.

The collection is under the process of being indexed and catalogued for ease of use and potential online access.

RELATED COLLECTIONS AT EMERSON COLLEGE:

“The Bill Dana Papers” (manuscript collection).

“The Warren Debenham Comedy Novelty Collection” (Ephemera and comedy novelty items and collectibles).

“The American Comedy Collection” (growing collection of books on comedy, comedy albums, cds, and videos, newsletters and fanzines, television scripts and production notes. Included are yet-to-be processed collections of Director Howard Storm, Television producer Kevin Bright, Director Phil Leslie, comedian Jan Murray, and Comedian/Producer/ Director Henry Winkler).