

In One Era... & Out the Other!

Shorties "Like Mel" Just as Funny as Tall Comics!



Mel Brooks

BY ALLAN KRIEFF

Born Melvin Kaminsky in Brooklyn, New York in 1926, his family knew he was funny right from the beginning. People would

walk up to his crib and just start laughing and his three older brothers "treated him like a pet," (meaning he was either dearly loved or ate from a bowl on the floor).

He started in show business as a stand-up Catskill comic before changing his name and becoming an Emmy-winning TV gag writer for Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*. By the time we met, he was a major star and undeniably the king of parody, having written, directed, produced and acted in eight hilarious movies:

The Producers (the original 1968 non-musical version that won an Oscar for best original screenplay), *The Twelve Chairs*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Blazing Saddles*, *Silent Movie*, *High Anxiety*,

History of the World: Part I and *To Be or Not to Be*.

He won three Emmys for his "2,000 Year Old Man" routine with Carl Reiner, an Oscar for *The Critic*, a cartoon short he wrote and produced, and created the popular 1960's spyspoof TV show, "Get Smart." In case you haven't guessed, we're talking about the one and only Mel Brooks!

Fade Out & Fade In

In 1986, after filming *Century Village* commercials in L.A. with Red Buttons, Red and his wife, Alicia, picked me up at my hotel and we headed for dinner at Matteo's Italian Restaurant in Westwood, for dinner, still a favorite haunt of show biz celebs. With Red a Matteo's regular, we were seated in the prestigious first bay and seated adjacent to us with his brother was Brooks who immediately started wisecracking in his unusually loud voice: "It's okay," he yelled to patrons packing the place. "Order the lobster. Red Buttons is picking up the checks!"

When the laughter died, Mel turned, dropped on his knees, and grabbed Alicia, kissing her full on her lips and repeated it with Red, then grabbed for me but stopped short of a kiss. Holding my face in his hands he asked Red: "Quick, introduce us!" Said Red: "Allan, say hello to Mel Brooks; Mel, this is Allan Krieff from Florida."

"FLORIDA!" yelled Mel. "My God, do you know my mother? She lives at the Presidential Towers in Hollywood!" I said, "The Presidential is one of my advertising clients. I'm in that building often."

"Great," he replied. "Could you speak to the manager and see if he can make the elevators go a little faster?" "Sure," I agreed and with that, got a kiss on the lips, too!

Taking Mel's dinner order was a scene from his movies. First, Mel asked the waiter (in a loud "whisper") for a confidential report on the chef: "Did he recently go to the bathroom? Did he wash his hands? Does he scratch himself in private places a lot? Is there anything you noticed oozing from his body?"

NEXT he decided against an appetizer and instead ordered a Caesar salad, ask the waiter to "hold the lettuce, hold the eggs, hold the anchovies, lemon and garlic... just give me some brown croutons in a big wooden salad bowl and hurry, I'm starving." As the waiter leaves, Mel desperately needs a cappuccino. "Hell-oo-oo! Hell-oo-oo!" he yells, "A cappuccino... and keep them coming!"

For his main dish, he asked for the Dover sole 'meunière' — rather than 'grilled' as listed on the menu. After the waiter asks and learns what meunière is (lightly floured and fried in butter, served on a long dish with veggies), Mel yelps: "No, no, no!" He prefers it on a round dish.

"But the fish is long and will hang over the sides of a round dish," the waiter advises. A compromise is found. The Dover sole will arrive on a long dish but will be immediately transferred to the big wooden salad bowl still on the table with Mel's croutons.

When Mel's bill arrived, he loudly announced, "I love coming here because the food is just like my films ... tasteless, but funny!"

Fast forward:

One month later, I get a surprise call from Brooks (who got my number from Red). "Allan, my mother says the elevators are now okay going up, but slower coming down, maybe you should speak to someone higher up ... but don't take the elevator." I told him how much fun it was to meet him.

"How'd you like to be an angel," he asked. "Invest in my movie, *Spaceballs*. I'm sending you a prospectus, you'll make a fortune! You'll never forget me for this, Allan — and give my mother a call. She loves hearing from people." Click! I never called Mel's mother. Nor invest in *Spaceballs*.

Of course, it became a box office smash.



Brooks in "Spaceballs"



From "Blazing Saddles"

