



# BBC Comedy

The BBC has been making people laugh for eighty years. On Radio, and later Television, it has not only presented every kind of comedy programme but actually invented most of them. It has discovered and nurtured talented writers and performers and has not been afraid to give them creative free rein. This catalogue is the result and in it there are over 250 hours of comedy.

To help you make a selection we have divided the programmes into different genres (most shows are thirty minutes):

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## **Series summaries**

Each of the comedy series summarised are presented so that you can broadcast a distinctive high quality series within a theme or genre over a convenient timeframe.

They can be broadcast in whichever way best suits your station and are suggested in either one year, six or three month periods.

Units can be broadcast as a series or in combinations of sit-com and sketch show for example, in a "Comedy Hour" format. Classic sit-coms from different series can be broadcast in a "Smash of the Day" weekly slot for a comparative feel.

There are also a variety of shorter, fifteen minute series which permit greater flexibility within any schedule, complementing drama, features or readings for example.

# 1. The Situation Comedy

## (A) Chaos Theory

**A genre based on the best traditions of farce, where everything that can go wrong does go wrong, and laughter results.**

### **At Home With The Snails**

4 x 30'

2001

Geoffrey Palmer plays a Professor of Symbolics at Oxford, desperately trying to write a book. His son, Alex, is clearly depressed and has done nothing since university. Then he finds himself a hobby, slowly he becomes more and more obsessed... with snails...

**"hilarious... one of the most original comedies to be aired for a long time"** The Stage

CO0015

### **At Home with the Snails (5-8)**

4 X 30'

2002

Alex has shaken off his obsession with snails, moved to London and now has a job and a girlfriend. Meanwhile, his parents have feigned their own deaths - George intends that Alex's grief will furnish material for his new book and Beverly hopes their ruse will ultimately reunite her family. But even the best-laid plans can go awry...

CO0020

### **Dad's Army**

52 x 30'

1974-1975

"Don't panic!" Walmington-on-Sea is lucky in the dark days of World War Two to be defended by a crack Home Guard platoon led by the town's bank manager, Captain Mainwaring. These gentle and wonderfully observed comedies of derring-do and incompetence are adapted from the successful television series. Arthur Lowe is Captain Mainwaring, with a platoon of John Le Mesurier, Clive Dunn, John Laurie, Arnold Ridley and Ian Lavender.

1-13 CN2072, 14-33 CN2457, 34-52 CN2025

### **Flywheel, Shyster And Flywheel**

18 x 30'

1991, 1993, 1994

The original Marx Brothers radio shows were broadcast in 1932 on Five Star Theatre. The lost scripts were recently found in the U.S.A.'s Library of Congress and lovingly recreated by the BBC. Groucho's outrageous one-liners and Chico's inventive and zany language is brought to life as the usual crises are continually averted. With Michael Roberts as Groucho as "Waldorf T. Flywheel" and Frank Lazarus as Chico as "Emmanuel Ravelli".

1-6 CD0155, 7-12 CD0504, 13-18 CD0821

### **The Men From The Ministry**

26 x 30'

1973-1975,  
1977,1978

No branch of official activity is safe from the optimistic bungling of Lamb and Lennox-Brown, executives in the ubiquitous General Assistance Department of the Civil Service. Supporting them is a vast army of government officials for whom no problem is so bad that they can't make it worse! This enduring and influential Whitehall spoof ran for fifteen confusion-filled years. Starring Derek Guyler as Lennox-Brown and Richard Murdoch as Richard Lamb, with Norma Ronald as Mildred.

CN4581, CN4768

**The Navy Lark**  
13 x 30'  
1981

Everything is all at sea in the most accident-prone ship in the navy - H.M.S Troutbridge. With a crew led by Stephan Murray as the constantly bemused "Number One", the conniving Petty Officer Jon Pertwee, silly-ass Sub-Lieutenant Leslie Phillips and an Able Seaman played by the young Ronnie Barker, *The Navy Lark* ran for eighteen years on British radio.

CN3805

**People Like Us**  
16 x 30'  
1995-1997

A delightful spoof of the fly-on-the-wall documentary. Chris Langham is the hapless Roy Mallard, the world's worst radio reporter, always in the way as he tries to illuminate and probe people's professional working lives. Mallard is the master of the mixed metaphor and the non-sequitur, it's such a shame that he always seems to antagonise his subjects so much!

1-6 TCD1212, 7-12 CO0001, 13-16 CO0004

**Think The Unthinkable**  
4 x 30'  
2001

A timely satire on that modern bane or blessing: the management consultant. Fresh from college, Unthinkable Solutions are confident, ambitious, full of personal rivalries and completely devoid of any common sense. No organisation that elicits and survives their 'help' will ever be the same again...

CO0017

## **(B) Les Miserables**

**More character-based humour where exasperation with those little things in life provides a richly comic series of programmes.**

**Hancock's Half Hour**  
41 x 30'  
1983

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear". The voice of Tony Hancock, one of the finest British radio comedians, creating a delightfully pretentious and insecure character, Anthony Aloysius Hancock, of 23, Railway Cuttings, East Cheam. Supported by superb scripts by Galton and Simpson, and a cast of Kenneth Williams, Sid James, Hattie Jacques, and Bill Kerr, *Hancock's Half Hour* sounds as fresh and hilarious now as it ever did.

CN4471

**One Foot in the Grave**  
4 x 30'  
1995

"I don't believe it". Victor Meldrew is made redundant and replaced by a recorded telephone message. In enforced retirement he constantly battles against domestic technology and the absurdities of modern life and his exasperation reigns supreme. Richard Wilson is Victor and Annette Crosbie his long-suffering wife.

TCD0931

**Steptoe and Son**  
14 x 30'  
1966, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1976

A comic masterpiece from the writers of Hancock. The Steptoes are rag and bone men but Harold, the son, yearns for the good life, away from the horse and cart and dad. Albert stands in his way, with a combination of low cunning and emotional blackmail, and somehow things always go wrong for Harold. Adapted from a television series which regularly attracted audiences of 20 million viewers. Harry H Corbett is Harold and Wilfred Bramble is Albert.

CN3644

**Yes Minister**  
14 x 30'

1984-1985

Mrs. Thatcher's favourite sit-com. The constant battle between the politician and the civil service is brought wonderfully to life by the sustained, dry wit of the dialogue and the interplay between the three main characters. Paul Eddington as the Rt Hon. James Hacker M.P., Nigel Hawthorne as Sir Humphrey Appleby, and Derek Fowlds as Bernard Woolley, circle warily around each other in the corridors of power.

1-8 CN4332, 9-14 CN4530

## 2. The Sketch Show

**The sketch show has become a familiar radio form although its roots lie in music hall and revue. Its range and variety keep the comedy fresh and vibrant.**

<b>Beachcomber... By The Way</b> 6 x 30'  1994	"Greetings Morons". The eccentric world of J.B. Morton began in the 1930s as a newspaper column in the Daily Express. It has a passing connection with reality and is peopled by red-headed dwarves, Doctor Strabismus (whom God preserve) of Utrecht and the endlessly peremptory Justice Cocklecarrot amongst others. Richard Ingrams and John Wells attempt to hold it all together, with the help of John Sessions, Patricia Routledge, Joan Sims and June Whitfield.  TCD0898
<b>Goodness Gracious Me</b> 6 x 30'  1998	Barrier-breaking satire from the hilariously irreverent team of British Asian comedians. Starring Sanjeev Bhaskar, Kulvinder Ghir, Nitin Sawhney, Meera Syal and Nina Wadia. Go for an "English" in Bombay - "What's the blandest thing on the menu?" - and explore the Asian mum's obsession with the aubergine in this very funny and original show.  CO0009
<b>The Goon Show</b> 52 x 30'  1992	"It's all in the mind, you know." The Goon Show's team - Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers, and Harry Secombe - broadcast from 1951 to 1960 and are perhaps the most influential radio comedians of all time. Grytpype-Thynne, Moriarty, Henry Crun and Min, Eccles, Bluebottle and Colonel Denis Bloodnock - he of the exploding trousers - are instantly recognisable, featuring as they do in the surreal adventures of the endlessly gullible Neddie Seagoon.  CD0314-CD0325
<b>I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again</b> 52 x 30'  1966-1970	A virtual Who's Who of British comedy with Tim Brook-Taylor, John Cleese, Jo Kendall, Graeme Garden, Bill Oddie, and David Hatch as the stars of "Radio Prune" , a sort of radio custard pie. Thrill to a series of comic parodies, gasp at the full frontal sketches, sing along to the pastiche pop songs and groan at the awful puns.  CN2137, CN2138, CN2369, CN2370
<b>Little Britian</b> 7 x 30' 2004	The Sony Award winning comedy sketch show exploring ordinary life in Britain as lived by some less-than-ordinary British folk.  CO0024

<p><b>Round The Horne</b> 52 x 30'</p> <p>1966-1968, 1976</p>	<p>A colourful and bizarre collection of characters and catch phrases made <i>RoundThe Horne</i> unique in the history of radio comedy. The urbane Kenneth Horne kept the whole thing moving at breakneck speed as the high camp of Julian and Sandy gave way to the smouldering double entendres of ageing juveniles Binkie Huckaback and Dame Celia Molestrangler. The impenetrable folk songs of Rambling Sid Rumpo introduced audiences to a world of suggestion and outrageous innuendo that still hasn't been fully explained. And also starring Kenneth Williams, Hugh Paddick, Betty Marsden and Bill Pertwee.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CN2919</p>
<p><b>Take It From Here</b> 52 x 30'</p> <p>1969</p>	<p>Written by Frank Muir and Denis Norden, <i>Take It From Here</i> is one of the funniest of a very funny genre. There are skits, sketches and songs from a talented cast and the highlight is always the day-to-day life of the Glums, a gloriously dysfunctional family unit, where Eth's romantic optimism is always hampered by the speed of Ron's thought processes and Pa Glum's fondness for beer. Starring Jimmy Edwards, Dick Bentley and June Whitfield.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CN982, CN1008, CN1009, CN1010</p>
<p><b>That Mitchell and Webb Sound (1-5)</b> 5 x 30'</p> <p>2003</p>	<p>David Mitchell and Robert Webb invite listeners into their gloriously lopsided world of sketches populated by quirky characters in twisted situations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CO0023</p>
<p><b>That Mitchell Webb Sound (6-10)</b> 5 x 30'</p> <p>2005</p>	<p>A return to the lop-sided world of David Mitchell and Robert Web.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CO0026</p>

### 3. The Improvisation Shows

Contemporary comedians get used to working without a script and those with a talent for improvisation fill these shows with unexpected moments of uncontrollable laughter, often from the audience.

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|---|--|
| <p><b>I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue</b><br/>17 x 30'<br/><br/>1996, 1998, 1999</p> | <p>Often called the antidote to panel games; in some primitive cultures this programme is worshipped as a god. Humphrey Lyttelton, the world-weary Chairman, gives panellists ridiculous things to do in a series of hare-brained games, including the legendary but inscrutable "Mornington Crescent". Those taking part include Tim Brooke-Taylor, Graeme Garden, Barry Cryer and Paul Merton.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CO0007, CO0013, CO0016</p>  |
| <p><b>I'm Sorry I Haven't Got a Clue (18-25)</b><br/>8 X 30'<br/><br/>2002</p>  | <p>Another potent batch of the antidote to panel games - for the young at heart and broad of mind. Four panellists provide homespun wireless entertainment as they run the gamut of the reluctant chairman's silly suggestions and the pianist's bold attempt at musical accompaniment.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CO0018</p>   |
| <p><b>I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue (26-33)</b><br/>8 X 30'<br/><br/>2002</p>      | <p>Another intoxicating round of the antidote to panel games in which four of radio's most clueless panellists are given silly and unusual things to do by their hapless chairman. Musical accompaniment in keys known and unknown is provided by the show's resident pianist and, as usual, sitting on the chairman's right hand is the delightful Samantha who "never fails to score"...</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CO0022</p>  |
| <p><b>I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue (34-39)</b><br/>6 X 30'<br/><br/>2003</p>      | <p>The famous antidote to panel games, hosted by Humphrey Lyttelton.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CO0025</p>  |
| <p><b>The Masterson Inheritance</b><br/>18 x 30'<br/><br/>1994</p>              | <p>A steamy bodice-ripping saga of the Mastersons, a family at war with itself, made all the more comic because the plots depend on suggestions from the audience. This explains the peculiar importance of blancmange and a tumble drier to the French Revolution. Josie Lawrence, Lee Simpson, Caroline Quentin, Paul Merton, Phelim McDermott and Jim Sweeney are open to suggestion against a background of moody music and bizarre sound effects.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">TCD0769</p> |

## 4. The Panel Game

**Panel games provide a combination of wit and knowledge and erudition. Carefully chosen panellists ensure that, while laughter is never far away, information and anecdote abound.**

### **Just a Minute**

52 x 30'

1991, 1994-1996

This is easily the longest-running comedy panel game on British radio. Competitors speak for one minute on a set subject, without repetition, hesitation or deviation. It's a lot more difficult than it sounds. Interruptions by the other panellists make life difficult, and it's really an excuse for tall stories, jokes, gamesmanship and repartee. The resident team is Derek Nimmo, Kenneth Williams, Peter Jones and Clement Freud, plus many guest stars. The chairman is Nicholas Parsons.

CD125, CD597, CD941, CD1179

### **Jazz Score**

18 x 30'

1993-1994

A quiz programme for jazz lovers, often recorded in Ronnie Scott's club in the heart of London's Soho. Anecdotes and much laughter accompanies this light-hearted game as chairman Benny Green asks the questions of many of the top names in jazz today.

CD552, CD834

### **My Music**

52 x 30'

1992-1994

Frank Muir and John Amis compete with Ian Wallace and Denis Norden in answering a series of questions on all kinds of music. A delightful atmosphere amongst witty friends, in front of an appreciative audience. Steve Race is the questionmaster.

CD277, CD467, CD723

### **My Word!**

52 x 30'

1964-1987

A panel game about words, poems, plays, catch-phrases and literary allusions of all kinds. Denis Norden, Frank Muir, Dilys Powell, Anne Scott-James and Antonia Fraser are the experts. Highlights of the programmes are the closing anecdotes told by Frank and Denis, often based on wild distortions of popular sayings or quotations.

CN205, CN324, CN395, CN599, CN736, CN882, CN1046, CN1170, CN1398, CN1606, CN1861, CN1892, CN2034, CN2323, CN2589, CN2852, CN3075, CN3827, CN4366, CN4591, CN4862, CN5305

### **Quote... Unquote**

39 x 30'

1985-1988

The sayings of the famous as well as the obscure are recalled and celebrated in a panel game about quotations, including Eavesdropping, Graffiti and the occasional outbreak of Foot in Mouth. Devised and presented by Nigel Rees.

CN4653, CN4937, CN5202

## 5. Science-Fiction Narrative Comedy

**For some reason science fiction is a late convert to comedy but in the last twenty years this has been largely remedied on radio and television.**

**The Hitch-Hiker's  
Guide To The  
Galaxy**  
12 x 30'

1979-1980

The most successful sci-fi comedy of all time, a radio original from the late Douglas Adams. An epic adventure in time and space, with some helpful advice on how to see the Universe for just over thirty Altairian dollars a day and how to avoid Vogon poetry, which is seriously bad. Starring Peter Jones as The Book, Simon Jones as Arthur Dent, Geoffrey McGivern as Ford Prefect, Mark Wing-Davey as Zaphod Beeblebrox, Stephen Moore as Marvin, the Paranoid Android, and Susan Sheridan as Trillion.

1-6 CN3149, 7-12 CN3574

**The Hitch-Hike's  
Guide to the  
Galaxy (7-12)**  
6 X 30'  
2002

The show that began with the end of the world continues with a new epic adventure in time and space. It includes some helpful advice on how to avoid certain death and see the Universe for just over thirty Altairian dollars a day.

CO0019

**Paradise Lost In  
Space**  
6 x 30'

1995

A black hole adventure where a hi-jack in space goes badly wrong. Norman and Max find themselves on the planet Oblivio where the aliens are friendly, but for some reason all talk like Noel Coward. Can Norman and Max explain the concept of tennis and tell them how to make a martini or...escape. With Tony Robinson, David Haig, Louise Lombard and Michael Thoughton.

TCD0957

## 6. The World Of Wodehouse

**One of the most popular comic writers of the twentieth century, P.G. Wodehouse has always transferred wonderfully well to radio, where character and dialogue illuminate the delightfully whacky plots.**

### **Blandings**

18 x 30'

1988-1989, 1992

Blandings Castle in Shropshire is the rural home of the ninth Earl of Emsworth. His main interests are his prize sow, The Empress of Blandings, and finding his way out of the maze of romantic and family misunderstandings that happen to those who inhabit the world of P.G. Wodehouse. With Richard Vernon as Emsworth and Richard Briers, Josephine Tewson, and Elizabeth Spriggs.

Summer Lightening (1-6)

CN5126

Heavy Weather (1-4)

CN5236

Pigs Have Wings (1-4)

CN5483

Galahad At Blandings (1-4)

TCD0305

### **The Oldest Member**

6 x 30'

1995

The oldest member of the golf club sits in his favourite chair in the clubhouse with a large whisky and recalls tales of the links, tales where the golf course and the course of true love are often inextricably linked. Maurice Denham is the oldest member in these delightful stories.

TCD1074

### **What Ho! Jeeves**

13 x 30'

1979

Two series about the misadventures of Bertie Wooster and how his manservant, the inimitable Jeeves, urbanely manages to extract him from all his scrapes. Sir Michael Hordern is Jeeves and Richard Briers is Bertie.

Joy In The Morning (1-7)

CN6596

Jeeves And The Feudal Spirit (1-6)

CN3597

## 7. Famous For 15 Minutes

**A variety of short series, each with a distinctive style, all at fifteen minutes.**

- |  |   |                           |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| <b>The Glums</b><br>40 x 15'<br><br>1969           | The Glum family segment of <i>Take It From Here</i> , featuring Jimmy Edwards, Dick Bentley and June Whitfield in a richly comic series. Ron and Eth spend most of their lives in a pre-nuptial stupor - an inert romance on the settee - which Mr. Glum can do nothing to speed up. Occasional noises off can be heard, but not understood. That's Mrs Glum, played by Alma Cogan. | CN1660                    |
| <b>Juste Plain Madness</b><br>12 x 15'<br><br>1990 | Adrian Juste plunders the world of radio comedy for a series of comic montages on everyday subjects, lovingly pieced together from the comedy of Tony Hancock, Peter Sellers, Jasper Carrott, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, Emo Phillips, and many, many more...   | CN5658                    |
| <b>The Life Of Jim</b><br>6 x 15'<br><br>1985      | "Professor" Jimmy Edwards, one of the greats of radio comedy, looks back at forty years in show business and the ups and downs in an unique career. From fighter-pilot to comic star of radio, television and theatre, he never lost his penchant for playing large wind instruments. Recorded in front of an enthusiastic audience.  | CN4634                    |
| <b>Life With Lederer</b><br>10 x 15'<br><br>1990   | Helen Lederer brings her own brand of comic paranoia to this guide to modern designer living. Advice on The Body Beautiful, The New Home, Relationships, Parties and Holidays and much more.  | 1-5 TCD0041, 6-10 TCD0551 |

## 8. History Lessons

**The past has become fair game for some of Britain's young comedians.**

<b>All The World's A Globe</b> 8 x 15' 1991	The entire history of mankind from the first amoeba to the Second World War. Presented by the entire company of the National Theatre of Brent - Desmond Oliver Dingle and Wallace - at a crisp pace. Patrick Barlow and Jim Broadbent star in this award-winning show, with occasional guest appearances by Juliet Stevenson and Ben Kingsley.	TCD0198
<b>The Hannibal Lecture</b> 1 x 30' 2000	Comedian Steve Punt examines our lurid obsession with the world of mass murder - from Cluedo to Tarantino - as he asks questions like "Was God the first detective?"	CO0012
<b>The Mark Steel Revolution</b> 5 x 30' 1998	Comedian and journalist Mark Steel takes a fresh and wry look at some historical events. In the "Revolution" he ranges over the French, Russian and Industrial and just for good measure throws in Evolution and the American Civil War. With sketches and readings he examines key players, motives and the bizarre ironies of these great moments in history.	CO0008
<b>The Mark Steel Lectures</b> 4 x 30' 1999	In the "Lectures" he looks at some great historical figures - the loveable tramp, the cheating cricketer, the corset maker and the man who tried to abolish Christmas. In other words, and in no particular order, Oliver Cromwell, Charlie Chaplin, W.G. Grace and Thomas Paine.	CO0011
<b>The Mark Steel Lectures (5-10)</b> 6 X 30' 2002	Another six comic takes on men whose passions and endearing idiosyncrasies shaped their times. Presented by stand-up comedian and newspaper columnist Mark Steel.	CO0021

## 9. Features

**These features relate specifically to the stars of two of the best loved comedy programmes and are ideal for placing either as part of or at the end of a run.**

<b>At Last The Go On Show</b> 1 x 60'  1992	This fascinating and hilarious Goons 40th Anniversary documentary is packed with classic clips, inside information and never-before-heard rehearsal recordings. Michael Bentine, Spike Milligan, Harry Secombe, Peter Sellers and many others recall the genesis of the surreal radio comedy.	TCD0325
<b>The Days of Take It From Here</b> 1 x 30'  1969	The story of a much-loved radio series recalled by the writers Frank Muir and Denis Norden, and the producer Charles Maxwell.	CN1011
<b>Peter Sellers: Funny That Way</b> 1 x 30'  1989	The career of one of the most versatile British comedians, from early years as one of the stars of <i>The Goon Show</i> , before becoming the world's leading comic film actor.	CN5449
<b>Spike Milligan - Return To Bexhill-on-Sea</b> 1 x 30'  1989	Spike Milligan, writer, poet and star of <i>The Goon Show</i> , returns to the Sussex town of Bexhill-on-Sea, where he spent the early years of the war, and meets old friends in an impromptu reunion of D battery.	CN5449