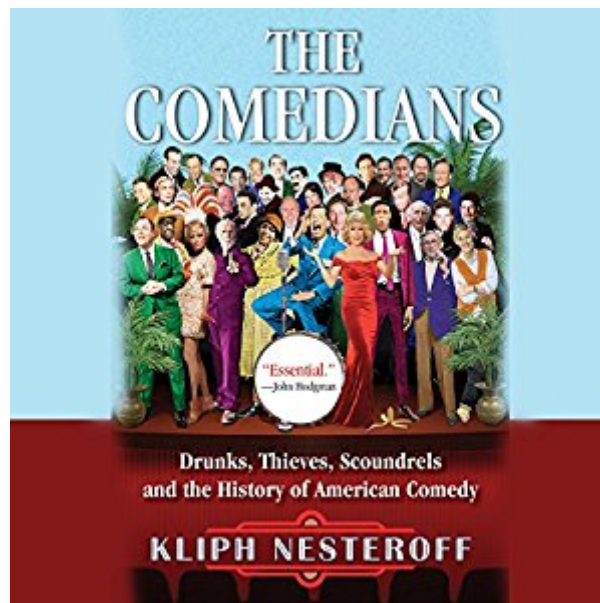




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# **The Comedians: Drunks, Thieves, Scoundrels And The History Of American Comedy**



## Synopsis

In *The Comedians*, comedy historian Kliph Nesteroff brings to life a century of American comedy with real-life characters, forgotten stars, mainstream heroes, and counterculture iconoclasts. Based on over 200 original interviews and extensive archival research, Nesteroff's groundbreaking work is a narrative exploration of the way comedians have reflected, shaped, and changed American culture over the past 100 years. Starting with the vaudeville circuit at the turn of the last century, Nesteroff introduces the first stand-up comedian - an emcee who abandoned physical shtick for straight jokes. After the repeal of Prohibition, Mafia-run supper clubs replaced speakeasies, and mobsters replaced vaudeville impresarios as the comedian's primary employer. In the 1950s, the late-night talk show brought stand-up to a wide public, while Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, and Jonathan Winters attacked conformity and staged a comedy rebellion in coffeehouses. From comedy's part in the Civil Rights movement and the social upheaval of the late 1960s to the first comedy clubs of the 1970s and the cocaine-fueled comedy boom of the 1980s, *The Comedians* culminates with a new era of media-driven celebrity in the 21st century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Kliph Nesteroff's "The Comedians" is an invaluable historic document, chronicling the evolution of comedy - mostly standup - over the past several decades. It is not a dry encyclopedic rendering of a list of comedians; nor does Nesteroff expound on one form of comedy over another. It is a straightforward compilation of facts mingled with interviews Nesteroff conducted himself of many

well-known comics and some lesser known or even forgotten ones on his blog, [...].Nesteroff maintains his impartiality throughout - at the end, I was hard-pressed to say who his favorite comic of all time might be. That's because while the book mentions household names such as Bob Hope, Jack Benny, George Burns, George Carlin and others, he also gives equal time to more obscure comics such as B.S. Pully, Jean Carroll, Sammy Shore and others. This is the type of book which, when you are finished, you won't put it back on your bookshelf and forget about it. You'll want to leave it readily available to flip through to re-read certain passages. I had a difficult time, as I read it straight through, to avoid skipping ahead or checking the index for any information on comedians which popped into my head as I was reading it. I highly recommend it for any student of comedy -- whether amateur or professional.

I enjoyed reading this, but I think there were a few flaws. First, the author obviously did a tremendous amount of research which is great, however, sometimes the chapters just went on and on and on. I found myself skimming a few chapters. Second, it seemed at times as if the author didn't give credit to certain comics or comic teams. There was a decent amount written about Martin and Lewis, but very little about Abbott and Costello. So I think the chapters that seemed to drone on might have been more interesting if there was more information about more comics. That being said, there were a number of chapters I really enjoyed.

**\*Please Read\*:** An Amazing book - and not exactly what I expected. I'd actually like to Rate this at 4.2 Stars. I'd give 5-Stars - but Being a Huge fan of Steven Wright, Emo Philips & Henny Youngman - there's barely a mention of them - yet time to write about Dane Cook (Yuck!) and 'Andrew Dice' (Yuck! Yuck!!). I expected this book to cover like the 1960's & 1970's - but it goes all the way back to the Vaudeville days!! I'd was 80% more detailed and interesting than I would have guessed. I took 47 pages of notes (for my own reference)!! Too much for me to even summarize here. I can't even begin to imagine all the research and information Kliph did and covered to make this book. I would put this - for a Comedian and/or Fan of Comedy - as a 'Must Read'!!(Today is 8-7-2017) and a month ago I was blessed to open for Gilbert Gottfried and I bought him a copy of this book as a gift to him, and an ice breaker for meeting him. Before I could hand it to him - I was hinting around about it - and He named the book title & author. And said he already devoted one of his podcasts to this book!\*(Note) I know comedy is an art form and subjective - but - I'm so Sick & Tired of Bad language & Offensive words & behaviors by comics. For example George Carlin - and Genius - yet I wished he did all his sets 100% clean. I have mixed thoughts & feelings when I hear his

comedy.\*This book was written in Mostly good taste - with 'bad words' kept to a minimum.Amazing all the craziness - dysfunctions and tradgity in the history of comedy!! This book is a real eye-opener!! Scott M.

For anyone with a serious interest in comedy, this book is essential.And I do mean serious. This is not a book of funny anecdotes, although they can be found here. This is a history of a century of the American comedy business -- and, specifically, those who toiled in its ranks, both those who rose to the top and the many more who faded into obscurity (and/or poverty and addiction).There is a reason why this volume is called "The Comedians" -- Nesteroff knows it would be impossible to provide a history of all facets of professional American humor, so he focuses almost exclusively on those who tell jokes on stage, albums, or late-night shows, and those who do sketch or improv on stage. He touches on some TV sketch shows like "In Living Color" and "The Dana Carvey Show", but only in tracing the arc of careers -- "Saturday Night Live" is barely mentioned, nor is "Carol Burnett" or others of the Bigs. And stand-ups who rose to success on sitcoms or in film depart these pages once they step off stage.Nesteroff starts with vaudeville and works his way through the comedy circuit shows of the pre-radio days and the Depression, then covers how radio and television changed the comedian's craft. He does spend a fair amount of time on the TV late-night shows, in part because their hosts continued to act as comedians in those roles, but mainly because they have been and remain a venue for stand-up. The cultural shifts of the '50s "sick comedy" era, the countercultural comedy of the '60s, and the drug-fueled comedy boom of the '80s are covered in great detail.If there is a flaw, it is that in trying to cover so much, Nesteroff leaves some stuff out. The book is strongest with the history up until about 1990, when the comedy boom ended, but the quarter-century since then is covered in a rush. Nesteroff covers the roles HBO and shows like "Evening at the Improv" played in the '80s, but he says little about how the explosion of cable networks in the late '90s provided new opportunities. And he passes over the most significant developments in recent years -- YouTube and Twitter providing new paths to fame -- in just a few pages.These are minor grievances. This book is a great work of comedy history, and provides an expert look at what it was like "back in the day" for those who became the major stars of the 20th century.

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