

## FOREWORD

Jack Kibble-White and Steve Williams are an untapped national treasure. Their knowledge and understanding of television is exceeded only by their enthusiasm for the subject.

I have long admired their perceptive analysis of programmes. Their overview is always based on meticulous and often first-hand research. I well remember reading their detailed examination of *Game for a Laugh*. I marvelled at the insight. At last here were writers who understood the essence of the show; the problems and the decisions made to overcome them. Their forthright and honest opinions resulting from clear thinking and deep intelligence were genuinely welcomed. Their appreciation of the creative personality balanced with sound knowledge of the technical issues make them mentors to be respected.

I cannot think of anybody better armed to present a record of Saturday Night Television than Jack and Steve. Reading this you will learn the history of a special brand of entertainment but the lessons are universal.

If you harbour ambition to be a part of the increasingly complex world of television I suggest this book is a must-read.

On the other hand if you are simply a fan of television this

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book will heighten your viewing pleasure by giving you fascinating behind-the-scenes secrets.

I do hope producers out there will realise Jack and Steve can help make their programmes brighter and more rewarding by employing them – or simply buy this book and learn.

Jeremy Beadle  
13 August 2006

## 3-2-1

Yorkshire Television for ITV

29 July 1978 to 24 December 1988 (154 episodes)

'It's a quiz, it's a game, it's fortune and fame!' So went the opening to one of ITV's most durable, and most baffling, Saturday night series.

*3-2-1* was a shameless attempt to create a rival to *The Generation Game*. It was based on a Spanish show (somewhat inevitably, *Uno Dos Tres*) with the name referring to the fact the series was a quiz show, a game show and an entertainment spectacular all rolled into one. All of this from the unlikely setting of Kirkstall Road, Leeds.

Fast-talking Ted Rogers oversaw proceedings. Three



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married couples took part in the opening quiz and, inexplicably, the winners were eliminated, coming back the following week to build up their stash of cash. The other couples went forward to watch a series of comic sketches, songs and novelty acts, all based on that week's theme, after which they would be presented with a cryptic clue. Each clue related to a specific prize,

and the contestants' job was to avoid the rubbish and find the Mini Mayfair or trip to Benidorm.

Famously, the clues were utterly impenetrable ('Bernie'll tell you, 'ere it's gone, but now you'll know the big trip's on'), making great play of anagrams and sound-a-like words. Whether any contestants were actually able to understand them or simply picked a prize at random is a moot point ('Well, ERE goes from Bernie, which leaves three letters, BNI, but now you'll know the big trip's on, and this would have tripped you up in a big way, yes, you've done it, you've rejected Dusty Bin!').

Originally Ted was assisted by a company of comedians, Chris Emmett, Duggie Brown and Debbie Arnold, who would interrupt proceedings. In addition there was also The Gentle Secs; a collective of six hostesses, each from a different country (apparently to give the show an 'international' flavour). Ted also had a 'chauffeur' who would come on and do bits of business, as well as, of course, Dusty Bin, the show's mascot who served as the ultimate booby prize for those contestants who failed to decipher those cryptic clues. Such reckless over-manning was testament to the money thrown at the series. So flush with cash were the early shows that Ted even strolled around the audience offering pound notes for correct answers to trivia questions.

*3-2-1* was an instant hit, with the series becoming a staple of the weekend schedules. No doubt the huge amount of gimmicks Yorkshire TV stuffed into the show helped – Ted's three-finger salute, Dusty Bin's exploits, the video games the contestants had to play, even the flying YTV chevron in the

opening titles – all had massive child appeal and helped to cement it as a family favourite.

As it continued throughout the Eighties, the show was changed slightly – thankfully ensuring the loser of the first round was now eliminated. The cast changed throughout, with troupes such as Lipstick and The Brian Rogers Connection replacing The Gentle Secs. A big-name singer or comedian would top the bill each week, dependent on that week's theme. Given that the themes were supposed to add a bit of variety to proceedings, it was funny how often they seemed to be Music Hall (where Ted could do his Danny Kaye impression), Fairy Tales or Cruise Ships.

Ratings eventually began to decline in the mid-Eighties. The final series abandoned the idea of themed shows altogether and instead simply developed a straightforward formula of quiz, songs and comedians (including early appearances from the likes of Phil Cornwell). The show came to an end in 1988, apparently considered too tacky for the modern ITV.

Sadly, post-3-2-1 Ted Rogers' career stalled, as he failed to land a replacement series and experienced some well-publicised financial difficulties. In recent years, however, 3-2-1 has become a staple in the schedules of Challenge TV, so much so that shortly before his death in 2001 Ted recorded new links for evenings of repeats. No matter how many times they were repeated, however, those cryptic clues remained completely unfathomable.

## The 64,000 Question

ATV Network Production for ITV

19 May 1956 to 18 January 1958 (80 episodes)

Bringing high tension to the masses well over forty years before *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *The 64,000 Question* was one of a suite of game shows, including *Double Your Money* and *Take Your Pick*, to arrive on British screens during the hot flush of ITV's first year of transmission. The show was based on the hit American series of (almost) the same name, *The \$64,000 Question*. However, whereas the US series was able to award a then unprecedented actual \$64,000 to the winner, the UK version found itself restricted by regulations governing TV prize money to a jackpot of just £1,600 (64,000 sixpences), rising to £3,200 come the end of 1956 (64,000 shillings).

Nonetheless, this was still a sizeable amount, and one that allowed *The 64,000 Question* to crank up the tension. In fact, quizmaster Jerry Desmond and 'custodian of the questions' ex-Detective Superintendent Robert Fabian (whose real-life policing adventures formed the basis for the successful series *Fabian of the Yard*) could often be found posing for publicity photos while kneeling in front of a large safe containing the questions.

The quiz itself was pretty straightforward. Contestants would have to answer questions of increasing value on a chosen specialist subject. The 100 and 500 teasers would be easy enough, however the questions came in two parts for

the 1000 and 2000 teasers, and continued to increase in complexity until the 64,000 question itself required seven correct answers. The path to the top prize was therefore arduous, requiring the contestant to appear on a total of six consecutive editions. Stringing out encounters in this way was incredibly popular, and viewers would become so hooked by the performance of a contestant on the 8000 question that they simply had to tune in the following week to find out what happened next.

The show spawned a spin-off series, *The 64,000 Challenge*, featuring members of the public going head-to-head against previous *64,000 Question* contestants. Seven episodes were broadcast from 15 June to 31 August 1957, each presided over by Robin Bailey and, as with the parent programme, the producers were keen to point out that the accuracy of the answers could be vouched for by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (a statement which further enhanced both programmes' intentional air of gravitas).

*The 64,000 Question* was regularly amongst the top five most watched programmes. However it was brought to an end in 1958. It made a brief return to our screens in 1990 under the full title of *The \$64,000 Question*, but even then the top prize was still only £6,400.

## All Creatures Great and Small

BBC1

8 January 1978 to 24 December 1990 (90 episodes)

*All Creatures Great and Small* oozed charm in a non-contrived sort of a way; the tinkling theme tune was the musical equivalent of a hillside stream, and the title sequence itself the epitome of pastoral tranquillity and bonhomie. More importantly, the series' characters, both regular and incidental were almost to a man utterly endearing. From the flamboyant Siegfried Farnon (Robert Hardy), to the innocently roguish Tristan Farnon (Peter Davison), not forgetting the litany of 'yokels' and amusingly pompous upper crusts, this was a world that you wanted to live in. Of course, James Herriot (Christopher Timothy) himself was a model of charm and patience, while his wife Helen (originally played by Carol Drinkwater) was the perfect example of an old-fashioned, supportive wife.

For three series, *All Creatures Great and Small* worked through the original Herriot novels with James and company cementing the image that they spent most of their time sticking their arms up cow's backsides and tending to dogs owned by ridiculously upper-crust ladies. But by the time the Second World War was rearing its head in the show, the source material was drying up and, in contrast to previous series' conclusions, the supposedly final run that commenced in 1979 ended with the rather gloomy prospect of James and Siegfried preparing to 'join up' and go into battle.

This downbeat note was a strange way to draw the programme to a close and unsurprisingly the public appetite for more remained undimmed over the intervening years. Although Christmas specials were served up in 1983 and 1985, it seemed inevitable that a full-blooded return to Darrowby would follow. And so it was that, some eight years after the original run had finished, *All Creatures Great and Small* returned to Saturday nights. At first glance the formula looked to be much the same. However, having grown unhappy with the development of her character, Carol Drinkwater elected not to reprise her role. In her place Lynda Bellingham, who is a perfectly fine actress, lent Helen a slight, but unwelcome element of brittleness. Peter Davison also pared down his involvement in the new run, so in came John McGlynn as the proto-ecologist Calum Buchanan.

All in all though, the storylines remained pretty much the same (although one episode featuring the demonstration of an artificial vagina provoked questions from viewers regarding *All Creatures Great and Small's* suitability as family viewing), and the series continued to cast its spell on the telly-watching populace. By the time it drew to what one must assume to be its ultimate conclusion in 1990, the action had moved on to the early Sixties. Perhaps sensing that the charm of *All Creatures...* could not survive the turbulence of the Swinging Years, the programme was allowed once again to come to an end. This time round the audience recognised that it was right to let go of James, Siegfried and the rest and let them pass into the afterlife of

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an utterly warm and pleasant television memory. Two years later the mantle was picked up by ITV's inferior *Heartbeat* and rural dramas found themselves slipping off Saturdays and over to Sunday nights.

## An Audience With...

LWT for ITV

26 December 1980 to ongoing  
(44 episodes as of 9 December 2006)

There are few things more glamorous on television than an ITV light entertainment show. Compared to the often half-hearted efforts on the BBC, programmes recorded in LWT's cavernous Studio One, with its enormous audience, have always managed to impress through sheer scale if nothing else. Probably the most exciting of all was *An Audience With...* – not only were the people on stage famous, but so were those watching!

Although never a regular series, *An Audience With...* is one of the longest-running strands on British TV, starting way back on Boxing Day 1980 when Dame Edna Everage took to the stage in front of 'her' peers. The concept was established from day one; the star delivers a stand-up act or wheels out some anecdotes, while the celebrity audience, relentlessly placed in shot, cues in the routines with some carefully scripted questions.

Offering over an hour of the star, it's unsurprising that *An Audience With...* has served as the best example of the work of numerous performers, with Billy Connolly, Victoria Wood and Bob Monkhouse all recording shows that stand as perhaps the definitive record of their act. However, it initially only appeared on a very occasional basis, with just one episode between 1988 and 1994.

Since then, the series has turned up with increasing frequency, which, although welcome, has somewhat diluted its prestige. Where once we had Dudley Moore, Mel Brooks, Joan Rivers, Jackie Mason and Peter Ustinov we now have to endure the likes of Brian Conley, Joe Pasquale and even the cast of *Coronation Street*. The show's format has changed down the years too; originally it was a spotlight for comedians and entertainers, but these days it's more often a platform for musicians, such as Cliff Richard and Donny Osmond, to run through their back catalogue, often conveniently at the same time a Greatest Hits album is being released. At least in 2006 Take That and Lionel Richie made things a little more exciting by broadcasting their episodes live.

*An Audience With...* remains a regular part of the Saturday night schedules, although the audience cutaways seem to have become more frequent in recent years, as if the number of celebrities that can be lured into the studio is of more importance than the identity of the star actually doing the business up on the stage. Sadly, this means we'll probably never again get to enjoy the rather halting attempts at identifying audience members that Kenneth Williams so memorably essayed on his *An Audience With...* – 'Er, Matthew? It is Matthew, isn't it? *Game for a Laugh?*'

## Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway

Granada Television for ITV1

8 June 2002 to ongoing  
(46 episodes as of 21 October 2006)

What if you could win everything shown in the TV ad breaks? This vaguely interesting concept formed the rather weak backbone to Ant and Dec's second attempt at establishing a successful Saturday night entertainment series. Since the rise of the Tyneside twosome in the Nineties, it seemed inevitable that sooner or later they would bag a primetime Saturday night slot. But the failure *Slap Bang with Ant and Dec* demonstrated that without a proper hook even they – the anointed future of light entertainment – were going to struggle.

*Saturday Night Takeaway* wisely built the entire show round an end game in which a member of the audience got



© Ken McKay / Rex Features

an opportunity to not 'just watch the ads – win them'. Each week a contestant was plucked from the audience and asked a series of general knowledge questions. However, given the brevity of the quiz, it was difficult to care much whether 'Sheila from Dagenham' actually went home with the star prize or not. Perhaps recognising that the 'Win the Ads' game wasn't actually that good, its role in the show was greatly diminished after the first series.

However, pretty much everything else about *Takeaway* was great. The first episode set the tone with an excellent ruse in which the duo appeared live on a cinema screen and informed a stunned audience that one of their party had a £3000 prize waiting for them at home that had to be collected before the end of the show. This stunt was not in itself new (*Noel's House Party* and 'NTV' had hacked into a cinema screen a few years earlier), but it established *Takeaway* as an 'anything can happen' sort of a show – ideal for Saturday night viewing.

That same edition also featured the introduction of what was obviously designed to be a major element. 'Banged up with Beadle' saw the one-time Saturday night prankster locked up in a fort in the Solent for the duration of the series. Each week he would be joined by a member of the public, and between them they would have to master a new skill that, if performed successfully live on the Saturday night show, would earn the member of the public £5000, plus a privilege for Beadle to make his incarceration more bearable. 'Banged up with Beadle' even spawned its own spin-off show in 2002 – *Ant and Dec's Banged Up with Beadle*.

Probably much against the programme's wishes Beadle actually got on very well with his fellow inmates, meaning that hoped-for arguments rarely ever surfaced. Ironically, the only disagreement of any significance occurred during the first week when Beadle threatened to walk out after being told he had failed a yoga task. It took the intervention of an executive producer to resolve the situation, ensuring that at the end of the show, the lucky member of the public was awarded their prize money after all.

For the second series we lost Beadle plus other items such as 'Make Ant Laugh' that had felt like a hangover from *Slap Bang* anyway. In their place came celebrity hidden-camera shenanigans with 'Ant and Dec Undercover' and 'What's Next?' – five minutes of unscripted and unprepared nonsense as our two hosts were invited to take part in a Wild West shoot-out or try and slam-dunk a few hoops with a team of crack basketball players. Whatever the situation, Ant and Dec's unfailing ability to improvise amusing banter never deserted them.

Perhaps the most memorable addition though was 'Little Ant and Dec'. The diminutive duo's *raison d'être* was to conduct slightly cheeky interviews with various celebrities ranging from Kylie Minogue to Tony Blair. Over the years *Takeaway* has become a bigger and more ambitious spectacle. For example, the 2006 series saw Ant and Dec abseil down the side of the London Studios, and take a variety of vehicles out for a hair-raising spin on a race course. Meanwhile, celebrities were inveigled into ordinary people's lives in the clever and original hidden-camera strand 'Stars In Their Lives'.

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But however ingenious or impressive these various items might be, it's really the boys' bonhomie, comic timing and, above all, genuine affection for each other that really keeps viewers tuning in, and you have to figure that as long as Ant and Dec remain the best of friends there will always be an appreciative and loyal audience waiting to lap up their latest antics.

## Aspel and Company

LWT for ITV

9 June 1984 to 20 June 1993 (118 episodes)

Parkinson had his Yorkshire grit. Wogan specialised in homespun blarney. Harty essayed camp bemusement. Michael Aspel, on the other hand, appeared not to have a unique take on the role of chat show host. However he did have bags of affability and easy charm, and as *Parkinson* was to the Seventies, so *Aspel and Company* became a familiar part of an Eighties Saturday night.

When he took on the show, Aspel had already proven himself adept at most things on TV – indeed, he managed to pull off a rather bizarre shift from reading the news to presenting kids show *Crackerjack*. Later stints asking questions to people who couldn't speak English on *Miss World* and keeping the peace between Una Stubbs and Lionel Blair on *Give Us a Clue* established him as a safe pair of hands. Yet the chat show had its roots in the wireless, as during his lengthy stint on London's Capital Radio, Aspel notched up several hundred interviews with famous people. This was enough of an apprenticeship to allow him to translate his talent for chat to television.

Starting off with a guest list of Richard Clayderman, Tracey Ullman and Paul McCartney, Aspel proved himself to be the perfect host of a relaxed talking shop. His gentle manner meant that guests opened up, yet our man possessed the rigour and quick wit to ensure interviews kept on the rails. Some moaned he didn't ask tough questions, but this was

Saturday night and not the place for an interrogation. Aspel didn't even mind what and how much his guests plugged just so long as they were entertaining in the process.

Aspel also seemed entirely without embarrassment and throughout the run was happy to answer any questions his guests might have on how old he was (he'd just passed his fifty-first birthday when the first series began), when he lost his virginity and even, thanks to Jackie Collins, what he called his penis (his 'dickie', fact fans).

Everything seemed to run like clockwork, except for one notable occasion. Oliver Reed's memorable appearance, where he emerged with an overflowing pint glass and proceeded to sing an unintelligible version of 'The Wild One', has gone down in the annals of history (compare and contrast with his appearances on *Saturday Night at the Mill* and *Sin on Saturday*). However Aspel remained unflappable throughout, and seemed content to simply let Ollie get on with it and let the edit suite sort it out.

Sadly, *Aspel and Company* ended on a low note. In 1993, the series was moved from Saturday to Sunday, and was also broadcast live, which Aspel was rather uneasy about. Then there followed the notorious appearance by Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis – a real coup, but one that came at a heavy price. Aspel had to agree to discuss nothing but the trio's newly opened Planet Hollywood restaurant, even going as far as to read out the menu on air. This rather shameless selling-out inevitably spelt the end for the series. Still, as the most likeable man on telly, he didn't moan once and still had the likes of *This Is Your Life* and later *Antiques Roadshow* to keep him busy.

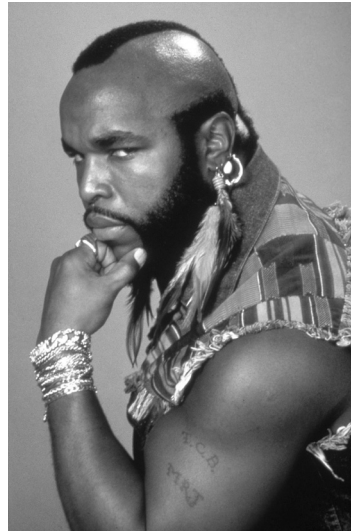
## The A-Team

Carnell Productions/Universal [shown on ITV]

22 July 1983 to 17 October 1987 (95 episodes)

'Crash, bang, wallop, it's *The A-Team*.' So proclaimed *TV Times* back in July 1983 as it announced the arrival of one of the Eighties most iconic television series. Starting with a 105-minute opening episode, *The A-Team* began in the UK on Fridays before being moved to Saturday early evenings in 1984. Deliberately created to get the viewers' blood pumping, *The A-Team* was high-octane stuff, featuring the weekly adventures of a former Vietnam combat squad on the run from the law and forced to live as soldiers of fortune.

The line-up consisted of four pleasingly delineated and distinctive characters: Dwight Schultz as Murdock (the crazy one), Dirk Benedict as Templeton Peck – better known as Face (the smooth con-man who regularly became embroiled in some yawn inducing skirt chasing), George Peppard as Colonel John 'Hannibal' Smith (the cigar-chomping leader of the pack) and Mr T as B.A. Baracus. Of the quartet, it was Mr T who made the biggest impact. His temperament,



© Photos International/ Rex Features

liking for bling and massive physical frame set him apart from pretty much every other action hero on telly. His surly behaviour also struck a chord with the younger audience, who could relate to his simplistic outlook on life (although it's probably not unfair to point out that there was something of the child in all of the four characters).

Not that characterisation was *The A-Team's* defining attribute. While BBC dramas of the time (such as *The Tripods*) featured characters embarking on noble quests and learning important lessons about themselves, *The A-Team* relied on blowing up lots of stuff, and sending jeeps hurtling through the air at every given opportunity. The series' massive success (in the UK in 1984 it attracted more than 16 million viewers) was predicated on a tightly defined formula that was much loved by viewers, and later much dissected by observational comedians.

The ingredients for any given episode included an attractive woman for Face to chat up, the trading of insults between Murdock and BA, Face donning some form of disguise to infiltrate that week's gang of baddies, aerophobic BA having to get into a plane, and of course the set piece finale in which the team would find themselves hauled up in some kind of enclosed space, only to uncover a stray oxy-acetylene welding torch, a massive vehicle and enough scrap metal to armour-plate a bus. The triumphant final reel would then see the team in their improvised battle vehicle wreaking havoc and flipping jeeps galore, while a nation of teenage boys looked on and cheered in front of their television sets.

Formulaic it might have been, but *The A-Team* managed to

display a level of invention that kept things highly entertaining. One week the team might be called upon to defend a group of shopkeepers from a protection racket, and (literally) the next they would be pressed into service to transport a harvest of melons to a local market.

All was going swimmingly until 1987 when, provoked in part by Michael Ryan's horrific killing spree in Hungerford, the Independent Broadcasting Authority decided to clamp down on what it saw as gratuitous violence on ITV. *The A-Team* was an obvious target and sometimes as much as nine minutes were cut from a 48-minute episode, leaving the plot in a disjointed state that was very difficult to follow. Obviously, this was an unsatisfactory situation, but before ITV could take any decisive action, word came through that the Americans had decided to axe the series anyway.

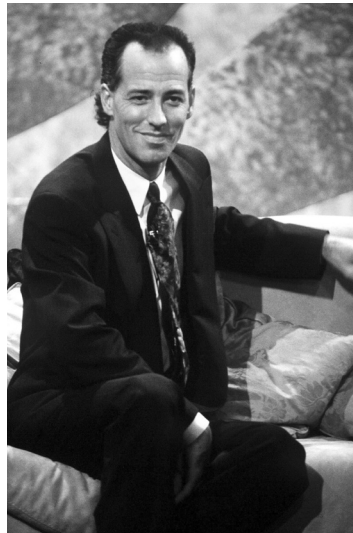
## Barrymore

LWT for ITV

21 December 1991 to 28 June 1997 (67 episodes)

'Here we go – late coach party.' And so would start another sequence of unscripted Barrymore-fuelled mayhem. Can there ever have been another entertainment series that spent so much time with the cameras trained on the studio audience, and can there ever have been another entertainer who could make such mileage out of donking old men over the head with the end of a microphone?

Building an entire show around Michael Barrymore's bantering with Joe Public was an obvious idea, and after a one-off Christmas special (written by comedians Stewart Lee and Richard Herring), the *Barrymore* series proper



© London Weekend Television/ Rex Features

featured the eponymous host welcoming talented or just eccentric members of the public onto his rather basic set (consisting of two large sofas set at an obtuse angle positioned in front of what appeared to be the partitions from *Blind Date*). Barrymore would carry out a pretty straightforward interview, all the while chipping in with loads of comic asides to the

audience ('They're not all locked up, are they?'), before finally allowing his guest to perform their act (which he would invariably attempt to upstage).

The first show was notable for a bizarre opening as our host spotted BBC Sport executive Brian Barwick in the audience and made great play of throwing him out of ITV premises ('You're BBC, you shouldn't be here'), while inviting the entire audience to hum along to the tune of *Match of the Day*. But the rest of the series was full of equally strange and memorable moments. During the filming for one edition, Barrymore initiated his usual shtick of aggravating a member of the audience, only to be shooed away as the embarrassed recipient of his attention confessed she was on a date with her secret lover and didn't want to be seen on telly by her husband. Other in-the-crowd antics involved our man attempting to walk along the partitions that separated sections of the audience, and physically grovelling on one poor lady before dragging her, a step at a time, down towards the studio floor.

But those who joined him on the sofas weren't safe either. Ernie, an 81-year-old Jewish comedian was well into his act ('I have sex nearly every night...nearly on a Monday, nearly on a Tuesday...') when a heckler informed him, quite correctly as it turned out, that his flies were undone. Amidst the peals of laughter Barrymore was unable to resist dropping in a circumcision gag and then went on to make great play of pulling Ernie's zip up for him.

A regular insert to the show was 'My Kind of People', where the *Barrymore* road show would set up in a shopping

centre and invite members of the public to sing songs, tell jokes or perform magic. Of course they would have to endure Barrymore arsing about behind them before, if they were good (or bad) enough, getting an invite to appear on the main show. This open-house policy resulted in some of the most weird and wonderful entertainment acts in Britain getting national airtime. Yodellers, roller-skating gymnasts, female OAP bikers and human gnomes were all put to the service of fuelling Barrymore's limitless potential for mucking around.

The show enjoyed three series of massive success, blighted only by the odd big production number during which Mike would attempt to sell himself as a serious singer (the most memorable of these was perhaps a maudlin reading of the Barry Manilow hit 'Never Met A Man I Didn't Like' including changed lyrics to reflect Barrymore's pedigree as a 'Bermondsey Boy'). Yet due to his prodigious talent, such excesses seemed excusable.

As Barrymore began to earn the epithet 'troubled entertainer', his show shifted its focus away from members of the public and on to fellow celebrities (with the likes of Spike Milligan, Hinge and Bracket, Paul Young and Frank Bruno all making an appearance). Perhaps this was simply to distinguish the programme from *Michael Barrymore's My Kind of People* – a spin-off from the similarly titled item in *Barrymore*, or maybe Mike simply felt more comfortable in the company of his fellow pros. Although *Barrymore* wound up in 1997, its memory lived on in *Michael Barrymore's My Kind of Music* – a pretty rubbish musical quiz show that never really allowed its host to stretch his now long-forgotten comedic muscles.

## The Basil Brush Show

BBC1

14 June 1968 to 27 December 1980 (154 episodes)

For years, Saturday nights on BBC1 would start with a programme aimed at the younger members of the audience, normally involving a puppet of some kind. Cast adrift from the usual weekday and Saturday morning children's programmes, these shows were normally made by the light entertainment department. As such they would include all the usual trappings of a standard variety programme – including a pop band or two, who in exchange for plugging their latest single would have to participate in a hugely demeaning sketch with the star of the show (involving said star getting their names wrong or making jokes about their hair). The master of this art was undoubtedly the esteemed Basil Brush.

Created by Peter Firmin and voiced by Ivan Owen, the upper-class fox first made his debut as one of *The Three Scampis* (broadcast as part of ITV's long-running pre-school series *Small Time*), but soon cast off his partners to become a solo star in his own right, helped by regular appearances alongside David Nixon. Eventually Basil was given his own BBC show, and a fixture of the Saturday teatime schedules was born.

The eponymous series was never-changing, with Basil perennially pissing off his long-suffering human sidekicks, Mr Rodney (Bewes), Mr Derek (Fowlds), Mr Roy (North), Mr Howard (Williams) and Mr Billy (Boyle). Contrived gags and

daft puns were the order of the day, most obviously in the familiar closing sequence when the 'Mister' would attempt to tell a story (such as 'Basil the Buccaneer') during which Basil would act up something chronic.

For those who worked with Basil, the association could stick – Derek Fowlds went on to enjoy a long and distinguished acting career, most obviously in *Yes Minister*, but a generation would forever know him as 'Mr Derek'.

Throughout the run, numerous big-name pop stars would appear, mainly because *The Basil Brush Show* was one of the few places outside of *Top of the Pops* to showcase contemporary pop music. In fact over the years pretty much the whole gamut of pop music was represented on the show with acts such as Leapy Lee, Gilbert O'Sullivan, The New Seekers, Pilot, Brotherhood Of Man and Wings all making an appearance. However it must be noted that the George Martin who wrote almost all of Basil's scripts was a former stand-up comedian and not the Beatles producer.

When the show finally came to an end in the early Eighties, Basil conceded the slot to a number of other juvenile series, including *The Keith Harris Show*, *The Krankies Elektronik Komik* and *Roland Rat: The Series*. Meanwhile, Basil liggged around a number of ITV kids' programmes, such as *Basil Brush's Joke Machine*, until he went into semi-retirement in the late Eighties.

That wasn't quite the end though, as in the twenty-first century, Basil was 'relaunched' with a new voice (Ivan Owen having since died), a new body and a new setting. The irrepressible fox had now become the star of a sitcom shown as part of Children's BBC.

## Baywatch

The Baywatch Company/Tower 12/Tower 18  
[shown on ITV]

6 January 1990 to 19 July 1997 (122 episodes)

As well as being (according to its star David Hasselhoff) 'the most popular television series in the world', *Baywatch* holds the distinction alongside *The New Adventures of Superman* of being the last American drama show to make a significant impact on Saturday nights. Like many of the previous US hits, *Baywatch* found success by defining and then sticking firmly to a winning formula. In this case an exotic location, soft rock soundtrack, easy to follow morality tales and scantily clad beauties.

Although lead actor, David Hasselhoff, was persistently heard complaining about the lack of 'emotional stories' ('I don't want to come out of this in five or six years and have people say, well he talked to a car and then he ran down the beach'), viewers were turning on in their millions to enjoy some brainless entertainment and as many slow-mo shots of buff lifeguards running into the sea as the producer's could contrive. In fact, such was the show's popularity in the UK that when, due to poor ratings Stateside, NBC decided to cancel it after the first series, ITV organised a consortium of contented buyers to pre-finance another run.

Of course without ITV's help *Baywatch* would never have secured the services of its most iconic cast member. Pamela Anderson first appeared as C.J. Parker in the third series, and

with her arrival *Baywatch* perfected its winning formula. As if to prove the point, by its fourth year it became established as the fastest-produced drama on television (churning out twenty-two episodes in only five months). However, the production line couldn't last for ever and British viewers got tired of Hasselhoff, Anderson and the others' heavy moralising; even the gratuitous slow-motion shots accompanied by histrionic soft rock incidental music were beginning to pall.

By the end of 1997 (just two years after ITV had seen fit to bill repeats of the show as *Golden Baywatch*), the channel jettisoned the series altogether, allowing Sky One to pick up the rights. Today the show never seems to be off our screens thanks to some digital satellite channel or other airing repeats. In fact, as you are reading this there is probably some British channel somewhere right now showing the same bevy of lifeguards hurling themselves headlong into the same surf for the umpteenth time today.

## **Beadle's About**

LWT for ITV

22 November 1986 to 31 October 1996 (94 episodes)

Although it may surprise his detractors, *Beadle's About* is generally regarded as the 'Rolls-Royce' of hidden-camera shows, and many of the programme's most successful stunts are now considered classics of the genre. The show diverged from standard hidden-camera series such as *Candid Camera* by concentrating on stings set up for pre-selected targets. While this made the stunts all the more difficult to stage (each one was tailor-made for a specific person, so there was no opportunity to remount it and try it again with someone else if it went wrong), it also allowed for the introduction of a little bit of natural justice, as long-suffering wives could get one back on their irritating 'look-at-me-I'm-a-bit-wacky' husbands.

Of course, certain setups live longer in the memory than others and particular highlights include the overweight Golightly family trashing a bed shop in Orpington, a bogus Queen Mother stealing items from an antiques shop, a husband and wife visiting a military museum only for the husband to start up one of the tanks and trash the exhibits, and the various and many workplace stunts involving employees (usually on their first day at a new job) being asked to shred and then reassemble documents or other equally ridiculous tasks.

Although the camera work and (particularly) the sound on *Beadle's About* were first rate, odd shots obviously taken after

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the stunt had happened did crop up and a sequence featuring actress Annette Badland as a foreign princess was notable for the inclusion of a number of close-ups and reaction shots that clearly weren't caught at the time the prank was being played.

Of all the *Beadle's About* stunts, there is one that is commonly agreed to tower above all others. Apparently its genesis came not from Beadle, but from the man who gave us such great children's telly programmes as *Jigsaw* and *Eureka*, Clive Doig. After much logistical planning (that resulted in the ruse becoming one of the most expensive hidden-camera stunts ever filmed in Britain) the game was on.

The target selected was an unsuspecting farmer's wife on her way home from an appearance in a local pantomime. While she had been out, Beadle and co. had embedded a fake meteorite in her garden. Her initial reaction was priceless, and with very little persuasion from the 'authorities' gathered at the scene (really Beadle's stooges), she willingly serenaded the steaming lump of rock (she was fed a line to the effect that meteors were attracted by creativity). In so doing she caused an 'alien' to appear from within the debris. Here was the pivotal moment of the entire, elaborate scam. Fabulously undeterred, the target enquired whether the extra-terrestrial would like a cup of tea. At this point the audience at home wet themselves, as did Beadle and the poor woman's friends (all watching the action unfold on monitors from the comfort of a forty-seat coach situated in a nearby field). As Beadle himself concedes, he couldn't have scripted a better outcome.

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Surprisingly, although 1996 was the year of *Beadle's About's* most acclaimed stunt, that same year the powers-that-be deemed the series had come to the end of its natural life and the show was cancelled. This was a particularly sad moment for petty agitators who realised that the by now famed 'I thought it was Beadle' defence would no longer wash in a court of law.