

# MEN'S CLUB UPDATE

## Abbott and Costello

BY HOWARD ARKIN

In the upcoming months it is probable that we will be spending a great deal of time isolated in our apartments. To help pass some of that time, the North Shore Towers Men's Club recently sponsored the first of what we hope will be many programs on North Shore Towers Channel 995.

On September 23, we had noted lecturer and film producer Keith Crocker discussing the life and times of Abbott and Costello. Keith has appeared before the Men's Club on previous occasions to discuss the I Love Lucy Show, the Ed Sullivan Show, as well as various comedians from years ago. For those of you who may have missed Keith's most recent lecture, let me fill you in.

Both Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were born in New Jersey. Abbott was born in Asbury Park in 1897 and Costello was born in Paterson in 1906. With deference to

Frankie Valli, this may have made them the original "Jersey Boys." Their partnership had an accidental start—in 1931, while performing in a Brooklyn theater, Costello's straight man (his wife) fell ill and Abbott stepped in to replace her. The chemistry was apparent and the team of Abbott and Costello was born.

The scope of Abbott and Costello's talents encompassed vaudeville, radio, television and movies, a feat which very few entertainers were able to accomplish. They initially worked the burlesque and vaudeville circuits throughout the 1930's, and in 1938 made their first radio appearance on The Kate Smith Show. They were so sensational on radio that they were signed to their first movie contract by Universal Studios and another phase of their careers took hold. It was during World War II that "the boys" would reach the zenith of their careers with films such



Who's on First?

as "Buck Privates," "Keep Them Flying" and "In the Navy."

It was the 1945 film, "The Naughty Nineties," in which they performed the routine for which I think they are best remembered, that of course being the "Who's on First" skit. For those of you who are unfamiliar with that iconic exchange, you can see it on YouTube. Seeing it as a 10 year old I thought it was hilarious. But 70 years later?

Both Abbott and Costello had some problems in their personal lives, drinking and gambling being among them. After the war, the

IRS "came-a-knocking," forcing both men to lose their homes and quite a bit more. Some of their fortune was recouped with the 1948 film, "Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein." Other successful films such as "Abbott and Costello Meet the Keystone Cops," "Abbott and Costello Meet Jekyll and Hyde" and "Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy" followed. Their final film was "Dance with Me, Henry" in 1956.

In the final years of their lives they did not work together. Costello did some standup comedy and appeared on the Steve Allen Show. Abbott did some voiceovers for Hanna-Barbera animated films. Costello died in 1959 at the young age of 53 and Abbott passed away in 1974 at the age of 76.

We're looking forward to Jerry getting Keith back again for another lecture. I'm hopeful that the pandemic will be a thing of the past and that next time it will be live.



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