



# British Telly Club

## Proving Love Can Bloom at Any Age

**A**s *Time Goes By* was a sweet and unexpectedly long lasting romantic sitcom in which two masters of the genre, Geoffrey Palmer and Dame Judi Dench, made the art of comedy look easy.

Palmer played Lionel, an ex-army officer and Kenyan coffee planter who returns to England to write his memoirs, entitled *My Life in Kenya*. Seeking the help of a temporary secretary to take care of the typing, an agency offers him the services of Judith Pargetter. Attracted by her youthful vigor, Lionel invites her out to dinner but chances to meet, too, with her mother Jean.

During the Korean War she and Lionel had been very close, intent on marriage, but one vital letter went astray and each thought the other had given up. Could the old fires be stoked after a 38-year parting? And what about the twice-married Judith, who was rather keen on Lionel herself? Such was the situation and the dilemmas at the start of the first series. As time went by *As Time Goes By* changed tack somewhat and in the middle period concentrated on getting Jean and Lionel back together. Eventually they cohabited and married, but things were never that simple for the prickly couple who were both too independent to settle easily into married life.

Throughout its run, *As Time Goes By* was a smoothly purring vehicle, expertly driven by its lead actors and fine-tuned to perfection by writer Bob Larbey. The series



The cast of *As Time Goes By*.

was not suited to all tastes, being perhaps best appreciated by middle-class middleagers, but it did deliver some genuinely sharp and edgy moments puncturing its cozy image.

The creation of the series was credited to Colin Bostock-Smith, although it has been reported that actor Geoffrey Palmer, who brilliantly portrayed the curmudgeonly but gentle Lionel, first took the idea to the BBC.

By its eighth season the show was enjoying considerable success in the United States where, despite her Oscar-winning film performances, Dench was best known as Jean from *As Time Goes By*.

The series proper ended in 2002 with the wedding of Judith and Alistair, and the departure of Sandy and Harry, leaving Jean and Lionel quietly to themselves.

A week later there was an hour-long compilation of highlights from the preceding 64 episodes.

Three years later, the show's legion of devotees were given a chance to catch up on all the regulars in a two-part seasonal special which found Jean growing broody for grandchildren and cajoling a reluctant Lionel into discussing "medical problems" with Alistair.

Sources: BBC and the BBC's Comedy Page

## British Telly Club

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British Telly Club (BTC) welcomes all correspondence. Send letters via e-mail to Doug Jagers at [djagers@wfyi.org](mailto:djagers@wfyi.org) or by snail mail to: BTC, c/o Doug Jagers, WFYI, 1630 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. BTC reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think.

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# Dame Judi Dench



Dame Judi Dench as Jean in *As Time Goes By*.

BBC

### British Telly Shows on WFYI 20.1

#### Weeknights

11:00 pm Last of the Summer Wine

#### Saturdays

8 pm M15

11 pm New Tricks

## Are You Ready for DTV?

June 12, 2009



more info at [wfyi.org/dtv](http://wfyi.org/dtv)

Dame Judith Olivia Dench (born December 9, 1934), known as Dame Judi Dench, is an Academy Award-winning English actor born in North Yorkshire.

In her native country, Dench has developed a reputation as arguably the greatest actress in post-World War II history, primarily through her work in theatre, which has been her main forte throughout her career. She has more than once come first in polls to find Britain's best actress.

She received professional training at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London and made her professional debut as Ophelia in *Hamlet* in Liverpool in 1957. She subsequently spent several seasons in repertory in Oxford and Nottingham. In 1961, she joined the Royal Shakespeare Company and made numerous appearances with the company in Stratford and London over the next two decades, winning several best actress awards.

Dench has also made numerous appearances in the West End and with the National Theatre in London. She is a multiple win-

ner of the main awards for performances on the London stage, including a record six Laurence Olivier Awards. She has also appeared with success on Broadway in *Amy's Room*. As she enters her 70s, Dench remains one of the biggest draws on the London stage.

Her many television appearances include the series *As Time Goes By* and *A Fine Romance*. She has also occasionally directed plays. She returned to the West End stage in April 2006 in *Hay Fever* alongside Peter Bowles, Belinda Lang and Kim Medcalf.

Judi Dench was created an Officer of the British Empire in 1970, and raised to Dame Commander in 1998. She was made a Companion of Honour in 2005.

In 1971 she married British actor Michael Williams and they had their only child, Tara Cressida Williams (aka Finty), on September 24, 1972. Their daughter later became an actor. Dench starred with her husband in the 1980s British sitcom, *A Fine Romance*. Williams died of lung cancer, aged 65, in 2001.



Geoffrey Palmer (right) with Philip Bretherton in a scene from *As Time Goes By*.

BBC

# Geoffrey Palmer

Geoffrey Palmer, born in London on June 4, 1927, is one of British television's most reliable actors, appearing in several of the most popular situation comedies of the last 20 years, and on occasion taking the lead.

With his bloodhound features and lugubrious voice and manner, Palmer is instantly familiar in whatever role he plays. Not only is his face at once recognizable from the situation comedies he has appeared in, but his voice is doubly well known from his frequent employment as a voice-over artist for television commercials.

After serving his apprenticeship as an actor in the theater, Palmer emerged as an accomplished and individual performer in television situation comedy through his casting as the absent-minded eccentric Jimmy, brother-in-law to Leonard Rossiter's Perrin in *The Rise and Fall of Reginald Perrin*. Forever apologizing for turning up at the Perrin household in search of a meal after yet another "cock-up on the catering front," Palmer's Jimmy was manifestly appealing, though divorced from reality and pathetically woebegone.

Soon after the end of the *Perrin* series, Palmer was back on the screen on a regular basis playing Wendy Craig's other half in Carla Lane's hit series *Butterflies*. Palmer returned to the dottiness of Jimmy in the *Perrin* series when he went on to play the comically unhinged Major Harry Kitchener Wellington Truscott, the central character in *Fairly Secret Army*.

Palmer's subsequent series, *Executive Stress* and *As Time Goes By*, saw Palmer back in more familiar sitcom territory, playing belligerently adorable partners in support of strong female stars, in the first instance Penelope Keith and in the latter case Judi Dench. *Executive Stress* proved a mixed success, though Palmer gave good value as always, but *As Time Goes By* settled in well as the plot traced the reunion of the two erstwhile lovers.

Palmer has occasionally ventured out of the sitcom territory with which he is usually associated. Notable examples of experiments in other fields of comedy have included guest appearances in such acclaimed shows as *Fawlty Towers* and *Blackadder Goes Forth*, in which he played Field Marshall Haig.



# Memory

A Conversation with Dame Judi Dench and Geoffrey Palmer

Just before *As Time Goes By* recorded its final regular episode, stars Dame Judi Dench and Geoffrey Palmer sat down for an interview with the BBC. The following is a condensed version of the resulting article.

Stephen Fry famously declared that he was proud to share a land mass with her and that “railings should be built around her so that all may admire her in an orderly and respectful fashion” – but Oscar-winning actress Dame Judi Dench erects no barriers as she contemplates the end of an era.

“It’s sad, but I think that probably it’s time,” she says candidly, her white trousers and top and feathery cap of silver hair emphasising her piercing blue eyes. “I only go by the fact that the last episode we did, somebody said to me, ‘Wasn’t the dog good and where did you get your luggage from?’ I thought, oh well, it’s time we packed this up now!” she laughs. “But it will be sad not working together.”

Dame Judi’s citrus-sharp observations as Jean, served up with Geoffrey Palmer’s dry wit as Lionel, have provided an irresistible feast for viewers, and Geoffrey remains sanguine about continuing his off-screen friendship with his co-star, with whom he also starred in *Mrs Brown*. He played Private Secretary Henry Ponsonby to her Queen Victoria, which earned her a Golden Globe and a first Oscar nomination.

“I’ve been asked if we’ll see each other again and I’m sure we will – we shall go out and have raucous lunches,” he says decisively. But, in response to Dame Judi’s wondering if an amalgam of the team will stay in touch, he isn’t quite so optimistic.

“You kind of know that will never happen,” he declares. “In this business, you can work with people and then never work with them again, so there’s a

great chance that we won’t work with a lot of the crew again, whom we’ve been very close to for 10 years and they’re lovely people. That, I think, is the over-riding sadness, apart from the fact that something that has been very enjoyable is coming to an end.”

*As Time Goes By*, produced and directed by Sydney Lotterby, has a huge following, both in the UK and in America, where fan club Web sites dedicated to the “Britcom” have proliferated at an astounding rate. Recently, 65 fans, aged from 16 to 87, jetted across the Atlantic from the USA and Canada especially for one of the recordings at BBC Television Centre in London.

“It’s surprised everyone that it has grown and grown and grown in its appeal in the States,” says Geoffrey. “I imagine it’s the essential Englishness of it.”

“And I think it’s quite quaint to them,” adds Dame Judi. “The two main characters in it aren’t young and maybe that’s got something to do with it, too. You don’t often get a series about people who are after 50, shall we say.”

The series is also one whose content will never make a maiden aunt suffer a fit of the vapours.

“Nobody says anything nasty, nobody swears,” explains Geoffrey. “That, to middle 9 England or whatever, does have a great appeal, I think.”

Geoffrey is a fan of *Men Behaving Badly*, which he maintains is “one of the great situation comedies, but admits: “A number of people who I would consider to be my friends said it was revolting, with people always getting drunk and being sick...But *As Time Goes By* doesn’t do that, so it appeals to kind of mainstream audiences, which may make it sound deeply boring.

# Lane

“There’s also the fact that it’s not about the young. I’m old enough to remember when there was no such thing as ‘teen culture.’ My generation grew up and nobody took any notice of young people. People were children and then they grew up – there was no teen market or anything like that,” he says, warming to his theme.

“People who wrote songs – George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern – they didn’t write songs for kids. They wrote songs for grown-ups who were falling in love. I think, for older people, it’s a huge relief that it isn’t about 20-year-olds or 18-year-olds,” declares the genial actor.

It’s now impossible to imagine anyone other than Dame Judi and Geoffrey in the roles of Jean and Lionel, which cloak them like a second skin. But neither had any inkling that the series would take such a limpet-style grip on viewers.

“I don’t think you ever know,” reflects Dame Judi, who last year received Bafta’s highest accolade of an Academy Fellowship at a star-studded tribute to honour a career which has spanned more than 40 years. “You don’t know that anything is going to be a success, ever, whatever your feelings are. You just react to whether you want to play the part or whether you want to work with so-and-so. You just instinctively know about whether it’s a part that you think you could bring anything to, or interpret in some kind of way.”

The duo have a cache of happy memories from their small-screen relationship.

“I remember that we’ve laughed a huge amount – all the filming has been huge fun,” says Dame Judi. Geoffrey recalls: “There’s a great feeling of mutual trust and dependence – nobody’s trying to carve you up.”

“Working with Judi is extraordinary because she doesn’t [“learn her lines!” interrupts James Bond’s boss with lightning speed] behave like one of our most distinguished actresses,” continues Geoffrey. “She never pulls rank or anything like that – some would. And she never, as an actress, does anything but what is right for the scene. It’s very easy, consciously or unconsciously, not to deliver a line too well so that it will mess up your line. She is extraordinary for doing what serves the author, totally.”

Geoffrey muses that time really has gone by quickly. “I remember thinking originally that we’d better do this soon, otherwise one had the feeling – not from Judi’s point of view, but from mine,” he adds chivalrously – that if there were anything to do with romance, it would become rather obscene if I got any older. And I never thought we’d go on till I’m as old as I am now and maybe it is obscene. But thank God we only just lie in bed together, there’s no physical contact. We wouldn’t want to make the great British public sick in front of their televisions.”

He recalls how, when the pair were due to meet for lunch at l’Escargot to discuss the series, Sydney wondered how to address this grande dame of British theatre, with “your grace” or “your dameship” being proffered. “I think,” Geoffrey told him laconically, “we probably call her Judi.”

“Anyway,” he says now, “we had a jolly good lunch and shared a taxi afterwards and I was frightfully over-excited!”

“And I was frightfully aflutter because dropping you at Marylebone Station was very *Brief Encounter*,” says Dame Judi.

For *As Time Goes By* fans, the encounter of the last decade has been all too brief.



# BRITCOM LAUGHLINKS

## The Unofficial Chronology of Dame Judi Dench

<http://www.djdchronology.com>

Want to keep up with current projects and happenings with one of our favorite ladies? This site is worth a look. Past projects, current projects and scheduled appearances can be found on this site. Layout and functionality is basic, but a nice resource for information on one our favorite actors.

Rating: 3 out of 5 mouse clicks

## As Time Goes By Central

[www.atgb.com](http://www.atgb.com)

Nice site with hodgepodge of bits, bytes and snippets on the popular series. Some interesting trivia bits, photos and some good character profiles are housed here. It's worth a look for the die-hard ATGB fan.

3 out of 5 mouse clicks

## Shop BBC America

<http://www.bbcamerica.com/shop>

A great stop to find the latest DVDs, Britcom collectibles and other information on favorite shows. While it may be self-promoting to list it here, it is definitely worth checking out for upcoming releases and pre-orders. Great information on your favorite BBC programs.

Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks



Bill Owen (as Compo Simmonite), Brian Wilde (as Foggy Dewhurst) and Peter Sallis (as Norman Clegg)

## Last of the Summer Wine

WEEKNIGHTS AT 11 ON TV 20

Ripe for mischief, Britain's oldest (if not wisest) adolescents have been delighting television audiences around the world since 1973, making this the longest-running sitcom in the world.

The series is set in a picturesque village in the Yorkshire Dales, one of the most beautiful parts of England. If Compo, Blamire and Clegg did not live there, it would be a quiet backwater, but their comic capers ensure that there is never a dull moment.

Well into their second childhood, they fill their time with cycling, canoeing, or whatever daft idea comes into their heads. Sometimes they just sit in the café, annoying the proprietors, Sid and Ivy. More often than not, they are galling through the village and across the Dales, giggling with glee, falling in streams, and behaving worse than a gang of seven-year-olds bunking off school for the day.

New

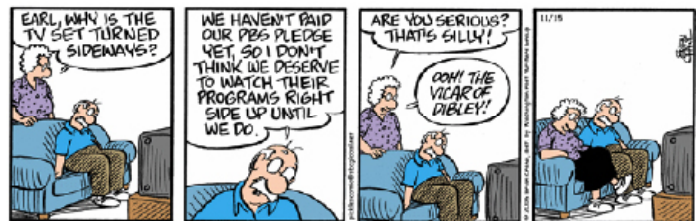
## World, Have Your Say

WEEKDAYS AT 1 PM ON 90.1 FM HD1, BEGINNING MARCH 23

World, Have Your Say is a ground-breaking, live global interactive program on radio every weekday at 1 pm and online 24/7. It invites World Service listeners and BBC online users to share their views and questions on key issues with a worldwide audience. The program features leading global figures, experts and correspondents who are also invited to take questions and comments from the audience.

To participate or learn more about the program, visit [worldhaveyoursay.wordpress.com](http://worldhaveyoursay.wordpress.com)

### FROM THE FUNNIES



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Please join us for the next WFYI British Telly Club meeting on Sunday, March 29 at 3 pm in WFYI's headquarters, 1630 N. Meridian St. To RSVP, call (317) 715-2009, or send an e-mail to [membership@wfyi.org](mailto:membership@wfyi.org).

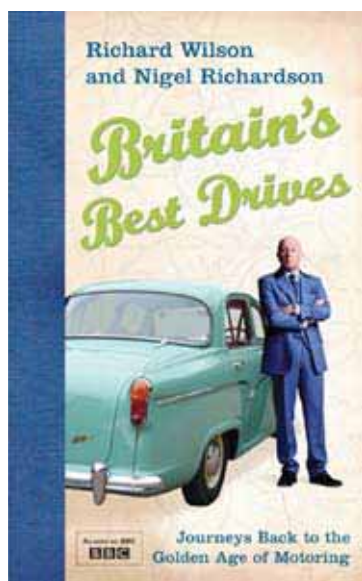


## Age of Terrorism

While political violence has always been with us, in the late 1960s it came of age. Terrorists, realizing the power of the media, began to hijack planes and target civilians. The Age of Terror was born. Presented by Peter Taylor, four key episodes are re-examined to pinpoint the seismic shifts in the war between the terrorist and the state.

## MI-5

Spooks takes us into the thrilling world of MI-5, the clandestine security service, and the people who make up the elite team. They tackle organized crime, terrorist activities, embassy sieges, weapons proliferation and anarchists, not to mention the conflicts and power struggles back in the office.



## Britain's Best Drives

Armed with period driving guides, Richard Wilson retraces six classic routes through the UK and recreates the pleasure of the golden age of motoring. He explores some of the most striking and beautiful scenery and landmarks Britain has to offer. Along the way he meets the people who live there and remember how these places once were, and wonders why things aren't what they used to be.

COMING TO WFYI 20.1 IN APRIL

MASTERPIECE

# Little Dorrit

SUNDAYS IN APRIL AT 9 PM ON WFYI 20.1

One of Charles Dickens' greatest love stories also has the timely theme of chronic debt and financial collapse. Adapted by screenwriter Andrew Davies, the five-part miniseries stars Matthew Macfadyen as hero Arthur Clennam, newcomer Claire Foy as Amy "Little" Dorrit and Tom Courtenay as her father, who has been incarcerated for 25 years for insolvency. Scores of other great actors appear in this moving tale that was particularly close to Dickens' heart, since his own father did time in debtor's prison.



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