My name appeared on the credits of an episode of Not the Nine O'Clock News which started with a sketch about children being rounded up and carted off to see the Rolf Harris Show on Saturday mornings. Some have assumed I had something to do with it - but I didn't, in fact, write that sketch. (In its defence… whilst it appears to be in bad taste now the details of Harris' secret life are known, it was fairly innocent at the time).

I'm not sure which sketch I wrote in that particular show – it was a long time ago. It might have been one called ‘Divorce’ or it could just have been Gob of the Month - which John Lloyd said “was Billy Connolly's favourite joke of the whole series. “

Divorce was a rewrite of the marriage service (with Rowan Atkinson as ‘the vicar’) … except that, in this ceremony, as you'll have already
guessed, the couple are splitting up. ‘Gob of the Month’ was a spoof on ‘Goal of the Month’ which was very popular at that time. It goes without saying that this featured footballers who had just scored a goal and who, unlike today (when they get up to all sorts of contortions) a lot of them just turned round and jogged back, gobbing spectacularly as they did so. The commentary did not finish on the goal but continued to build to a climax as the player gobbed on the ground. I know it doesn’t sound particularly edifying on the printed page but it worked quite well with Mel Smith’s commentary.

‘Divorce’ has had a number of resurrections. It reappeared on the Not the Nine O’Clock News album (hedgehog Sandwich), was used in a Red Nose Day TV prog, and was reprised in a show called ‘The Secret Policeman’s Other Ball’ which raised funds for Amnesty International. It also

+++ The story behind my involvement is that I saw John Lloyd at The Cambridge Arts Theatre when he was a young flaxen haired member of ‘Footlights’ - and he saw our little review group at the Edinburgh Fringe and/or in London (but didn’t think much of it.) He produced a radio programme called News Huddlines (with Roy Hudd) soon after he joined the BBC and there was a need for ‘quickies’ and ‘one liners.’ (Most of mine ended up ‘on the cutting room floor.’) When John Lloyd moved on to television he took his little black book (containing the details of all the writers had used when working in radio) and contacted us to ask if we would be prepared to submit material for the new program. This was a very economical way of working because we only got paid for what was used … although the BBC (unlike the NHS) was scrupulously honest and would pay royalties even when the show was screened in some remote and sparsely inhabited part of the world. Occasionally there would be a mini-bonanza … such as when a sketch appeared on an album or whatever.

The non-commissioned writers tended to have day jobs/careers so they wrote in their spare time ‘for fun.’. The success rate for was not high - Jimmy Mulville who went on to found Hat Trick Productions (which makes programs such as ‘Have I Got News For You’) was in charge of reading through the scripts I submitted … and he put the majority in the bin (and a jolly good job too or I’d have been embarrassed by them to this day!) He did say, however, as if to make amends, that a lot of
viewers thought ‘Gob of the Month’ was going to be a regular feature … and kept writing in asking if it could be repeated.

After he finished working on Not the Nine O’Clock News John Lloyd went on to produce Spitting Image, a topical programme which used puppets constructed by Fluck and Law which depicted the politicians, royals and ‘celebs’ of the day. I took my daughter, Laura, along to the first scriptwriter’s meeting - she was very young at the time and was frightened by some of the puppets (Tebbit and Breznev being two of the most eerie.) The pilot programme we were shown wasn’t great - and I thought it would probably die the death so I didn’t offer to contribute - but they got their act together and it went on to be a great success, of course.

John Lloyd’s next ‘major adventure’ was Blackadder - about which I need say no more as it is still being repeated on a regular basis. If you want more details, see:


DONATIONS

You can still, of course, donate to Comic Relief … and your contribution will make a big difference to people both here in the UK and around the world. The link is:

https://www.comicrelief.com/donate

Amnesty International is, needless to say, still going strong. The recent report by Amnesty International which exposes the Syrian government’s calculated campaign of extrajudicial executions by mass hangings at Saydnaya Prison has made headlines around the world. To donate, the link is:

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/campaign/chameleon-2017?gclid=CjwKEAiArIDFBRCe_9DJi6Or0UcSJAAK1nFvdvPkJWTTvXjFEVcGxwJ4kXT-AJWeoAUFgjjXw-eYCqhoCQrDw_wcB ...

or Google: 'donate to Amnesty international.'
23rd October 1980

Dr. John Cormack,
12 Stonebridge Lane,
Fulbourn,
Cambridge,

Dear John,

Many thanks for this sketch. We had read it through, but I'm afraid we just can't make it work properly. It is very funny on the page but it reads very slowly and I just think it would be too long on the programme. Also it's nearly uncuttable because it need to be "accurate" and paced slowly, I think.

So very sorry about that.

As ever,

(John Lloyd)
Producer,
"Not the Nine O'Clock News"
Having received this letter from John Lloyd I did cut it – (it was over-long) - and they did use it.
For sketch click on:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlY2DIpmS2I
NOT THE NINE O'CLOCK NEWS

Taken from the BBC television series transmitted 1980 starring

ROWAN ATKINSON, MEL SMITH, PAMELA STEMPHENSON and GRIFF RHYS JONES

SIDE 1

1. LOYAL APOLOGY (Richard Curtis and Howard Goodall/MTEL, GAY MUSIC, COP CON)
2. NEWS SUMMARY (David Kinh, Fay Price and Louise Blinsh)
3. CONSTABLE SAVAGE (P. W. Harwood)
4. BARONET OSWALD ENRICO ROSLEY (Peter Bently/BBC, EMI MUSIC LTD)
5. UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE (Guy Mestral)
6. (I LIKE) TRUCKING (Richard Curtis, Howard Goodall, Rowan Atkinson/MTEL, GAY MUSIC, COP CON)
7. SIR ROBERT MARK (Craig Williams and Lynne Nicholls)
8. HI-PI SHOP (Richard Curtis and Andrew Marshall)
9. ENGLAND MY LEOTARD (Kate Bush/Epic Music Ltd, pub. by EMI MUSIC LTD, EMI Music Publishing)
10. DIVORCE (Johh Cormack)
11. POLITICAL ORBIT (Pete Stringer)
12. THE MAIN POINTS AGAIN (Rowan Atkinson)
13. BAD LANGUAGE (Richard Curtis)
14. GIFT SHOP (Tony Hirst)

SIDE 2

1. HEDGEHOG APOLOGY (Rowan Atkinson)
2. SUPA DUMA (Richard Curtis, Howard Goodall/MTEL, GAY MUSIC, COP CON)
3. SOCCER VIOLENCE (Clive Barker and Stephen Markavitch)
4. BECAUSE I'M WET AND LONELY (Clive Barker and Stephen Markavitch)
5. THAT'S LIES (Mark Smith, Peter Richardsons, Nigel and Roger Farmer)
6. CRED (This New Rough Vision) (Clive Barker and Stephen Markavitch)
7. I BELIEVE (The Regan Song, Richard Curtis, Howard Goodall/MTEL, GAY MUSIC, COP CON)
8. THE AIDE (Richard Curtis)
9. THE MAIN POINTS AGAIN (Jim Clare, Pete Stringer, Colin Gilchrist)
10. NOT THE PARROT SKETCH (Richard Curtis)
11. OPEN MARRIAGE (Guy Jenkins)
12. LAGER (Barry Brown)
13. AND FINALLY (Rowan Atkinson, Jim Clare, Pete Stringer, Andrew Marshall)

*Signature tunes by Nic Rowley/Noisy Music Ltd.
Technical assistance by Philip Burwell, Phil Ashley, Peter Sidhom and Neil Pemberton.
Television direction Bill Wilson.
Television production John Lloyd and Sean Hardie.
Album production John Lloyd, Sean Hardie and William Grierson.
1. LOYAL APOLOGY (Griff Rhys Jones and Mel Smith)
2. NEWS SUMMARY (David Kind, Ray Price and Laurie Rowley)
3. CONSTABLE SAVAGE (P. W. Newstead)
4. BARONET OSWALD ERNOLD MOSLEY (Peter Brewis)/BBC-EMI MUSIC LTD.
5. UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE (Guy Meredith)
6. (I LIKE) TRUCKING (Richard Curtis, Howard Goodall, Rowan Atkinson)/NOEL GAY MUSIC, COP. CON.
7. SIR ROBERT MARK (Craig Warren Nicholls)
8. HI-FI SHOP (David Renwick and Andrew Marshall)
9. ENGLAND MY LEOTARD (Kate Bush)/Kate Bush Music Ltd. sub. pub. by EMI MUSIC LTD. (Lyrical pastiche Peter Brewis)
10. DIVORCE (John Cormack)
11. POLITICAL OBIT (Peter Steggles)
12. THE MAIN POINTS AGAIN (Laurie Rowley)
13. BAD LANGUAGE (Richard Curtis)
14. GIFT SHOP (Tony Hilton)
THE SECRET POLICEMAN'S BALL

ROWAN ATKINSON
ALAN BENNETT
JOHN BIRD
TIM BROOKE-TAYLOR
JASPER CARROTT
GRAHAM CHAPMAN
JOHN CLEESE
BILLY CONNOLLY
JOHN FORTUNE
BARRY HUMPHRIES
NEIL INNES
CHRIS LANGHAM
GRIFF RHYS JONES
ALEXEI SAYLE
PAMELA STEPHENSON
JOHN WELLS
VICTORIA WOOD
Produced by Martin Lewis. Stage Show Directed by Renold Eyre. Assisted by John Cleave.
Sound Production by John Strachan. Executive Producer for Amnesty International: Peter Walker.
Recorded at The Secret Policeman's Other Ball — The 1981 Amnesty International Comedy Gala.
at The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London on 8th, 10th, 11th and 12th September 1981.

Recorded by The Ral Mobile. Engineered by Tim Sumner-Harpse.
Mixed and edited at The Snoring Street Studios. Mastered by George Pulham.
Rowan Atkinson appears by kind permission of Artists Records. Jasper Carrott appears by kind permission of DJM Records.
Billy Connolly appears by kind permission of Phonogram Records. Pamela Stephenson appears by kind permission of Phonogram.
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Photography by Michael Pulham.

Ansrnty International would like to offer its very real thanks to all of the above, especially the director and performers, (who gave all their services entirely free of charge),
and to everyone else who in any way assisted in the production of the show, the scene, the music, the album, the book,
the sound check and The Secret Policeman's John McEwan & Co's Stage/Event Services.

The cast includes:

1. John Cleese, John Bird, Rowan Atkinson & The Entire Cast
   “A Word Of Thanks”

2. Rowan Atkinson
   “Road Safety”

3. Jasper Carrott
   “Australian Moor Insurance Claims”

4. John Cleese, Pamela Stephenson & Graham Chapman
   “Knives Out”

5. Victoria Wood
   “Had To Up To Here”

6. John Fortune & Alan Bennett
   “Men’s Talk”

7. Alexei Sayle
   “What’s On In Stoke Newington”

8. Dame Edna Everage
   “The Royal Australian Postcard Foundation”

9. John Willis
   “Dams On The Menace”

10. Rowan Atkinson & John Cleese
    “Beekkeeping”

11. Neil Innes
    “Song In A Fourth Accent”

12. Rowan Atkinson, Griff Rhys Jones, Pamela Stephenson & John Fortune
    “Divorce Service”

13. Chris Langham
    “Reading The Riot Act”

14. The Boys: Griff Rhys Jones, John Fortune, Rowan Atkinson
    “Top Of The Form”

15. John Cleese & Company
    “A Word Of Thanks”

    “Divorce Service”

17. Billy Connolly
    “Drinking”

PROFITS FROM THIS ALBUM GO TO
Amnesty International
Musical Interlude

The Universal Soldier  
(Buffy Sainte-Marie)  
Donovan

I Don't Like Mondays  
(Bob Geldof)  
Johnny Fingers & Bob Geldof

Farther Up the Road  
(Don Robey & Joe Venoso)  
Jeff Beck & Eric Clapton

In the Air Tonight  
(Phil Collins)  
Phil Collins

Message in a Bottle  
(Sting)  
Sting

Roxanne  
(Sting)  
Sting

Top of the Form  
(John Cleese)  
Rowan Atkinson
John Bird
Tim Brooke-Taylor
Graham Chapman
John Cleese
John Fortune
Griff Rhys Jones

I've Had It Up to Here With Men  
(Victoria Wood)

Divorce Service  
(John Curnow)  
Rowan Atkinson
John Fortune
Griff Rhys Jones
Pamela Stephenson

Denis and Ronnie  
(John Wells)  
John Wells

Clothes Off!  
(At Last the 1948 Show: Tim Brooke-Taylor, 
Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Marty Feldman)  
Graham Chapman
John Cleese
Pamela Stephenson

Alan and John  
(Alan Bennett)  
Alan Bennett
John Fortune

Drinking  
(Billy Connolly)  
Billy Connolly

Finale  
I Shall Be Released (Bob Dylan)  
The Secret Police
Top of the Form
(John Cleese)

Rowan Atkinson
John Bird
Tim Brooke-Taylor
Graham Chapman
John Cleese
John Fortune
Griff Rhys Jones

I've Had It Up to Here With Men
(Victoria Wood)

Victoria Wood

Divorce Service
(John Cormack)

Rowan Atkinson
John Fortune
Griff Rhys Jones
Pamela Stephenson

Denis and Ronnie
(John Wells)

John Wells

Clothes Off!
(At Last the 1948 Show: Tim Brooke-Taylor,
Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Marty Feldman)

Graham Chapman
John Cleese
Pamela Stephenson

Alan and John
(Alan Bennett)

Alan Bennett
John Fortune

Drinking
(Billy Connolly)

Billy Connolly

Finale

I Shall Be Released (Bob Dylan)

The Secret Police
Solemn organ music is heard.

MINISTER. We are here to celebrate the holy sacrament of divorce. Dennis, wilt thou leave this woman, who is thy wedded wife? Dost thou dislike her, despite her, hast thou told her a thousand times if thou hast told her once to squeeze the toothpaste tube from the bottom and not the top and dost thou despise her brother, the chartered surveyor, who invites himself to dinner and then drinks thy Scotch after ye have gone to bed? Dost thou dislike her mother, hate her cooking, get irritated that she picks at her toenails in bed, and that the clippings somehow find their way into that little crack in the side of the duvet, and wilt thou forsake her for as long as ye both shall live?
DENNIS. I will.
MINISTER. Muriel, wilt thou leave this drunken shit
who is thy wedded husband? Didst thou dislike the
brevity and infrequency of his lovemaking and wert
thou so sick of having to lie to him about how it's not
size that's important and that you may as well be
sleeping with one of those seaside collection boxes
made out of a mine? Wert thou driven to distraction
by the fact that he uses saucers as ashtrays and
the fact that when he said he was going to his
mother's for the weekend, he was in fact in Ipswich
with Elsie Maynard and will you, if given half a
chance, cheerfully wring his neck?
MURIEL. I will.
MINISTER. Who taketh this woman away from this
man?
FRANK. I do.
MINISTER. Jot these words with me: 'I take thee
from thy wedded husband.'
FRANK. I take thee from thy wedded husband.
MINISTER. 'To have and to hold, from this day
forth.'
FRANK. To have and to hold, from this day forth.
MINISTER. 'For I am Frank Hodgkiss, the lounge
lizard from accounts.'
FRANK. For I am Frank Hodgkiss, the lounge lizard
from accounts.
MINISTER. 'And the reto I plight thee my troth.'
FRANK. And the reto I plight thee my troth.
MINISTER. Those whom I have put asunder I bet no
man can join together. Dearly beloved, divorce is an
honourable state and is not to be taken in hand
lightly, inadvisedly or wantonly to satisfy men's
carnal lusts, although that's a pretty good reason,
and forasmuch as Dennis and Muriel have
consented to abandon holy wedlock and instead to
pledge their troth to whomsoever tickles their
fancy, I pronounce that they be man and woman
apart and henceforward shall be free to be swingers
and frequent singles' bars that have been approved
by the Archbishop of Canterbury, perhaps dancing
cheek to cheek. Amen.
MURIEL. Amen.
THE BEST OFBBC COMEDY
THE EIGHTIES

EIGHT HILARIOUS 1980s SHOWS
The News Huddlines Alas Smith and Jones
Not the Nine O'Clock News Victoria Wood -
As Seen on TV
Yes, Minister A Bit of Fry and Laurie
Blackadder The Man From Auntie

Entertainment and enlightenment - 1980s comedy produced both in abundance. At one end of the decade Yes, Minister was lifting the lid on the Machiavellian machinations of Whitehall mandarins, at the other Ben Elton was motormouthing off at the abusers of power. Elton also co-wrote the remarkable Blackadder, while contemporaries Fry and Laurie proved equally witty.

The '80s provided women with a welcome seat at comedy's top table - Victoria Wood, a true original, being among the first to prosper. The emphatic success of Not The Nine O'Clock News opened many doors, leading to the long-running Alas Smith and Jones. In terms of longevity, though, few can match The News Huddlines, a good old-fashioned radio comedy with topical one-liners and sketches.

So sit back, put your feet up and enjoy another decade of great comedy.

Mark Lewisohn, Author, Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy
The Best of BBC Comedy

SIDE 1: THE NEWS HUDDLINES 28 November 1991
SIDE 2: NOT THE NINE O'CLOCK NEWS (compilation)

THE NEWS HUDDLINES
With Chris Emmett, Roy Hudd and June Whitfield
Producer: Dirk Maggs

NOT THE NINE O'CLOCK NEWS
With Rowan Atkinson, Griff Rhys Jones, Mel Smith and Pamela Stephenson
Producer: John Lloyd

The brainchild of BBC radio producer John Lloyd and current-affairs expert Sean Hardie, Not the Nine O’Clock News first hit BBC2 on 16 October 1979. The four members of the team were Rowan Atkinson, Chris Langham, Mel Smith and Pamela Stephenson. The second series (with Langham replaced by Griff Rhys Jones) won the Silver Rose at the Montreux Festival and for the next three years the irreverent and innovative sketches made the show one of the most talked about on television.

The show had an open-door policy when it came to scripts, with anyone being able to submit sketches for consideration. The regular team included some of today’s most successful comedy writers: Richard Curtis, Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin, and David Renwick.

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