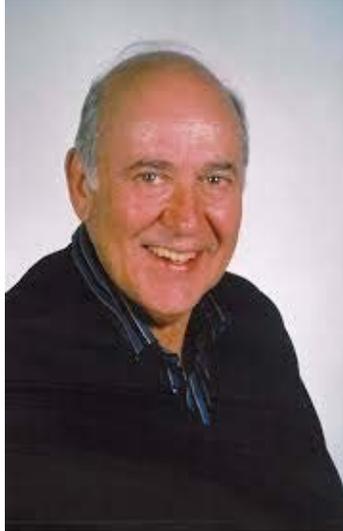


**This interview with
CARL REINER
was conducted by the Library of Congress on
August 19, 2015**



LOC: Why do you think you and Mel Brooks work so well together?

I love to ask questions, and Mel has the ability to answer every one of them in a way that makes me laugh out loud. And another reason we work well together is we're friends, and our wives became friends.

The very first time I ever saw Mel was the day I came to work with Sid Caesar on "Your Show of Shows." Mel didn't work for the show, Max Liebman the producer, didn't like him that much. He felt Mel was too disruptive and noisy. Mel actually worked for Sid who paid him \$50 a week to provide him with jokes.

That first day, Mel was complaining about the problems of being a *Jewish pirate*. I remember his first words: "Oy, I can't afford to set sail. You know what they're charging for sail cloth these days, \$3.79 a yard. At those prices, I can't afford to pillage and rape anymore!"

He really made me laugh.

The following day, after seeing a show called "We, the People," where they recreated the news, I thought that would be a good thing for Mel and I to do. I said to him, "I understand, sir, that you knew Jesus."

And Mel said, "Oh, boy! Thin lad, always wore sandals. He went around with twelve other guys. I owned a candy store and he and his friends never bought anything. He'd always ask for water."

We tickled ourselves and we tickled everybody. And any time there was a lull, we'd get up and do our "2000 Year Old Man" routine. We did it in the office, in friends' living rooms, and it became so popular that we had requests for "command performances" from people like Billy

Rose and Lerner and Lowe. At one of these parties, after seeing our routine, George Burns came up to us and asked, "Is there a record of this? If not you'd better make one or I'll steal it."

Edward G. Robinson told us to make a play out of it, and said "I want to play that 1,000 year-old man." When I told him, "It's the 2,000 Year-Old Man," he said, "I can play any age!"

It was Steve Allen--bless him--who loved to discover and present new comedians, offered us free of charge, his recording studio at World Pacific Jazz. He had no interest in being our partner. He just wanted to get the act recorded. We invited 300 people to the studio, and for two hours, we wailed. From those two hours we trimmed the fat and cut it down to album size.

We were reluctant to release it, as Mel employed a Yiddish accent, which was a staple in vaudeville, but now was persona non grata. We felt our act was only for Jewish people, and non-anti-Semitic Gentiles.

LOC: What does it take to be a good "straight man"?

Having the same interest that the audience would have in hearing unexpected, hilarious answers to simple questions.

LOC: Is there such a thing as "Jewish" humor?

Yes, just as there is black humor, Irish humor, Scottish humor. It always comes from people who have been ostracized, and humor allows them to find something that will relieve them of their pain and suffering. These people who can't fight with their swords fight with their words.

LOC: How important was this album to the development of your career?

At that time, I was pretty well set, as I was doing the Van Dyke show. Mel's career hadn't really started yet. It would be a couple of years before he came up with his brilliant success, "The Producers," which was a prelude to a dozen more boffo films and shows.

LOC: Was there any opposition to releasing the album?

We worried about whether Gentiles would find it funny. At that time, I had an office at Universal Studios and Cary Grant was my neighbor. I gave him our first album. A day or so later, he asked me, "Can I have a dozen? I'm going to England."

"You're taking our record to England?"

"Yes," he said. "You know they do speak English there."

When he returned he said she loved your record.

And I asked, "Who loved it?"

"The Queen Mother," he said. "I played it for her at Buckingham Palace."

It was then I thought, "Well if she liked it, it must be okay! The Queen Mother is the biggest Shiksa in the world!"

LOC: Why do you think that so many years after its release the album still endures?

It's funny. We did this album in *1960*. Many kids come up to us and say they learned the routine and do it at parties. Thanks to the Shout! Factory, all five of our albums are available in a box set.

LOC: Do you have a favorite cut/skit on the album?

They're all my favorite!

LOC: After the initial routine on the album with the 2000 year-old man, Mr. Books adopts some other personas—a folk singer, etc.--why did you choose those occupations for him to play?

I love to laugh and when questions pop into my head, I knew I would hear something that would tickle me. In essence, I was just a surrogate for the audience, who, if they could, would have loved to ask Mel questions.

LOC: What makes Mel Brooks so good as a performer?

He was born with a comic bone and he has a brilliant brain. He is the most well-read man I know. He had a large collection of first editions, and read them all. Mel has a very high IQ--and most importantly, he's a "funster." He *enjoys* making people laugh.

LOC: Was everything on the album completely improvised?

Yes, everything. It seems organic because it was organic.