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Home > Opinion > Comedians rush in where wise men never go



Comedians rush in where wise men never go Scratch a comedian and you will find an angry mind, and there are plenty of examples from the past and present day

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Jerry Lewis and Robert De Niro in The King of Comedy

round.

O 4 min read

was standing in a room filled with, as Mel Brooks once coined it "the great and the near-great," listening to Anthony Rudolph speaking about his collection of paintings by the late great artist Paula Rego. He had spent 26 years as her partner and her model and what he had to say was interesting. Or should have been. In front of him, by which I mean directly in front of him, stood a man gazing at us, the audience with his back to the speaker. He was tall and had long hair, so the effect

ometimes I wonder if I have ADHD, am over entitled or just have an

inflated idea of my own importance. At the Ben Uri Gallery this week I

Afterwards though, perusing the gallery trying to look at paintings, almost entirely hidden from view by the fine wine sipping cognoscenti, I saw him hovering by the stairs and, without thinking, asked him why he had stood so prominently with his back to the speaker.

was almost ghostly and quite distracting, but as I am aware I have an irritable bent

and since no one else seemed bothered by it, I held back my desire to turn him

hear what was being said and showed me the large silver hearing aids behind his ears. "Ground swallow me up," I mentally intoned, but ploughed straight on in by saying;

"Oh thank you for telling me that because I would never have known... I'm so

He smiled benignly and told me that he was very deaf and that was the best way to

sorry..." "No, thank you for asking," he responded.

"You didn't!" she cried, aghast, "Why would you do that? That's appalling, you

didn't..."

I escaped and once outside I told my daughter what had happened;

I mean everyone was thinking it but why did I have to say it? I suppose it is the journalist side of me. I honestly wanted to know.

"Everything is copy," famously said the great writer and humourist, Nora Ephron.

And "Fools rush in" sang the great Nat King Cole. During the filming of DNA Roots

for ITV my dear friend Rula Lenska and I were being driven from Kazimierz Dolny, from whence, we found, came both of our great grandparents, to Krakow. Her great grandfather was a count and mine a cobbler which was sweet since we met and became friends on the cobbles of Corrie.

During the journey she conversed in fluent Polish to the driver, which was noisy but

OK, then the chat got giggly and Rula burst into hearty Polish song. Surreptitiously,

I pressed the WhatsApp to the waiting camera crew in Krakow: "I hope this journey

ends soon or you may find that I have set fire to my co-star" and pressed send without realising that the WhatApp group also contained Rula. By the time we arrived in Krakow, Emma, the assistant was virtually on a life support machine. She theatrically grabbed Rula's phone while she was still in the back of the car, burbling something like; "Oh ...ah ...yes ... sorry ... I just forgot to add ... the ... (high pitched giggle) ... oh silly me ... my mistake – oh there it is..." Rula suspected nothing. Later, I told her, but by then we were already mishpachah.

kidnapped by Robert De Niro's would- be comic, Rupert Pupkin. It was an excoriating performance by Lewis, moody, insular, aloof and probably the nearest he

Which brings me for no particular reason, to Jerry Lewis because we watched

Martin Scorsese's King Of Comedy this week, with Lewis as the talk show host

got to playing himself: Joseph Livitch, the son of a Russian émigré father, vaudevillian Danny and mother Rae Brodsky music arranger and pianist. He was an actor, singer, director, producer, controversialist and humanitarian. I loved him as a kid when he made slapstick films with Dean Martin but saw little of him in the last 50 years. He made 29 films and countless TV shows of his own and guest appearances on others. Although he never actively spoke about his ethnicity,

He was a Jewish Rowan Atkinson long before Mr. Bean emerged. His recordbreaking film, The Bellboy, was entirely silent. He also invented the video monitor which enabled him to act and direct at the same time. It is standard technique now on every film set. He is revered by the French as a serious auteur, Le Roi de Comedie and largely forgotten in his native country.

he was the first performer to make a film about the Holocaust. It was called *The*

Clown who Cried and it was never distributed and is now lost.

Every year he raised millions of dollars doing a one-man Comic Relief for Muscular Dystrophy Association. A yearly 21-hour telethon in the US he raised more than 60 million dollars a year. Master of the broiges, he split from Dean Martin after ten years, from the Telethon after 21 years, and from his wife and six children, whom he subsequently cut out of his will. He was a complicated man.

Scratch a comedian and you will find an angry mind. Anyone lucky enough to have

seen Trevor Griffith's The Comedians or The Last Laugh by Paul Hendy recently, at

the Noel Coward Theatre will testify to that. We have just witnessed Dawn French

making an abject fool of herself by her inane and insulting parody of Israel and the war in Gaza and David Walliams doing a Nazi salute not once but twice on the panel game Would I Lie to You? Olivia Coleman and Harriet Walter have signed the ignorant and ill informed letter accusing Israel of genocide – a letter which somehow fails to mention October 7th.' The constant embarrassment of Miriam Margolyes and all the other, obsessive lunacy surrounding the conflict, swells. These are all famous, wealthy, and perhaps disappointed performers and comedians. Fools, rushing in where angels fear to tread without a thorough and unbiased knowledge of

history? Do we help ourselves? Jewish studio heads famously stayed out of the politics of World War Two even though they were invariably Jewish. Only Charlie Chaplin had the guts to make a film like *The Great Dictator*. Unconfirmed reports list Chaplin as part Romany although the search by the US during the McCarthy years has him down as a Russian Jew whose real name was Israel Thornstein. When asked if he was Jewish Chaplin replied: "I do not have that good fortune." Bless his edible boots.

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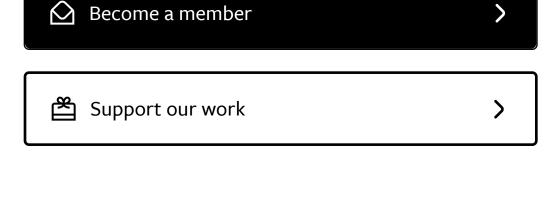
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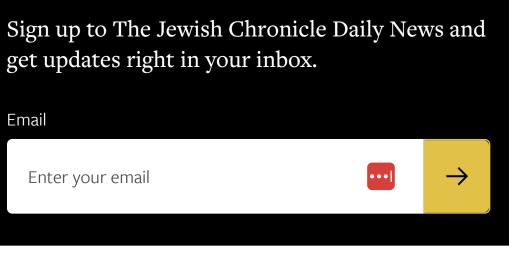


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