

DIRECTOR, SHAUN CHAMBERS REFLECTS ON *DEAD FUNNY*

Dead Funny celebrates the Golden Age of British TV comedy. It reflects on a time when TV comedy had the power to unite the nation. The time when 28-million people gathered around the TV to watch the legendary *Morecambe and Wise Christmas Special*, 20-million of us tuned in for the last episode of John Sullivan's series, *Just Good Friends* and 24-million watched the conclusion of rags to riches sitcom, *To the Manor Born*. If we compare this to sitcoms nowadays we see that even popular shows like *Peter Kay's Car Share* and *Mrs Brown's Boys* are averaging audiences of just 12-million.

The stars too were also cherished and indeed achieved national treasure status: Morecambe and Wise, Sid James, Tony Hancock, Tommy Cooper *et al* were national institutions. *The Benny Hill Show* was consistently attracting viewing figures of 21-million when it reached its peak in 1977. When Benny died in 1992, the new wave of alternative comedy was becoming popular as figures like Ben Elton prevailed, perhaps heralding the end of this Golden Age. Another nail in the coffin of this classic era was brought on by the death of the much loved, Frankie Howerd who died within the same week as Benny Hill.

As playwright Terry Johnson observes, laughter is an emotional response to stress: we see someone slip on a banana skin and we laugh for relief that it wasn't us that slipped but realise that it easily could have been and that tomorrow it might well be!

Dead Funny in many ways is a metaphor for comedy as it is about emotional survival; it is about how we struggle to survive the trauma that life can throw at us and we throw at each other. It is about how laughter makes us cope and how it can both lift and crush us. I suppose when we look back and remember our companions, those we bore, those we were born to or those we chose to spend time with, we often remember most fondly of all, that time when we laughed together.

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