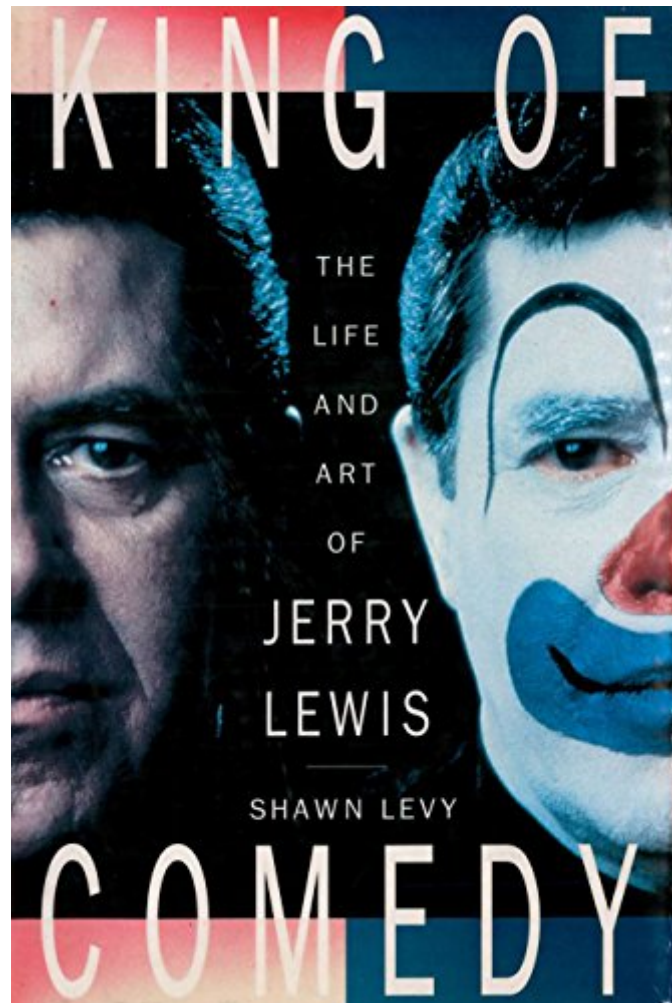


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King Of Comedy: The Life And Art Of Jerry Lewis



Synopsis

Shawn Levy's fascinating biography *King of Comedy* - the product of vast research and interviews with contemporaries, admirers, foes, and even, briefly, Lewis himself - traces the story of a man who defines High American Show Biz. At points along the time line of his career, Lewis has been the highest-paid performer in history in film, on television, and (in 1995!) on Broadway. With partner Dean Martin, he was half of the most successful comedy duo of all time. He was the first director who debuted in talkies to direct himself. He was a direct, acknowledged influence on giants from Woody Allen to Lenny Bruce to David Letterman to Jim Carrey. He is a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor, has raised over \$1 billion in charity, and was once nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. And, since the 1950s, he has been one of the most recognized faces on earth. For almost that long, though, people have argued over what Jerry Lewis means. Is he a talented comedian or a grotesque mimic? A startlingly original director or a pretender to Chaplin's throne? A multifaceted entertainer or a megalomaniacal egoist? A tireless champion of the disabled or a tireless self-promoter who has confused America's charitable impulses with affection for him as a performer?

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Customer Reviews

fast reading-both hilarious and sad

nice

Have always liked Jerry Lewis through his work with MDA. Cannot honestly say I have ever been a fan of his films. I also have read over the years of his relationship with his son Gary, and of course his divorce from wife, Patti. I am old enough to seeing his divorce spread all over the pages of the scandal sheets. And I remember when the ties were severed with MDA. This book was very refreshing as it was even handed. The author did not paint Jerry Lewis as all good or all bad. The pages referring to his partnership with Dean Martin were fascinating as were his dealings with producer, Hal Wallis. I came away from reading this book that like many, Jerry Lewis is flawed when it comes to his personal and professional relationships. His parents were no Ward and June Cleaver, but then again, many of us did not have Ward and June tuck us in at night either. After reading this book I realized that I would not like to sit down and have a cup of coffee with Jerry. I would like to talk more with his ex-wife as well as his son, Gary. It also made me want to read a biography about Dean Martin. A very good, in depth biography.

Still slogging through, a bit of a tome, but interesting. I was broken up when he and Dean split...just a kid; they were popular for sure! I need to get back to it and finish the story. I knew he was pretty innovative in movie making and the book gives the details. I was always struck by the buffoon becoming the articulate intellectual and how it did not seem to ever match or fit; the rest of the book may tell me.

I enjoyed this book. One must understand that being a star is not always what it is cracked up to be. It's tough at the top and even harder when fame fades.

I have read several books about Jerry Lewis but I believe that Shawn Levy has produced the most in-depth work about Lewis. He is able to provide a fluid explanation to many unanswered questions about the career of Jerry Lewis. He provides a detailed structured background into the creation, rise

and fall of Martin and Lewis, which allows the reader to grasp why the act ruptured at the height of its success. Levy is the first writer to really provide concrete answers about the breakup, since both Martin and Lewis have always talked around the issue. Levy also provides a back stage look at the solo career of Jerry Lewis allowing the reader to see why Lewis' post Martin film career, which started with great success was over by 1970. Levy included several lines of an Al Capp, creator of Lil Abner, opinion piece that analyzed Jerry's career and it captured exactly what made the comedy of Jerry Lewis hard to watch after his split with Dean Martin. Capp felt that Martin's presence tempered the shtick of Lewis and made it watchable. Martin restrained Lewis enough that made the wildness of Lewis tasteful and the movies made after the split lacked that restraint thus making the Lewis movies of the 1960s painful to watch because there was no one to tell Lewis when to stop filming a grown man making an embarrassing fool of himself. Though, I do not like the comedy of Jerry Lewis, I have always been impressed by personal interviews where it becomes apparent that Lewis is a gracious person, who has always credited Martin for the success of their act, whether he totally believes it or not. Jerry Lewis has always been more impressive to me when he performed or acted as an adult rather than a child. Personally, Lewis did his best work in the movie "King of Comedy" and the "Wise Guy" television series, which were dramatic roles.

Jerry Lewis' films represent to me the best and the worst of that genre: at times he's able to evoke the most joyous emanations from the human voice box, in individual scenes, projecting through brilliant technique and artistic temperment some of the most beautiful, balletic images ever captured in that medium; at other times, he seems to trash the entire industry by indulging himself in some of the most laborious and unfunny bits one can imagine - the "what was that?", "why didn't he just..." response from the fans inevitable. On the small screen, he could host and perform in greatly successful fund-raisers, singing, dancing, ad-libbing at a level most comedians could only dream of; and at the same telethon, drop his pants while a diva sings. This book effectively brings out such artistic (and personal) highs and lows. For this historians, Levy writes of events I had long ago assumed never could have taken place, i.e. a 1958 and 1961 stage reunion with Dean Martin. But through all the twists and turns, the wonderment and the disappointment, Jerry emerges as the natural successor to Chaplin and Laurel. At the end of that charity event with the the embarrassing boxer display interlude, he sings "You'll Never Walk Alone" with enough emotion and grace to temporarily make fans of his most carping critics.

Whether you love Jerry Lewis or hate him, you won't be able to stop reading this definitive

biography that corrects years and years of misinformation and paints a brutally honest picture of the entertainer. It's certainly a warts-and-all bio, filled with unflattering information, but its leveled with a real appreciation for Lewis's work as a comedian, actor and director. This biography gets beneath the skin and gives you a real insight to Lewis. He's not a monster but he's also not someone you'd want to spend a lot of time with off the pages of this excellent biography.

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