Bob Newhart

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Presents

Bob Newhart

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8:00 p.m.

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BOB NEHWART... is perhaps the only man in the world who can talk to himself on the phone without people looking at him strangely. He of the world-famous one-way phone conversations is also a household name to generations, thanks to his two extremely successful, long-running television series. And he is picking up new fans every day, from youngsters to college students, who watch him nightly on “Nick At Nite” and who attend his comedy concerts in large numbers.

Bob’s last television project was the Showtime film “The Sports Pages,” a dark comedy directed by Richard Benjamin that was an anthology of tales taken from the world of sports. Bob starred opposite Kelsey Grammer in the tale “How Doc Waddems Finally Broke A 100,” the story of a man (Bob) on trial for the murder of his rule quoting, by-the-book golf partner (Kelsey Grammer). Even though the film was a comedy, the role represented quite a departure for Newhart. In addition to his starring role in “The Sports Pages,” Bob was profiled in an unprecedented two-hour A&E Biography on his life and career in January 2001.

Bob still performs in comedy concerts, opting to continue live performances before sellout audiences all over the country and the world. With routines created by Bob from today’s newspapers in his unique style, and some of his early classic routines (which audiences demand he perform), he is garnering critical raves and pleasing audiences at the same time. In 1995 Bob entered another arena in the world of comedy, with the release of his very first video, filmed at a live performance, where an appreciative audience got to see him perform his greatest one-man telephone comedy classics, including “Abe Lincoln’s PR Man,” “The Nervous Driving Instructor,” “Sir Walter Raleigh Explains Tobacco,” “King Kong and the New Security Guard,” and many more. Nick at Nite Records has also released the audio portion of the video as a CD. It is available in record stores everywhere. In the feature film world he co-starred in Paramount’s smash hit comedy, “In and Out,” for producer Scott Rudin and director Frank Oz, with Kevin Kline, Tom Selleck, Debbie Reynolds, Matt Dillon and Wilford Brimley.

His career began when, after Army service, Bob worked as an accountant and an advertising copywriter. He was also performing in a theatrical stock company (his real love) in his hometown, Chicago. During this time, Bob and a friend at the ad agency, Ed Gallagher, used to amuse themselves by making long, antic phone calls to each other, which they recorded as audition tapes for what Bob calls “a poor man’s Bob & Ray syndicated radio show.” When Gallagher decided to drop out and opted, instead, for an advertising career, Bob simply “picked up the slack,” as he puts it, and thus was born his famous one-man, two-way telephone conversations.

In 1959, he was introduced by a Chicago DJ to the head of talent at Warner Bros. Records, who immediately signed him to a contract. Thus was born “The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart,” which became the first comedy album to go to #1 on the charts. He was an immediate sellout in comedy concerts, in nightclubs and on theatre stages all over America. Seven more albums followed, each extremely successful, selling in the millions.

In fact, his longevity record for holding the #1 and #2 chart positions simultaneously was not broken until 1995 (by Guns ‘n Roses), though it was set 35 years earlier. When Billboard issued their 100 Most Popular Albums of the past 40 years, Bob was not only the only comedian on the list, but he came in at #20, besting some of the greatest recording talents, like the Beatles, Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, Elvis Presley and many more.

So the television networks, always in need of the largest possible audiences, looked to Bob Newhart to supply them. His first series was a variety show, and it won the coveted Peabody Award and an Emmy. But could he act? Until Bob's first comedy series, comedians had been invited on television either to do their old nightclub routines on variety shows like “The Ed Sullivan Show,” or, if given their own series, like Milton Berle and Sid Caesar, to do the routines they had done from burlesque days onward. Sketch comedy was the only game at that time. Of course the answer was a resounding yes! “The Bob Newhart Show” debuted in 1972 on CBS, marking the beginning of a six-year run. It co-starred Suzanne Pleshette as Bob’s wife, Emily, and one of the finest casts of feature players ever on television, according to most critics/historians. But by 1978, Bob felt it was time to move on to other projects.

By now, his skyrocketing popularity carried him into motion pictures, where he was cast in a number of films with some of the biggest stars in Hollywood: “Hell Is For Heroes” with Steve McQueen; “On A Clear Day You Can See Forever” with Barbara Streisand; “Catch 22” with Jon Voight; “Little Miss Marker” with Walter Matthau; “Hot Millions” with Peter Ustinov; “Cold Turkey” with Dick Van Dyke; “Thursday’s Game” with Gene Wilder and “First Family” with Gilda Radner.

But he never gave up live, standup performances, his first love as well as his first show business profession. He didn’t have much time with the rigors of a weekly series and film roles during the hiatus months, though he continued his comedy work whenever he could work it into a demanding schedule. When he took the first series off the air, it seemed a good time to tour again, which he did for nearly four years, before television got him back into a new series with a new format.
In 1982, he returned to CBS with "Newhart," playing a New York, do-it-yourself book author turned Vermont innkeeper. Again surrounded by an exceptional ensemble of quirky characters (yet another trademark of Bob Newhart’s television career), the series went on to enormous success for eight seasons, ending against the wishes of the network, but only because Bob felt it was better to put the show to rest while it was at its peak. Television fans remember the final episode of “Newhart,” in which he “awoke” in his old bedroom from “The Bob Newhart Show,” with his “wife,” Suzanne Pleshette, next to him, when he proclaimed he had the strangest dream! Critics and fans alike have called this the single best and most surprising episode in television comedy history, including Entertainment Weekly Magazine, which put it at the top of its “Best All-Time Episodes” list.

Among Bob’s favorite honors are his selection as Grand Marshall of the 102nd Tournament of Roses Parade, joining 101 other world-famous leaders, stars, politicians and other world notables. Two years ago, he was introduced into the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame and on Tuesday, October 29th, Bob will be presented The Mark Twain Prize for American Humor at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. The evening will be taped as a one-hour television special to air on Wednesday, November 13th @ 9:00pm on all PBS Stations. The special, entitled “On Stage At The Kennedy Center: The Mark Twain Prize,” will feature many celebrity presenters paying homage to Bob. Now in it’s fifth year, the Mark Twain Prize celebrates those who have offered significant contributions to our nation through humor. About his selection for the Mark Twain Prize, Mr. Newhart commented, “I am totally humbled by being chosen as the 2002 recipient of the Kennedy Center’s Mark Twain Prize [for American Humor]. Mark Twain once said, ‘It is strange the way the ignorant and inexperienced so often and so undeservedly succeed when the informed and the experienced fail,’ which is certainly true in this case.”

Bob and his wife, Virginia, live in Bel Air, California. They have four children, Rob, Tim, Jennifer and Courtney. An avid golfer, he spends as much time as he can on the links. He has managed to make time for his family, his sports pastime and his professional work by limiting his concert dates, doing an occasional film and then returning home to resume his personal life.