

# FUNNY BONES

Peter Chelsom UK/ USA 1995  
128 mins (15)

'Some people just are funny, others learn funny. You either have or you don't have funny bones.'



## Cast

Tommy Fawkes	Oliver Platt
George Fawkes	Jerry Lewis
Jack Parker	Lee Evans
Katie Parker	Leslie Caron
Jim Minty	Richard Griffiths
Dolly Hopkins	Oliver Reed
Thomas Parker	George Carl
Bruno Parker	Freddie Davies
Director	Peter Chelsom
Screenplay	Peter Chelsom Peter Flannery
Director of Photography	Eduardo Serra
Music	John Altman
Producers	Peter Chelsom Simon Fields

I have a confession - I like Lee Evans. This may well explain why I so enjoyed this film when it first came out. However, whilst he was the main attraction as far as I was concerned, as the film progressed I found myself recognising an increasing number of faces, of which more latter.

I have seen Lee Evans on stage twice, and a more visibly energetic performer would be hard to imagine - within minutes the perspiration has darkened his suit noticeably. He himself admits to being a bundle of energy and his comedy style has been described as reminiscent of Norman Wisdom, someone else I have admired and seen live on stage - the comparison is understandable.

I was aware that Lee had made a movie and wondered as to the type of film with which he would be involved, as his stage act is very innovative and derives a lot from mime and other physical forms of comedy. Any concerns I had were quickly allayed as I found myself chuckling aloud moments into the film.

This is the third film from Peter Chelsom and is the second to be shown by the Club (*Hear My Song* being the previous film). He is a director who appears to make highly personal movies that are also intended for the mainstream audience. This film has various strands running through it; some work, whilst others fail. At least here is a British film with more ideas than it knew what to do with.

Apparently the film was originally longer than its current 128 minutes, and in the cutting some of the threads have been clearly lost. The central point of the film is that "You either have or you don't have funny bones" which some critics have picked up upon and debated. In their opinion Tommy Cooper or Harpo Marx had IT, unlike George Burns or Bob Monkhouse.

In this case, Tommy (Oliver Platt), the son of a famous comedian (*the* Jerry Lewis - what a piece of casting for a small British film), is a funny bone free zone. He suffers a humiliating 'death' on his big opening night in Las Vegas and escapes to Blackpool, where he grew up. There he seeks both new material and perhaps a new beginning. In addition to finding a half-brother, he also finds a dark secret about his father.





The director celebrates music hall days in one sequence in which Tommy gets Blackpool buzzing with news of an American in town, with money to burn for fresh ideas or acts. The subsequent auditions is one of the delights of the film, which was enhanced when the credits rolled at the end of the film and I realised that most of the acts were genuine(!). How can one not fail to grin at characters called *Backward Talking Man*; *Paper Tearer*; *Poodle Woman*; *Plastic Cup Smasher* and perhaps best of all *Bastard Son of Louis XIV* (I kid you not).

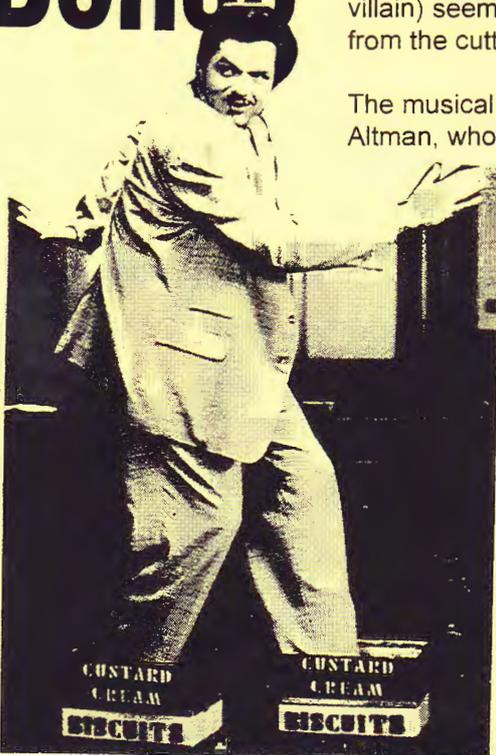
One of the actors I recognised, immediately transported me back to my childhood as I'm sure he will to those of you over 30 - Freddie "Parrot Face" Davies. He was a mainstay of children's television, where he was equipped with an outsize bowler hat, a lisp that produced a tidal wave of spittle and a recurring interest in budgerigars! Thinking about those black and white days, at least in our house, shows how times have changed on "Yoof TV". Seeing him again left me with a warm glow and made me realise how long ago my childhood was (soon I'll be commenting on the appearance of the police).

One criticism of the film is that it remains such a male narrative, endorsing the unfortunately widespread view that women are not funny. The choice of Leslie Caron as Jack's mother is another example of the excellent casting in the film, but despite a neatly performed song and a tongue-in-cheek circus routine she is given little to do. Hers is just about the only female role of consequence.

Jerry Lewis is perfectly cast as the famous American comedian - he could almost be living the role in real life. However, the sub-plot surrounding Oliver Reed as Dolly (an improbably camp villain) seems tacked onto the film to provide some respite - this section must have suffered from the cutting process.

The musical extracts and songs used in the film were arranged and orchestrated by John Altman, whom I am assured is *Nick Cotton* in *Eastenders*.

# Funny Bones



An ideal example of the adroit skills Evans has honed on the stand-up comedy circuit is shown in his big scene in the film, where he needs to convince Tommy that talk of his ability is not false. His solo act consists of miming to spliced-together sound extracts that are played through a radio to give the illusion of rapidly switching channels. This particular scene instantly reminded me of Evans's stage act and his celebration of Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Evans is a genuine talent in my opinion - he writes excellent music as those of you who may have viewed his Christmas show (on which Tony Bennett guest starred) will have heard. When I have seen him, he also appeared to be sincerely grateful that the audience had come to see him - his "thank you" at the end of each show appeared most genuine (or perhaps he has an innate acting skill as well!). He also most definitely has *funny bones*.

I know that this is a film which will not be everyone's cup of tea - when I saw it there were one or two in the audience who sat stoneyfaced throughout. This is unsurprising given that it is a film which asks questions about comedy, whilst keeping the gags flowing. It's a dark film with a light touch. If you will *a tower de force* (ouch - but one joke at Blackpool's expense must be allowed!).

## Room At The Top (6/2/97)

35 reaction sheets completed giving an average score of

### Comments:

I can see that it was a new slant in film making.

Were men at 25 really like that?

Simone Signoret really is "all woman".

An interesting insight into the period.

Think I'll take up smoking again!!

Nice piece of Sunday p.m. social historic grim in the North type of thing.

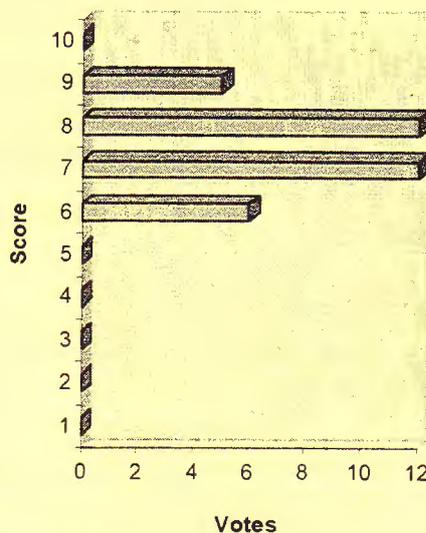
Surprised how powerful the sex element comes across - can imagine the effect on release.

Enjoyed the first part better than the second. L. Harvey accent became more irritating as time went on.

Moral - be yourself, happiness can't be bought. Still, if not more, relevant to the 90's.

Enjoyed what the special guest had to say.

P.S. I forgot to mention in the notes that John Braine, author of Room At The Top, was a resident of Woking



Votes

### WNCC 17th Season - Members' Reactions

Title (No of Reactions)	Average Score
Remains Of The Day (53)	8.4
The Usual Suspects (46)	6.8
Once Were Warriors (43)	6.6
Anchors Aweigh (22)	7.2
The Round-Up (18)	5.7
Shawshank Redemption (48)	8.5
It Happened One Night (35)	7.4
Il Postino (53)	8.1
Room At The Top (35)	7.5

*Helen Sayers.*

### Spring National Viewing Sessions

The details for the 2 days of screenings at the National Film Theatre, South Bank, London have been received:

Dates Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 March 1997

Cost	Adult	Student rate (no other concession)
Full weekend	£35	£27
Saturday only	£25	£20
Sunday only	£20	£15

The weekend provides a very good opportunity of seeing forthcoming attractions and is especially helpful in assisting Film Societies in selecting films for their next season.

Initial titles are expected to be announced in February. You will of course be kept informed. Any member wishing to book should speak to our Treasurer, Neville Ledsome.

### VIVIEN LEIGH - AN ILLUSTRATED TALK

On Thursday 6 March at 2.30pm only in the Myers Studio Theatre at the Epsom Playhouse, Paul Webb is giving an illustrated talk on Vivien Leigh, one of the most beautiful actresses of this century. Paul Webb is a theatre historian based at the National Portrait Gallery.

Tickets cost £3.75 and can be bought from the Playhouse Box Office 01372 742555/742227

### CHANGE OF DATE - CARRY ON STEAM

This celebration of trains on film has moved to the Rhoda McGaw theatre on Saturday 12 April. One of the highlights will be the evening showing of the classic Will Hay film *Oh! Mr. Porter*, which will be having a diamond jubilee screening. Further details nearer the time.

(Notes are produced for each film shown by WNCC - the writer receives various background papers from Ian Sowerby and these assist in producing our highly regarded notes. If you are interested in writing any film notes or indeed an item for the newsletter, see Ian Sowerby).

REACTIONS

NEWS AND VIEWS

NEWS AND VIEWS

at Beaufort Primary School, Kirkland Avenue, Goldsworth Park, Woking.

**\* SPRING BARGAIN SALE \***

**3 PAIRS OF SHORTS FREE TO EVERY WNCC MEMBER**

(£3.00 to non-members)



**UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE**

Jean Renoir. France. 1936. 45m sub-titles.  
A group of Parisians take a Sunday trip to the countryside. Here love intervenes. One of the most charming French films ever made.

Oscar winning Franz Kafka's *It's A Wonderful Life* stars Richard E Grant (Pret-A-Porter, Bram Stoker's Dracula) as Kafka, agonising over the first sentence of what was to be his masterpiece, *Metamorphosis*. "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning he found himself transformed into a gigantic...?" Kafka looks around his garret and spies the fruitbowl "...a banana, perhaps?"

This is not the real world, but the world of the joke, the myth, the fairytale. Funny, but also strange and dark. Definitely a winning combination!



Academy Award for Best Short Live Action (1994), US Academy of Motions Pictures 1995

**IN CUBA THEY'RE STILL DANCING**

Dir: Richard Downes  
GB 1993 36 mins

Agnes McLean is a life-long socialist and afficianado of Latin Dancing. This film follows her from her dance class in Glasgow's Pollock Centre to the famous Tropicana in Havana.

**THE MAKING OF WOKING**

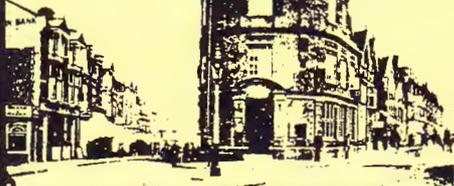
**THE MAKING OF WOKING**  
From Common Land to Commuter Town

A Film By  
WOKING FILM MAKERS &  
MAYFORD & WOKING DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

Story by Ian Wakeford  
Directed by John Myall

Completed in 1986. Running time: 15 minutes.

In 1983 WOKING FILM MAKERS and MAYFORD AND WOKING DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY collaborated on the production of their first short documentary film on the history of Woking. The film was conceived as an introduction to the town's history and why it came to be where it is today.



**LATE EDITION**

Dir: Peter Lord/David Sproxton  
GB 1983

**16mm col 5 mins**

More sly lipsynch from Aardman. Life behind the scenes at a right-on Bristol

newspa-  
per -  
deadlines.  
dogma  
and lots  
of  
droning. A  
perfect  
parody.

**EARLY BIRD**

Dir: Peter Lord/ David Sproxton  
GB 1983

**16mm col 5 mins**

What really happens behind the scenes at an early morning radio show? And when do sleepy DJs get to eat their toast and jam? Made as part of the Lip Synch series, matching 'on location' recorded sound with inventive plasticine and model animation.



*Please note that this is an amended programme due to the non-availability of 'A Great Day In Harlem'.*

Performance Ends 10.40pm (approx.)

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