

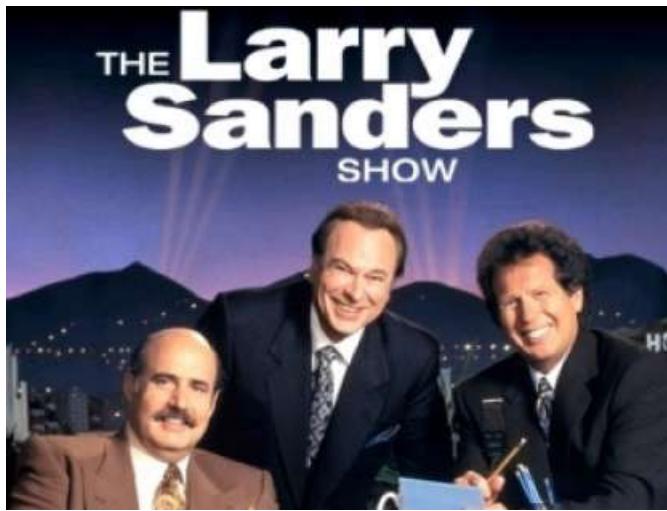
# The Grouse House Gazette

Thoughts and Observations on Music, Nature, and Politics from the Catskill Mountains

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## MY LOVE FOR... AND SALUTE TO... THE GREAT GARY SHANDLING

HE CREATED THE GREATEST SITCOM OF ALL TIME.. WHICH SAVED MY SANITY... FREQUENTLY... OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS



Gary Shandling's recent unexpected death hit me very hard.

He was one of my all-time favorite comedians and a truly undervalued genius if there ever was one.

Between 1992 and 1998... with his "The Larry Sanders Show"... Shandling created a depth and dimension to the "situation comedy" that no one had ever achieved before... or will likely do again.

The show was simply the GREATEST "situation comedy" EVER!

I was lucky enough to fall in love with the show from the very start.

I have been a fan of HBO since the beginnings of cable and have always given anything that they have presented a chance.

"The Larry Sanders Show" was one of HBO's first "episodic" shows... and the concept of a "cable television show" wouldn't be considered a mass success until six and seven years later with "Sex and the City" and "The Sopranos".

Shandling was well ahead of his time and HBO didn't even OWN "The Larry Sanders Show" as they were not yet fully committed to the concept of "episodic" television. That would soon change.

This is why today "The Larry Sanders Show" is not on HBO "GO".

But THAT will be changing soon with a deal struck just before Shandling's death. Watch for it soon on HBO GO - No date yet.

The Larry Sanders Show began three years after "Seinfeld" but the two shows ended at roughly the same time.

Both shows were terrific but Seinfeld had FAR GREATER commercial success in these earlier days of cable.

It is interesting to me that although you see a lot of development and changes if you watch the early seasons of "Seinfeld"... with "The Larry Sanders Show" the characters seemed to have begun fully formed from the very first episode. There are NO bad years. This could have been because HBO "green lighted" the full first season rather than financing ONE pilot (as is the "norm" in traditional television). So they got to write out the entire first season and "nail down" the character's personalities completely early on.

And when you compare the finale episodes from "Seinfeld" and "The Larry Sanders Show"... Shandling takes the prize.

"The Larry Sanders Show" finale was the perfect ending to six years of artistic brilliance. Building in the final season to the "fake" show's "fake" cancellation due to network politics.

Shandling had already been a very successful "guest host" for Johnny Carson's Tonight Show for years... when he had to make a choice between hosting his OWN late night talk show that was being offered to him at the time... OR taking on the much more outrageous concept of a "fake" talk show that existed within the "real" show... which was primarily about the office dynamics backstage during the production of the "fake" talk show. An absolutely BRILLIANT concept that has influenced multiple shows for twenty years... like "30 Rock" in particular.

He chose the "fake" show as it seemed the most challenging.

But the "fake" show had VERY REAL guests that were interviewed before live audiences... usually improvised as if they were "real" interviews... and then edited to the brief bits that made it onto the final "real" show for HBO.

"Larry's" guests included MANY Hollywood A Listers.

(See the end of this article for a PARTIAL list of the guests!).

Shandling even went to the trouble of shooting all of the "talk show" parts with video cameras... giving it a polished and slightly TOO real look... AND THEN... he had all of the "back stage" and "real life" segments shot on FILM... which gave it a grainy but oddly more "realistic" feel to it. As an example; the original "Law & Order" was shot on film... which gives it a reality that most of television lacks.

Of course... all of this made for very expensive production costs... as they were frequently running two sets of camera crews simultaneously on the same sets.

But beyond the unprecedeted guest stars... the show's core cast was also amazing... and there were multiple points of "discovery" for several of the actors and actresses that went on to much larger successful careers.



From left: Tambor, Jerry Seinfeld and Shandling on a 1998 episode of 'The Larry Sanders Show.'

Shandling certainly was an excellent judge of talent.

#### **There has never been an ensemble cast quite like this one.**

Rip Torn gave the performance of his lifetime as Larry's producer... always there to protect him but never above kicking Larry in the ass when he needed it.

Before The Larry Sanders Show... Torn was a comedian... and he LIED at his audition and told Shandling that he had been on an episode of "Gunsmoke". He is certainly a comic genius in his delivery and timing as he delivers many of comedy history's best "one liners"... and I STILL laugh EVERY TIME I watch it again.

Jeffrey Tambor has said that he had to beg for the part of Larry's "side kick" Hank Kingsley... as he felt he total "got" the character.

And Tambor ended up possibly being the funniest character on the entire show... as he was cast as certainly the biggest loser to ever "bottom-feed" in Hollywood. The show led to multiple future television successes for Tambor. (*Check out the "Hank Sex Tapes" show.*)

It was also a career starter for Janeane Garofalo, Mary Lynn Rajskum (24), Jeremy Piven (Entourage), Bob Odenkirk (Breaking Bad / Better Call Saul), Sarah Silverman, and several others.

#### **HOW GARY SHANDLING "SAVED" ME OVER THE YEARS...**

For the past twenty years... like everyone else... my life has had it's "Ups and Downs". I've certainly led a complex life.

And whenever I was down or in a "dark" place... I knew that I could always escape within a "Larry-thon"... by "binge watching" ALL EIGHTY-NINE shows in order!

I was years ahead of the world on "binge watching"!

For years the show was unavailable in any format.

But then at one point... a year or so after it ended... HBO ran the series in chronological order on their "HBO2" channel.

So... I set up a VHS-VCR (remember THOSE?) to record five shows on one tape a week. Then using two machines... I crudely edited FIVE tapes at slow speed of all 89 shows.

The video quality was horrible... but the dialogue still came through perfectly fine.... and I treasured these VHS tapes for MANY years.

I once flew on a plane back from London sitting next to an HBO "big shot" and I BEGGED her to release the show on video... which is when I learned that HBO didn't actually own the show.

At one point someone released a "best of" two disc set... which was actually CRUEL to those wanting the whole series... but there honestly didn't seem to be ANY demand. Which I found appalling!

And then finally in 2010... the people at SHOUT FACTORY released EVERYTHING as a DVD box! AND GOD BLESS THEM!

At last... I had my Larry Sanders Shows preserved FOREVER!

Shout Factory also released Shandling's first show called appropriately "It's Gary Shandling's Show"... which removed televisions famous "fourth wall" and was filmed on a set recreating Shandling's own house. It was ALSO a "ground breaking" show and ALSO much ahead of its time.

#### **Thank you Gary Shandling...**

For keeping me laughing all these years... and still doing so today.

#### **Gilbert Hetherwick**

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#### **SOME OF THE SHOW'S GUEST STARS...**

#### **And they ALL played themselves....**

*Jason Alexander, Tim Allen, Jennifer Aniston, Tom Arnold, Alec Baldwin, Roseanne Barr (to whom Larry proposes), Drew Barrymore, Warren Beatty, Beck, Jim Belushi, The Butthole Surfers, Sandra Bernhard, Clint Black, Micheal Bolton (where Larry tells him his haircut is "gay"), Terry Bradshaw, Carol Burnett, T-bone Burnett, Jim Carrey (who plays himself being a total asshole to Larry), Drew Carey, Dana Carvey, Chevy Chase, Shawn Colvin, Tim Conway, Elvis Costello, Courteney Cox, Norm Crosby, Billy Crystal, Ellen DeGeneres (who sleeps with Larry), Laura Dern (who dates Larry), Angie Dickinson, Illeana Douglas, David Duchovny (who has an unexplainable physical attraction to Larry), Peter Falk, Chris Farley, Farrah Fawcett, Sally Field, Harvey Fierstein, Bridget Fonda, George Foreman, Al Franken, Gina Gerson, Jeff Goldblum, Bobcat Goldthwait, Phil Harman, Hugh Hefner, Helen Hunt, Chris Isaak, Greg Kinnear, Larry King, Bruno Kirby (who ALWAYS gets "bumped"), Kris Kristofferson, k.d. Lang, Jay Leno, David Letterman, Jon Lovitz, Rob Lowe, Julianna Margulies, Heidi Klum, Norm MacDonald, Bill Maher, Ed McMahon, Martin Mull, Kevin Nealon, Rosie O'Donnell, Ryan O'Neal, Donnie Osmond, Sarah Jessica Parker, Mandy Patinkin, Sean Penn, Bernadette Peters, Tom Petty, Regis Philbin, Porno for Pyros, Victoria Principal, Charles Nelson Reilly, Carl & Rob Reiner, Burt Reynolds, Michael Richards, Don Rickles, John Ritter, Mimi Rogers, Winona Ryder, Pat Sajak, Adam Sandler, Jerry Seinfeld (where part of the show takes place on the Seinfeld set... brilliant!), Robin Williams, and Sharon Stone (who dates Larry... though he can't "get it up" without his own show on in the background!).*

**For a weekend of relaxation check out my one suite B&B "The Grouse House Penthouse"...** great view... hot tub... total privacy... Ranked "One of the top 7 B&Bs in America for wildlife viewing".

**And check out my latest music at [Hetherwick-Music.com](http://Hetherwick-Music.com) !**

**Or my little "jewel" of a recording studio at [Grouse-House.com](http://Grouse-House.com)**

(PS: I may get DRAGGED screaming into another POLITICAL Gazette soon! GH)