



Mark Russell

Master of Political Satire

Whenever Mark Russell is down in the dumps, he opens the newspaper and immediately cheers up. Practically everything he sees strikes him as funny. Some days, he says, the jokes jump off the pages and write themselves.

Russell plays off the day's headlines, performing stand-up comedy while accompanying himself on the piano. He spent 30 years on public television as host of the *Mark Russell Comedy Specials*, where it was consistently among the top-rated shows on that network. With impeccable timing, twinkling eyes and shock-of-recognition insights into American politics, he draws merriment from the pomposity of public life.

A native of Buffalo, New York, Mark Russell's first heroes were entertainers. Radio comedians like Fred Allen and Jack Benny had audiences screaming for satire. It seems that everyone was making fun of self-important people. Kenny Delmar was Senator Claghorn. Groucho Marx was Dr. Quackenbush. Bugs Bunny was Toscanini. Charlie Chaplin was Hitler.

Comic anarchy. Making fun of authority figures. Russell was inspired. He went out and earned the reputation of class clown, beginning in the fourth grade and maintained right through high school. What the faculty thought can only be imagined. But years later, when a scholarship at Canisius High School was endowed in his name, it was awarded to the student who showed "great wisdom and wit, but not necessarily in that order."

Like a lot of guys in those days, Mark Russell readily admits that he dodged the draft. He did it by joining the Marine Corps. The Few. The Proud. The Funny.

After serving his full hitch, he found himself in the smoke-filled bars of Washington, DC, singing his funny songs. When he got a job in a Capitol Hill bar the first thing he thought was "I've started at the bottom but I've managed to work my way down." He began knowing little about politics, but was an immediate hit because he could find humor in anything.

Around the time the New Frontier was invading Washington, Mark Russell invaded the Shoreham Hotel for a risky two-week gig. It lasted for twenty years. The Marquee Lounge became "the place" where politicians would come to hear Russell's jokes about what they had done that day.

Today his syndicated column is enjoyed all over America, as are his CDs, tapes and videos. Mark Russell is on the road most of the year performing at colleges, conventions and in theaters. He still lives in Washington, DC with his wife, Alison. He is the father of three and the grandfather of seven.

And his answer to the frequently asked question, "Do you have any writers?" is "Oh, yes...I have 535 writers. One hundred in the Senate and 435 in the House of Representatives."