



Art says Gleason "never cramped my style."

The Private World of **ART CARNEY**

(Continued)

that are entirely unlike all the others he has played. That, he believes, is the only way Art Carney the actor can make the most of his talents, and keep on improving and growing.

As for Art Carney the man, he is ill-at-ease with new acquaintances and finds it difficult to relax and enjoy himself in any group that isn't composed of friends and relations.

Perhaps one reason for this is that he doesn't drink any more. There was a time when drinking was a problem. But for quite a while he has been a total abstainer.

Three years ago, however, when he was on Broadway in "The Rope Dancers," he had to struggle for a brief interval to keep from backsliding.

When I asked him what he thought of that production, in which he gave a superb portrayal of an eloquent, ne'er-do-well Irish husband and father who was a boozier, he replied:

"To me the role was depressing."

In fact, he found it so disturbing he turned down the role in the TV version.

The son of a newspaperman and public-relations director, Art was born Nov. 4, 1918. He was christened Arthur William Matthew Carney, but only "Art" stuck.

The youngest of six sons, Art was always afraid of getting lost in the shuffle. He yearned to be somebody. He soon discovered that a sure-fire way to attract attention was by imitating other people. For pulling stunts in classrooms at high school in Mount Vernon, he was repeatedly sent to the principal's office.

As he grew older, Art's everlasting imitations became an irritation at home, too. So his brothers abated the nuisance by getting him engagements at fraternal lodges and service clubs. At a Rotarian banquet, Horace Heidt saw his act and signed him up for \$50 a week, taking him on the road when he was 18 to imitate Al Smith, Lionel Barrymore, Edward G. Robinson, and Ned Sparks. At the end of a three-year tour with Heidt, he toiled through a dismal stretch, making a meagre living in night clubs and vaudeville.

"I just didn't have any self-confidence," Art told me. "Not until I broke into radio, doing daytime serials."

In 1942, he won the Peabody Award for his portrayal in "The Man Behind the Gun," and his skill as an imitator began to pay off. CBS hired him to impersonate the voices of Roosevelt, Churchill, Eisenhower, Marshall, and other public figures in "Report to the Nation." He was just beginning to feel secure when the war interrupted his career.

We got around to his war experience when I commented on his muscular shoulders and asked if he exercised.

"Not much," he replied. "Just a little bowling, now and then. My shoulders got built up from lifting myself in and out of a wheel chair."



His "Ed Norton" was a TV favorite.



As TV performer, Art played in "Harvey."

That was after he was wounded in France in July, 1944. An infantryman, he was setting up a machine gun on his first day in action when a fragment of shrapnel ripped into his thigh. The injury left one leg a bit shorter than the other. When tired from standing up too long, he limps slightly.

Following his discharge, he returned to CBS and before he realized it he had become the comedian's comedian. All the top funny-men, Fred Allen, Milton Berle, Bert Lahr, Herb Shriner, and many others wanted him for their "second banana," their supporting comic.

The way he got teamed up with Jackie Gleason was like many other turning points in his life. He didn't mean to, it just happened. Jackie needed somebody to play a tipsy photographer in one of his skits and hired Art sight unseen, on the recommendation of two script-writers. Before long, Art Carney was an indispensable member of the cast of "The Honeymooners" and a name to be reckoned with.

At the peak of that situation comedy's popularity, Gleason wanted to transfer the show from New York to Hollywood. But he changed his mind because of Art who had an escape clause in his contract and refused to uproot his family.

JACKIE has always given Art due credit for the original success of "The Honeymooners," which is now being rerun from tapes. Once when Adolphe Menjou said to Jackie: "While Art was with you, he made himself," Jackie replied: "You're wrong, he made me."

The feeling is mutual. Says Art: "I like the guy. We never had a serious difference the whole time I was with him. One reason I played Ed Norton for six years was the way Jackie encouraged me. He never cramped my style. He gave me good lines. The more laughs I got, the better he liked it."

His agreement with Gleason allowed him to appear on competing networks once every 13 weeks. So he began to reach out for more substantial, more subtle, more gratifying roles. Even before "The Honeymooners" went off the air in 1957, he was making his name mean something to a large new audience—mean something, too, to critics and producers.

Today he is one of the "hottest properties" in show business. His creative energy seems to be inexhaustible. Every new characterization of his is essentially different.

As for next season, he's thinking about doing a Broadway musical, and there is talk about him and Jackie Gleason teaming up again on TV. Also under consideration is a TV version of "Come Back, Little Sheba," with Art and Shirley Booth costarring and William Inge, the playwright, making the adaptation and directing.

But whatever the future brings, one thing is certain: Art never again has to worry about being somebody in his own right. He's proved it; now all he has to do is live it.

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