

## DVD Review: Nostalgia Greater Than Laughs in ‘Carol’s Favorites’

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CHICAGO – Say or sing “I’m so glad we had this time together...” and persons of a certain generation will immediately respond, “...just to have a laugh or sing a song.” The theme to the “The Carol Burnett Show” is indelibly etched in show business memory, and Time Life Video is taking advantage of those days with the DVD release of “The Carol Burnett Show: Carol’s Favorites.”



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

This is a supposed compilation of Carol Burnett’s favorites episodes, in their entirety, as if we were settling down to watch an episode so many Saturday nights ago. This is advantageous to get a feel for how the show was presented in that era of television, but it also demands patience through a lot of throwaway gags and songs – remember when Vicki Lawrence had a chart topping singing career? Remember driving a Ford Frick? This is a different kind of TV sketch comedy, one that “Saturday Night Live” strangled in the night. While it’s a kick seeing familiar guest stars in their younger days (Steve Martin, Betty White, Joan Rivers), none-too-familiar viewers might scratch their heads over Ken Berry, Roddy McDowell and Jim Nabors. In essence, “Carol’s Favorites” deliver more nostalgia than pure laughs, which is why potential buyers would go for it anyway.



Rat Butler (Harvey Korman) and Starlett (Carol Burnett) in ‘The Carol Burnett Show: Carol’s Favorites’

*Photo credit: Time Life*

Ranging from shows dated 1972 through 1978 – which interestingly only covers seasons 6 through 11 in the history of the show, are the first 5 seasons lost? – Burnett had a variety format that featured parodies, running sketches (Mama’s Family), musical numbers and old fashion schmaltz. The in-house cast didn’t change that much, regulars Lyle Waggoner and Harvey Korman eventually left the show, only to be replaced successfully (Tim Conway for Waggoner) and unsuccessfully (Dick Van Dyke for Korman). Even though Conway joined as a regular

only for seasons 8-11, he is acknowledged above Waggoner, who was with the cast for the first seven seasons. Conway is a profligate scene stealer, so in rewriting the history of the show it makes sense. The Dick Van Dyke experiment (he only lasted half of Season 11) is gratefully not covered, without his name on the show's title it was proved disastrous to bring him in. There was only one star, and that was Ms. Burnett.

The DVD is designed to skip around, which is both frustrating and desirable. Frustrating in that it's almost impossible to watch a whole show without getting a itchy remote finger and desirable because, why not? If you like Carol's Q&A before the show, then watch all of them in row. That's what modern DVD technology is about, and who could have envisioned that in 1975? The choice is for the viewer, and most likely they'll want to skip to their favorites.

The Michael Jackson episode is certainly fascinating, as The Jackson Five perform (or lip sync) "Dancing Machine," a precursor to the disco era. Then the J5 participate in a painful school sketch, which makes the appearance all the more weird. Steve Martin is both dragged down to Carol's thudding overlong sketch level in the "As the Stomach Turns" soap opera parody (a take-off on "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" with Martin portraying – I kid you not – Richard Dryface). He then redeems himself with a classic post modern Martin bit called "Stand-up Comedy for Dogs." Truly bizarre and inspired.



The most famous sketch, one that is held up as the Carol Burnett ultimate, is "Went With the Wind," a "Gone with the Wind" take-off. With character names like Starlett, Brashly and Rat Butler, it plays more like a quickie Mad Magazine spoof than anything substantial. The reveal for Carol Burnett is the dress made of drapes, which would be known to anyone over a "certain age." It's just a reminder that memories (and the reputation the show gained from those memories) are better than the real deal. "Carol's Favorites" is full of these kind of reminders, and the comic stylings of Ken Berry.

The "Collector's Edition" six DVD set is nicely packaged, but the video extras are surprisingly spare. There is a documentary about the origins of the show that is only talking heads, and looked like it was spliced in a high school video class. Burnett deservedly is one of the heads on the "Mount Rushmore" of TV woman comedians. Why not hire the best documentarians to put together a decent history? There is one nice clip of her on "The Garry Moore Show" way back in 1962, otherwise it's just the shows and interview fillers. It would have been interesting to have an alternate track where they filled the station breaks with actual commercials from the era. They could have made the money to create a better documentary just from the old sponsors that would have lined up for something like that.

Such are the small quibbles of life. Nostalgia is what we make of it. If something disappoints just because it doesn't stand up to the standards of today, it's not Carol Burnett's fault. It's best to sing along again to "I'm so glad we had this time together..."

*"The Carol Burnett Show: Carol's Favorites" was released on DVD by Time Life Video on September 25th. Featuring Carol Burnett, Harvey Korman, Vicki Lawrence, Lyle Waggoner, Tim Conway and Guest Stars. Created by Joe Hamilton and Carol Burnett.*





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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [18]

Senior Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [17]

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