

Interviews: Barbara Feldon, Bernie Kopell 'Get Smart' at The Hollywood Show

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CHICAGO – The TV show “Get Smart,” which had its original run on the NBC network from 1965-1970, was an oddball classic. Created by Mel Brooks and Buck Henry, the sitcom was a goofy satire on cold war politics of the 1960s, with a hapless operative named Maxwell Smart (Don Adams) working for the CONTROL agency, spying against a foreign menace called KAOS. Barbara Feldon (Agent 99) and Bernie Kopell (Sigfried) were part of the supporting cast.

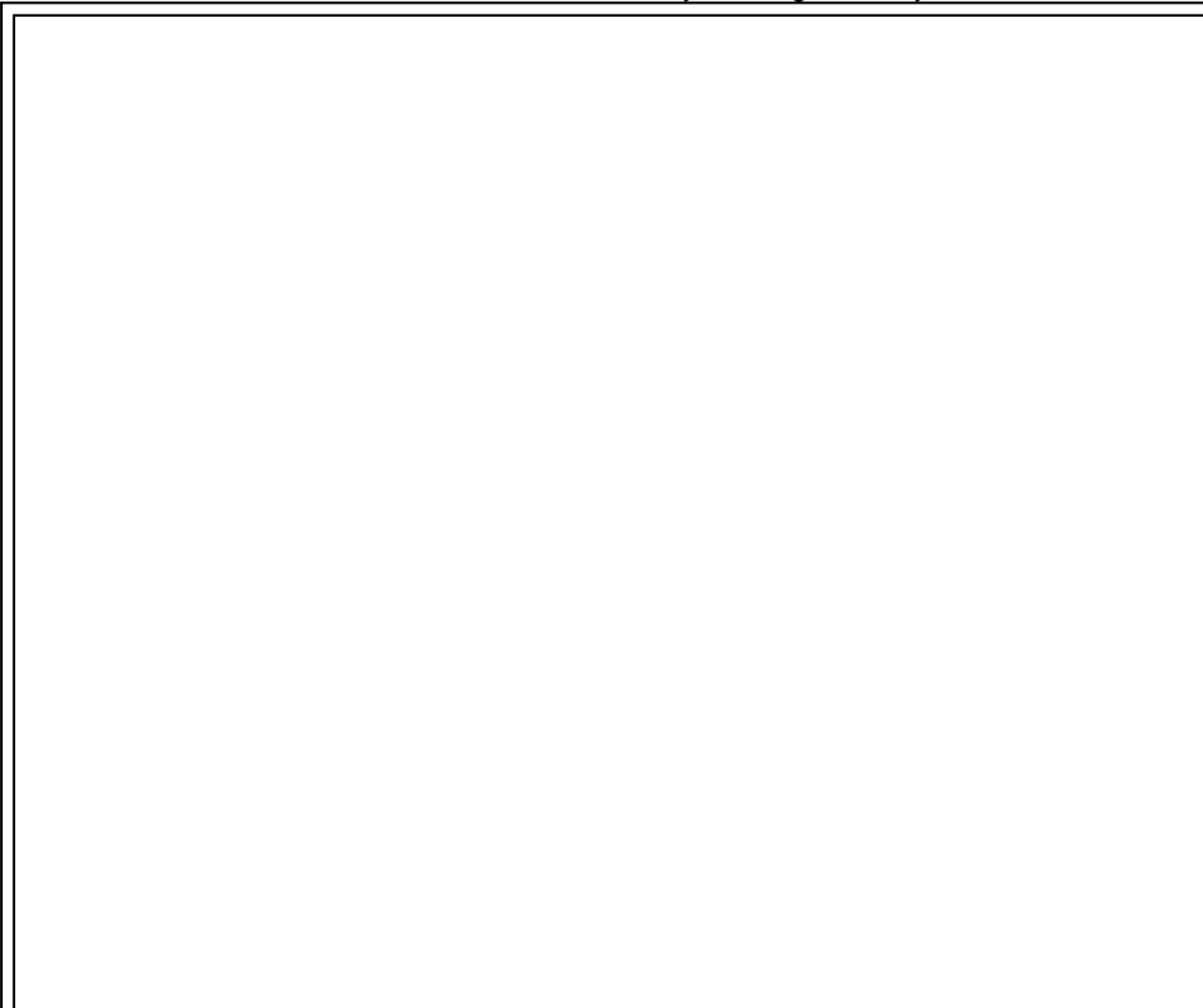
Feldon and Kopell were also part of The Hollywood Show, a two day gathering of favorite TV and movie stars to meet fans and sign autographs. The next show in Chicagoland will be at the Hilton Rosemont on September 7th and 8th, 2013 (details below the article). The Show will have over 30 celebrities in attendance, including Barbara Eden and Bill Daily (“I Dream of Jeannie”); Tippi Hedren (“The Birds”); Barry Livingston, Stanley Livingston and Tina Cole (“My Three Sons”); plus the cast members of the film classic “Jesus Christ Superstar” (Ted Neeley, Barry Dennen, Yvonne Elliman and Josh Mostel).

HollywoodChicago.com got the opportunity to talk with these 1960s TV legends – Bernie Kopell also was “Doc” on “The Love Boat” – and got some insight on “Get Smart,” one of the most popular and catchphrase worthy (“Missed it by that much!”) shows during the era.



Barbara Feldon, Agent 99 on “Get Smart”

Interestingly enough, Barbara Feldon got her big break in a popular 1960s “Mad Men” style commercial, portraying a seductress on a animal print rug hawking a hair pomade for men. This led to supporting parts on TV dramas like “East Side, West Side,” which led to her being cast opposite Don Adams on “Get Smart” as Agent 99. Adams and Feldon became an “it” TV couple, eventually marrying on the show. It was never revealed what the real name of “99” was, and Feldon also had to slouch in her scenes as she was taller than Adams. She worked steadily after “Get Smart” went off the air in 1970, eventually slowing down by the end of the 1990s.





Barbara Feldon at 'The Hollywood Show'
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: You won the famous game show 'The 64,000 Question' answering questions about Shakespeare. How did having all that knowledge about that particular subject enrich your life, and how has that knowledge deepened over the years?

Barbara Feldon: The knowledge required for 'The \$64,000 Question' was factual – names, dates, characters and so forth. But in studying all of that, I had to read the plays as well. [laughs] There is something about the study of Shakespeare, that the older you get, the deeper you can go into those works. It has never worn out for me, I still can find shocks, surprises and thrills in the way he thought and his understanding of human nature. The whole subject has enriched my life enormously.

HollywoodChicago.com: You worked as a model in your early show business career and broke out doing a commercial...

Feldon: That commercial didn't really get me that many jobs. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What then was the path to 'Get Smart'?

Feldon: I was doing some television acting, and Colleen Dewhurst, who was married to George C. Scott at the time, got me on his show ['East Side, West Side']. The producer of that show remembered me when he also produced 'Get Smart.' It was about being in the right place at the right time.

HollywoodChicago.com: You had such an effortless chemistry with the great Don Adams. What part of your friendship did you both connect to so strongly that made the chemistry work?



Barbara Feldon and Don Adams in 'Get Smart'
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Feldon: There is no way to define that, and there is no way to know it until you get two actors together. It is about that chemistry, putting two elements together that separately you can't see working together, but from the very first time we set our minds to each other we were those characters. It simply was the right mix.

HollywoodChicago.com: The Michael Ritchie film 'Smile,' in which you had a prominent role, is such an underrated classic. What kind of directing style did Ritchie have, and why do you think he was so successful in telling the truth about American culture and lifestyle?

Feldon: He had both a great affection for America, with its foibles and silliness, and a satirical eye. It was a combination of those two things, along with his intelligence, vision, sense of humor and pure thoughtfulness for this country. It was all those combinations that was Michael Ritchie.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, what event or person compelled you to write the book, 'Living Alone and Loving It,' and what type of writing do you engage in right now?

Feldon: A friend of mine asked me to do a seminar as a favor, but I didn't really have a topic. Then I remembered I'd been talking to women who were living alone, but experiencing half a life because of that circumstance. I'd lived alone for a number of years, and loved it, and felt that the other women just didn't know how to do it. So I gave that seminar, and at the end of it I felt I had a book. A literary agent agreed with me, and that's how I came to write it.

HollywoodChicago.com: I'm sure Don Adams was smiling from somewhere when you used his catchphrase in the title.

Feldon: Oh yes, ...'and Loving It!'



Bernie Kopell, Sigfried on "Get Smart, Doc on "The Love Boat"

Bernie Kopell put the "character" in character actor, as he became known in the 1960s as an expert in doing dialects and foreigner types. After a stint on the "Jack Benny Program" in 1962 and '63, he bounced around with guest spots on many popular TV series including "The Lucy Show," "The Dick Van Dyke Show" and "Green Acres." He was on 14 episodes of "Get Smart" as KAOS agent Sigfried, and did a couple years on Marlo Thomas's "That Girl" as Jerry Bauman. His longest character run was as Doc on "The Love Boat," appearing on all 250 episodes from 1977-87. He continues to make character role appearances, most recently as a judge on the reboot of "Arrested Development."



'Doc' Bernie Kopell at 'The Hollywood Show'
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: One of your significant early roles was working on 'The Jack Benny Program.' What did you learn by observing a top drawer comedian like Mr. Benny and do you have any story that defines your experience doing that show?

Bernie Kopell: I did learn something from Jack Benny, he gave me one good piece of advice. He told me, [doing a Benny impression] 'now don't talk until the audience finishes laughing.' He was a great gentleman, and had none of that actor's ego that some people have.

HollywoodChicago.com: You were on so many classic TV show sets besides the ones you were a regular on. Which role on which series where you weren't a regular gives you the biggest kick when you see it in reruns?

Kopell: It still is 'Get Smart,' even though it was a recurring character. I was doing 'That Girl' at the same time, without a contract on either show. I did that for five years, even doing both shows in one week sometimes.

HollywoodChicago.com: So how were you paid?

Kopell: A la carte, one at a time. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: You worked on the groundbreaking show 'That Girl.' In working on the show, did the cast agree with Marlo Thomas on the direction of her character Ann, since she insisted that her and Donald would never get married in the show, and what did you think of her ahead-of-its-time feminist views?



Bernie Kopell as Sigfried in 'Get Smart'
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Kopell: She was the first independent woman on TV, preceding Mary Tyler Moore, so it was pretty ballsy in that sense. Before Marlo, women would mostly say, 'more coffee, honey' on TV shows. They were passive and differential. 'That Girl' was groundbreaking.

HollywoodChicago.com: Who was the most interesting guest star on The Love Boat that you got an opportunity to meet and why?

Kopell: The most interesting to me was the gorgeous Juliet Prowse. We had scenes in bed together, and I was a wreck, because she'd been with Frank Sinatra and that level of guy. My feelings were both intimidation and attraction. She wore my pajama top in the scene, I wore the bottoms, I guess we had a pretty good night.

HollywoodChicago.com: It was 'The Love Boat,' after all.

Kopell: Right before the scene she told me that when Charles Boyer had a scene like we were about to do, he would say to his co-star [affecting a Boyer accent], 'Sweetheart, if possibly I get aroused during this scene, forgive me please. Also If I don't get aroused, forgive me please.' [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What can you tell me about the Captain, Gavin MacLeod, that the rest the world doesn't know?

Kopell: There really is nothing to tell. He's a good guy, a great friend, and we had fun together.

"The Hollywood Show" takes place September 7th and 8th, 2013, at the Hilton Rosemont/Chicago O'Hare, 5550 N. River Road, Rosemont, Illinois. [Click here](#) [18] for details, ticket purchasing information and a list of celebrity appearances.



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