

Entertainment News: 'Mr. Warmth' Don Rickles Dies at 90

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 7, 2017 - 9:24am

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LOS ANGELES – With the flourish of trumpets in “The Bullfighter’s Song,” a pugnacious man would strut on stage and launch a volley of hilarious insults on some unsuspecting targets. That act was Don Rickles, whose show business nicknames included “The King of Zing,” “The Merchant of Venom” and the magnificently ironic “Mr. Warmth.” Rickles died in Los Angeles on April 6th, 2017. He was 90.

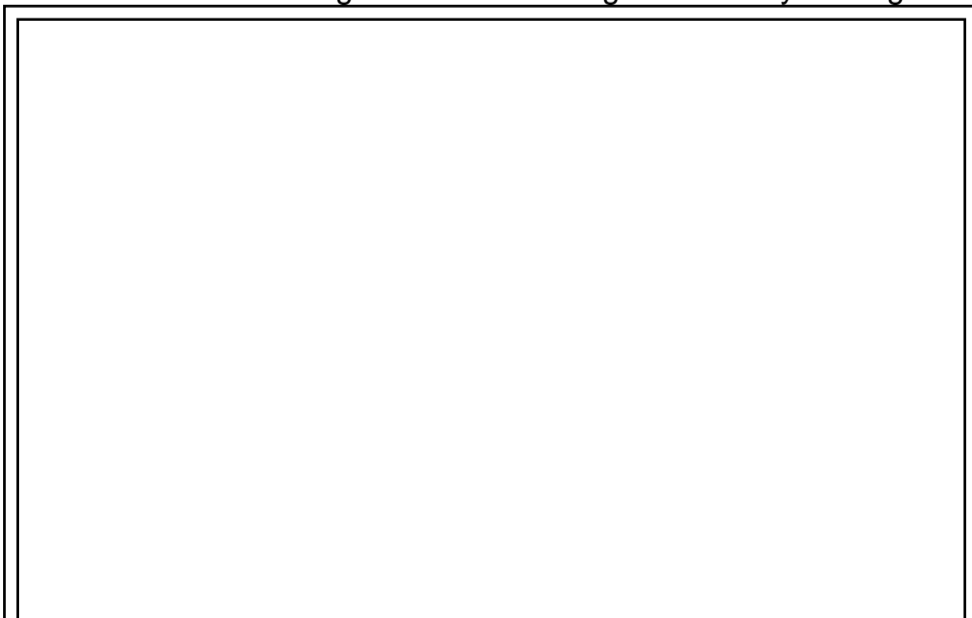
In his early career, Rickles was a throwback to the cocktail and burlesque joints of the 1950s and ‘60s, where a burgeoning stand up comic would do anything to engage the audience and keep a gig. With a quick wit and rat-a-tat delivery, Rickles developed a persona that would keep him working virtually all the way to the end. He went from the “Rat Pack” era, through comedy roasts of the 1970s, to the voice of Mr. Potato Head in the “Toy Story” series, and never lost his sharp edge and zest for life.

Donald Jay Rickles was born in Queens, New York, and after graduating high school enlisted in the U.S. Navy during World War II. After the war, he became a door-to-door salesman, but also had the acting bug since high school. He enrolled in the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, but had trouble finding roles afterward. He began his career as a stand-up comic in the early 1950s, and it was through a suggestion from a strip club owner that he should “insult the customers.” The act was born, and was characterized by his most famous zinger to any unruly customer, “you hockey puck”!

The breakthrough in his career was due to Frank Sinatra. Rickles was working in Miami Beach, when Sinatra came into the small club where the comic was working his magic. Seeing the popular singer, Rickles remarked, “Make yourself at home, Frank, hit somebody.” Sinatra roared with laughter, and later encouraged other stars to stop by and see the young Don, which led to a long standing gig in Las Vegas during the early 1960s.

Frank Sinatra also played a part in one of Rickles’ greatest gags. Trying to impress a date, Mr. Warmth approached Mr. S. in a restaurant where they were both eating, and asked Sinatra to stop by his table and greet him as if they were close friends. Sinatra complied, going up to the couple and saying, “Don! How the hell are you?” To which Rickles replied loudly, “Not now Frank! Can’t you see I’m with somebody?”

While he performed his act in better nightclubs, he also pursued his acting career, making an auspicious film debut with Clark Gable and Burt Lancaster in the the 1958 war drama “Run Silent, Run Deep.” In the next decade, his persona was also in demand in the Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello “Beach Party” movies. During the 1960s, he would pop up on TV shows as diverse as “The Munsters,” “Gilligan’s Island” “Get Smart!” and “Run for Your Life.” He had a revival of sorts in films during the 1990s, doing a character turn in Martin Scorsese’s “Casino” and introducing himself to a new generation by voicing Mr. Potato Head in the “Toy Story” series.





Mr. Potato Head of 'Toy Story'
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

But his main stage would always be his stand-up insult comic act, played to perfection on "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson," where he first appeared in 1965. He became one of Johnny Carson's favorite guests, and his appearances took on the stuff of legends. He also often guest hosted on the show, and in one of the most memorable moments broke Carson's prized cigarette box. When Johnny returned and noticed, he took a camera onto the set of Rickles' sitcom at the time, "CPO Sharkey." The hilariously organic clip was repeated several times on "The Tonight Show" anniversary specials.

Don Rickles was married for 52 years to Barbara Sklar, and she survives him, as well as his daughter Mindy and two grandchildren (his son Larry passed away in 2011). He died of kidney failure in his home in Beverly Hills, California.

Because of his long life, Rickles was a quote machine. Regarding his style, "When you stand alone and sell yourself, you can't please everyone. But when you're different, you can last." On retirement, "Why should I retire? I'm like a fighter. The bell rings and you come out and fight." And finally on the great demise... "Once in a while, when I'm alone, I think about my age. I think, How many more years do I have on this earth? But I can't really conceive of dying. Somehow, in my head, I don't think I'll die. I know that everybody dies, of course. I just think that it'll never come to me. It's crazy, but there it is."

Source material for this article is from Wikipedia and the LATimes.com. Don Rickles, 1926-2017



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