

Entertainment News: Monty Pythoner Terry Jones Dies at 77

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LONDON – Co-founding one of the most influential comedy troupes in history just wasn't enough for Terry Jones, of "Monty Python's Flying Circus." He also had to become one of the foremost amateur medieval history scholars in the world, among his many achievements as author, director and comic sketch creator. Jones passed away in London on January 21st, 2020. He was 77.

Terrence Graham Parry "Terry" Jones was born in Colwyn Bay on the north coast of Wales in England. He graduated from St Edmund Hall, a constituent college of Oxford University, where he met future writing partner Michael Palin. He broke into British television in 1967 along with Palin in the show "Twice a Fortnight," worked with Eric Idle in "Do Not Adjust Your Set," and wrote alongside Graham Chapman John Cleese, Idle and Palin (all soon-to-be Pythoners) on "The Frost Report."



'She's a Witch!' Terry Jones and Connie Booth in 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

In 1969, along with animator Terry Gilliam, Chapman, Cleese, Idle, Palin and Jones debuted "Monty Python's Flying Circus" on the British Broadcast Company (BBC). The subsequent 45 episodes over five years would revolutionize comedy, and it ignited a sensation when the series was aired on PBS in America, before "Saturday Night Live" debuted in 1975. Next were the movies – which he directed and co-directed – "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (1975), "Life of Brian" (1979, sole director) and "Monty Python's The Meaning of Life" (1983) following

in succession. He wasn't involved with "Spamalot," the musical stage adaptation of "Grail," but gave it his blessing.

Jones continued his association with Monty Python over the years, as the group did less together and more separate projects. He directed films outside of Python, including "Erik the Viking" (1989) and "The Wind in the Willows" (1996). He had 19 children's books published, and continued his interest in medieval history by writing books on the subject and hosting two television series ("Medieval Lives" and "Barbarians"). In 2016, he received a diagnosis of aphasia (related to dementia), and eventually succumbed to the neurological disease.

In 2009, Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com fulfilled a lifelong dream of talking to a member of the Monty Python troupe, when he interviewed Terry Jones, in association with an appearance he made in Chicago to introduce (what else?) "Monty Python and the Holy Grail." The full interview is on PAGE TWO.

HollywoodChicago.com: According to all production accounts, the filming of the Holy Grail was chaotic, dirty and depressive at times. Did you have a good laugh when the film became a success, then a cult classic, then a big beautiful Broadway baby?

Terry Jones: [Laughs] It was scary making the film. After the first day's filming, I went around to everyone and said 'don't panic', because we'd never made a movie before and we'd never directed ourselves. Early in the process, we were up this mountainside in Scotland. We were doing the first shot and Graham [Chapman, who played King Arthur] was shaking. We didn't know why, but it turned out he was trying to quit drinking and was going 'cold turkey'. So he had the shakes.

And when first shot of that day took place the camera suddenly sheared its gears. The cameraman opened the camera, and all the bits just fell out. That was the only camera we had that could do sound, so Terry [Gilliam, the co-director] just figured out what we could do with a mute camera.

It turned out we were doing 'the gorge of eternal peril' scene, but nobody would go over the rickety bridge. So we had to walk around the gorge of eternal peril for an hour and a half to shoot on the other side. We didn't get much done that day, with only a five and a half week shooting schedule.

HollywoodChicago.com: Is the function of a writing partner, as practiced with the great Michael Palin, simply to make each other laugh? Or is it more?

Jones: Essentially you have to make each other laugh. That's the key thing. Mike and I started writing together, but eventually we gave that up. I'd write at my place and he'd write at his and then we'd meet and read out what we had. It was really like tag team writing.

We still had an input to each sketch, but just we didn't do it at the same time. Examples are the Spanish Inquisition sketch and 'Every Sperm is Sacred' from 'The Meaning of Life', Mike started them and I added my bit.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did World War II, as it affected Britain, consequently affect your generation of post war children, and how do you think it manifested itself into the evolution of the brand of humor that the Python's created?

Jones: Well, that question certainly gets the mind working. I grew up austere, and didn't meet my father until I was 4-1/2 years old. I remember it to this day, because he was stationed during the war in India and didn't come back until well after it was over. I grew up too with an anti-authority factor. The Labor Party put in a sweeping socialist agenda and I felt a change in the air, with the old guard being challenged. In the 1960s, we did feel we were going to organize a better world.

HollywoodChicago.com: The Pythons are often compared to The Beatles when it comes to the revolutionary change they brought their particular brand of art and the divergent personalities they both had. Was there ever a time within the Python universe that you felt like the Beatles in 1970?

Jones: Not really. We always got on, even though we had our share of fights and feuds. In a way, we actually get along too well now, which is why we can't write anything together any more, because we're too polite and like each other too much [laughs].

HollywoodChicago.com: David Frost was recently in the film news with the movie 'Frost/Nixon.' What memories do you have working with him?

Jones: Mike and I worked with David Frost on 'The Frost Report', working on CDMs – which means continuing developing monologues – we'd supply jokes for that. Frost wanted to produce the Python shows initially and had John Cleese under contract with his company. John didn't want him to produce it, we didn't see it that way either, we wanted the BBC to produce it. So John said 'he can sue me if he likes' – and I think that's what happened.

HollywoodChicago.com: My favorite character of yours is the Straight man in the Wink-Wink Nudge Nudge sketch. What is your favorite Python character that you played?

Jones: I suppose I would say the waitress in the 'Spam' sketch and the harassed housewife in 'Every Sperm is Sacred' from 'Meaning of Life'.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've performed in one of the most famous comedy troupes in show business history, you've directed highly regarded films, and are by description a writer, medieval historian, poet, purveyor of newspaper editorials and a man who is not afraid to take his clothes off on film. What is the encore for this heroic life?

Jones: Well, currently I'm in Kalamazoo, Michigan [laughs], attending the world's largest academic medieval conference and in three hours time I'm going to talk about the dating of John Gower's Confessio Amantis. Which is actually very interesting. I've been lucky enough from the films and TV shows to have just enough income coming where I can do things that don't necessarily make money. Like coming to

Kalamazoo.

HollywoodChicago.com: Which sketches in 'Holy Grail' did you and Michael Palin write?

Jones: It's hard to remember. The whole concept started with something Mike had written, with Patsy and the coconuts. Did we write the swallow stuff? I can't remember.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you want to tell the audience at the screening on Saturday that you've never told anybody about the filming of Holy Grail?

Jones: I hope I can think of something, and I'm sure it will be a revelation.

HollywoodChicago.com: Care to comment on this statement regarding my experience with watching Monty Python as a kid – 'If it wasn't for Monty Python I never would have understood the revolution beyond my small town Indiana roots...'

Jones: I'm flabbergasted.

Sources for the this article are from NewYorkTimes.com. Terry Jones, Wink-wink, nudge-nudge, say no more squire, 1942-2020



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