Its been said that analyzing comedy is a bit like dissecting a frog: you arrive at a greater understanding of the frog but the frog does tend to die in the process. The purpose of Gerald Nachmans Seriously Funny: The Rebel Comedians of the 1950s and 1960s is not to provide a laugh riot of his subjects best punch lines, but rather to explore their lives, careers, and influence. Nachmans scope is impressive. He provides detailed biographies not only of household names Sid Caesar, Lenny Bruce, Bob Newhart, and Woody Allen but also comics like Jean Shepherd, Shelley Berman, and Will Jordan whose legacies have far outpaced their name recognition. Nachman has done his research; the book profiles 26 comedians, each in exhaustive detail, and no fan of this era will feel cheated at the end of its 768 pages. There are plenty of entertaining show biz anecdotes (Sid Caesar throwing a lit cigar at young writer Mel Brooks, Bill Cosby punching out Tommy Smothers) along with tales of the darker sides of Mort Sahl, Jonathan Winters, and others whose private lives were far less amusing than their stage acts. But what makes Seriously Funny so compelling, and its dopsy title at least partially forgivable, is the authors meticulous attention to each comedians imprint on the landscape of comedy itself. And while the jokes cited often seem a bit stale and obvious, it bears noting that they were revolutionary when these comedians first made them. --John Moe

My Personal Review:
After reading this book, and RAISED ON RADIO I'm convinced... Nachman is a brilliant chronicaller of generations, passionate and on such a mission his enthusiasm gushes through with each Peabody Award waiting to happen phrase whether or not you share his enthusiasm. - - Like RAISED ON RADIO, the book is neither definitive nor wishy-washy either. The chapters simply paint portraits of the people. In fact, the book goes a bit DEEPER into the subject manner than RAISED ON RADIO though not too
deep. Further, though Nachman did interview subjects and did research, a lot of the information isn't exactly new (atleast if you're a nerdish comedy album collector and already into what the book is about.) - - And although yes, sometimes he goes on and on to make a point, especially in the way he breaks down the personalities of the comics he analyzes, I have to say, Nachman's writing is so delightful its forgivable (whether or not some of the chapters could have been cut in half.) Also what I like about this book is the choice of comedians go well beyond the obvious and really make you think... recognizing not just the Lenny Bruce's and Mort Sahls, but radio and TV comics that paved the way... (Bob and Ray, Ernie Kovacs and Steve Allen included !)

All in all, this is a great book presented through the mind of a brilliant columnist... and yes NACHMAN definitely is a columnist... a master storyteller who can schpiel by the column inch and hold your attention all the way. The only danger of reading this book is that after each chapter you want to go out and get the CDs... but with so many comedians covered, that's a lot of bread !

Though I happen to be a fan of the topics covered in this and RAISED ON RADIO, I have to say, whatever Nachman decides to write about next, I'm fair game for it !

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