

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

New Orleans Is from Mars, Women Are from Venus

One would think that it wouldn't be too difficult to tell the difference between the London Avenue Canal and the canals of Mars, but (if the observers were Abbott and Costello) there was no noticeable difference. In 1953, in the film "Abbott and Costello Go To Mars", the boys accidentally launch a rocket to Mars but the trajectory lands them near New Orleans on Mardi Gras - and not on the Red Planet. Of course, they think they're on Mars anyway. A bank robber and his partner force the comic duo back on board the rocket ship where they take off and actually land on the planet Venus, populated and ruled entirely by women.



In the best-selling 1992 book "Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus", John Gray explored the different communication styles and emotions of the sexes. He observed that, the way men and women have difficulties interpreting each other, they seem to be from different planets. According to Gray, a woman relieves stress by talking about it. This "Venusian" language to a man comes off as either an accusation or request for a solution. "Martians", or men, don't bring up problems unless they want a solution. Women basically want to share the problem, be listened to and acknowledged. Men make the mistake of jumping in with a solution before their partner is finished.



Bud and Lou with Venusian Queen Allura, played by Mari Blanchard

Abbott and Costello always interrupted before their partner was finished speaking. Imagine Bud and Lou's disordered discourse with Venusian Queen Allura, played by top bathing suit model Mari Blanchard. Back then in the 50s, there was just as much a lack of understanding of the sexes as there is today. And no (as lost as they both were), Lou did not ask Bud: "Who's on First and Coliseum?"

This movie does present a universal truth. Regardless of their planet of origin, men are usually reluctant to ask directions.



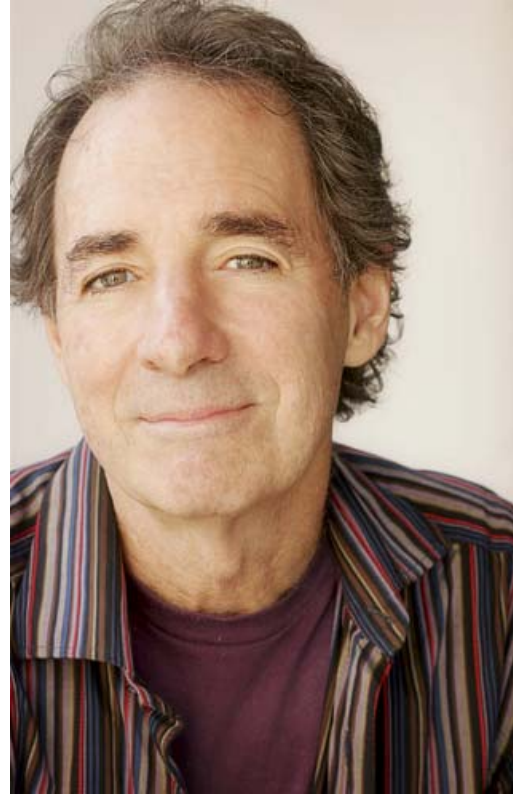
Doubloons are from Venus



The Venus Gardens Building on Oretha Castle Haley Blvd., previously The Venice Gardens Building on Dryades Street: "Venus" was a local pronunciation of "Venice"

Interestingly, this wacky movie was the first acting break for a seven-year-old boy from Los Angeles, Harry Shearer. As a child actor he was the voice of Jack Benny as a child, appeared in the movie "The Robe" and played in the pilot for "Leave It to Beaver". Actor, writer, satirist, radio show host, musician and the regular voice of more than a dozen "Simpsons" characters (like Monty Burns, Principal Skinner, Reverend Lovejoy and Ned Flanders), Harry also shone in the mockumentaries

"This Is Spinal Tap" and "A Mighty Wind". In 1985 he left "Saturday Night Live" (where he was a regular for a couple of seasons) over creative differences. His comment was: "I was creative, they were different." Harry is comedy's Renaissance man and a true lover of New Orleans (which he must find both creative and different). He owns homes in both the French Quarter and California and has done much to help the Crescent City in many clever and charitable ways.



*A young Harry Shearer
in "Abbott and Costello
Go To Mars"*

A more recent photo of Harry

Another "Martian" was the late Ray Walston, who played the title character in the 1960s popular television comedy "My Favorite Martian". In the series, Walston's character from Mars is named Exigius 12 ½, but he is passed off as Bill Bixby's Uncle Martin. This was before Bixby became "The Incredible Hulk" and Walston played Judge Henry Bone on "Picket Fences".

Ray was born in New Orleans from whence he eventually made his way to Broadway. Wearing red socks, he was cast as Satan in the big hit "Damn Yankees!" opposite Gwen Verdon as Lola. A Tony Award winner, he reprised his role in the 1958 movie. He also offered comic relief as Luther Bills in the stage and screen versions of "South Pacific". Whether an earthbound devil or a stranded "Martian", Ray's carefully crafted curmudgeonly roles had all the audience agreeing his acting was simply out of this world.



New Orleans-born Ray Walston as "My Favorite Martian"

Did you ever get the feeling that people in New Orleans sometimes communicate as if they themselves are visitors from another planet? An apparently alien conversation might go something like this:

"What's the name of the guy on First?"

"No, Who's on First on Prytania. What's on Second and Magazine."

"I Don't Know! I'm on Third and St. Charles!"

"Why isn't Washington First?"

"Washington should be Fifth, but there is no Fifth."

"No Fifth? I could use one about now!"

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