

Given their prominence in show business, is it possible there's a connection between Jews and comedy? The answer is: What are you, meshuga? (Or, to put it in contemporary terms: Duh.)

The Jewish sensibility seems part of comedy's DNA, or maybe it's comedy that's got Jewish DNA. In America, the influence is unmistakable; in the 1970's, it was estimated that Jews made up about 3% of the U.S. population... and 80% of professional comedians.

But why? Some say it's due to Jewish history, though that history is hardly the stuff of merry-making. But comedy is one of the best ways to deal with tragedy; Nobel Prizewinning novelist Saul Bellow said "Oppressed people tend to be witty."

In this multimedia talk, David Misch ("Mork and Mindy," "Saturday Night Live," "The Muppets Take Manhattan," "Funny: The Book") looks at the interaction between comedy and Jews, born of a fatalistic sensibility that sees irony everywhere, often expressed by sarcasm. (If a Jew says "Good thinking, Einstein," it's not a compliment.)

David looks at how comedy sees Jewishness as defined not only by having suffered but by a propensity to continue suffering (*How many Jewish grandmothers does it take to change a light-bulb? None: "Don't bother, I'll sit in the dark"*), as well as the ability to mock their own stereotypes (*What's a Jewish dilemma? Half-price pork*).

Although eternal outsiders (*Groucho: "I would never be a member of any club that would have me as a member"*), Jews have flourished in America beyond the wildest dreams of their immigrant forebears, and that goes double for entertainers. (Few people know that the word "humor" is itself Jewish; it used to be "humoroscowitz" but it was shortened at Ellis Island.)

So is humor, like ethnicity, a genetic trait? In the 1950s Larry Gelbart was asked why so many comedy writers like him were young and Jewish and he said "Probably because our parents are <u>old</u> and Jewish."

And as a free bonus (but for you, free), JEWISH MUSICAL SATIRE also highlights five songs by Jewish songwriters which show cultural satire from a Hebraic perspective.

## "Insightful and hilarious" - The Jewish Journal

Among David's TV and movie credits are "Mork & Mindy," "Saturday Night Live" and "The Muppets Take Manhattan." He's also a songwriter and the author of "A Beginner's Guide To Corruption" and "Funny: The Book." He's spoken at Yale, Columbia, Oxford, the 92nd St. Y (NYC), the Skirball Cultural Center (L.A.), the Smithsonian, Grammy Museum, Midwest Popular Culture Association, University of Sydney and the VIEW Cinema Conference (Torino, Italy). More at davidmisch.com.