

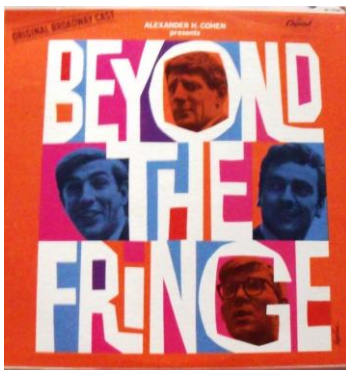
Oxbridge cockneys: Peter Cooke and Dudley Moore

We've seen different aspects of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore in Weeks 2 and Week 4 of the course. In Week 2 we looked at the script of the *One Leg Too Few* sketch from the 60s revue *Beyond the Fringe*. In Week 4 we listened (to an extent calibrated to contemporary and local propriety and pedagogical judgement) to Cook and Moore's often obscene but sometimes very funny alter egos, Derek and Clive.

Peter Cook (1937-1995) came from an upper-middle class background – his father was a career diplomat. He was brought up in Torquay, in Devon, and educated at an English public school, Radley, and then at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he began taking part in skits at University comedy club, The Footlights, and then, with the team of Jonathan Miller, Alan Bennett and Dudley Moore, in the *Beyond the Fringe* revue, first at the Edinburgh Festival, then in London, and in 1962 in New York. In 1961 he financed and became the major shareholder in the satirical magazine *Private Eye*, and opened a comedy club called The Establishment, bringing over the comedian Lenny Bruce for his only British appearance (Lenny Bruce also visited Dublin).

Dudley Moore (1935- 2002) came from a lower-middle-class background, from Dagenham in Essex, a town that was essentially an overspill of East London. For most of the post-war boom years depended heavily on the Ford Motor Co. for employment. Dudley Moore's father was a railway electrician.

Moore was very short, only 5' 2" (1.588 m), compared to Cook, who was tall and had aristocratic features. Moore was born with club feet, a disability that required a great deal of hospital treatment. He had to put up with a great deal of mockery from other children at school. His right foot recovered but his left foot was withered and twisted and he was extremely conscious of this disfigurement, which adds something of an edge to the 'One Leg Too Few' skit in *Beyond the Fringe*, an early indication of the nature of his relationship with Peter Cook, whose humour



often consisted of going too far, pushing into sensitive, dangerous territory.

As a schoolboy in Dagenham, Moore developed an interest in music and developed an astonishing talent. He won an organ scholarship to Magdalene College, Oxford, where he met Alan Bennett, and then joined the revue that became *Beyond the Fringe*, where he would meet and work with Peter Cook.

In 1965 Moore returned from New York, where the Establishment club had moved, and was offered a TV series called *Not Only...But Also*. He invited Peter



Cook on as a guest, and their comic partnership took off from there.

On *Not Only...But Also* Cook and Moore started performing sketches as two working class men, Pete and Dud, wearing macs (Macintosh coats) and cloth caps, and commenting in an inane but remarkably funny way on politics,

the arts, culture, female film stars, fantasies, knowledge, the professions and life in general.

Their working method in developing scripts was to ad lib (improvise) into a tape recorder and then to have the recording typed up and edited. Often this process took place the night before the show just before the programme was due to be broadcast, leaving them little or no time to

rehearse, so that they made extensive use of cue cards. The programmes were broadcast live and unedited, which was both a strain and a blessing, for the opportunities it gave both men to improvise and depart from the script.

A great deal of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore's comedy was broadcast fresh, in the moment that it happened. Moore tended to 'corpse' – to break



away from his character by deliberately or unintentionally laughing, and Cook for departing from the script in order to get Moore to laugh (see Frustration skit in the pub around 5:27). The studio audience loved these unscripted moments and the series was hugely popular in Britain. (Unfortunately, the BBC threw away most of the recordings of the *Not Only...But Also* series).



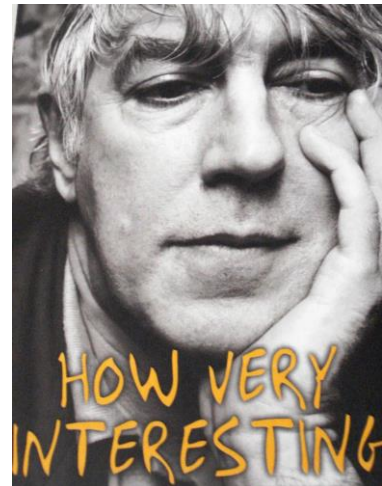


Peter Cook and Dudley Moore were both immensely gifted comedians from very different backgrounds, both blessed with innate comic senses of timing, deeply intelligent, both with a perfect ear for accents and an eye for comic mannerisms. Besides his comic ability, Moore had the bonus of being an immensely gifted jazz pianist, which led him to develop a separate musical career.

Each of them was very funny on his own. Here's Peter Cook here as a biased judge: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kyos-M48B8U>

Together, at their best, they were extraordinary. Neither Cook nor Moore was confined to the straight man / funny man partnership – there was no straight man. They were both hilarious, each taking turns to provide backgrounds of normality for the other. Cook was seen as the superior comedian, but Moore was very close, and only he could bring Cook to the heights that he reached.

They worked together, on and off from the early 1960s until the late 1970s, when they made the *Derek and Clive* recordings in New York and London, and Cook's alcoholism began to affect his ability. Dudley Moore then took up a standing invitation to film in Hollywood where he became an unlikely male lead and achieved astounding success in two films, *Ten* (with Bo Derek, 1979) and *Arthur* (with Sir John Gielgud, 1981).



Cooke died of alcoholic poisoning in 1995. Dudley Moore was hit very hard by his old friend's death and for weeks afterwards would regularly phone Cook's home in London just to listen to his voice on the answerphone message.

By this time, Moore himself had begun to show symptoms of the incurable disease, progressive supranuclear palsy (which slurred his speech and gave the impression that he was drunk). He died in 2002.

I never had the Latin <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofUZNynYXzM>

Yes, I could have been a judge but I never had the Latin, never had the Latin for the judging. I just never had sufficient of it to get through the rigorous judging exams. They're noted for their rigour.

People came staggering out saying ‘My God, what a rigorous exam’—and so I became a miner instead. A coal miner. I managed to get through the mining exams—they’re not very rigorous. They only ask one question. They say ‘Who are you?’, and I got 75% for that.

Of course, it’s quite interesting work, getting hold of lumps of coal all day. It’s quite interesting, because the coal was made in a very unusual way. You see God blew all the trees down. He didn’t say ‘Let’s have some coal,’ as he could have done—he had all the right contacts. No, he got this great wind going you see, and blew down all the trees, then over a period of three million years he changed it into coal gradually, over a period of three million years so it wasn’t noticeable to the average passer-by. It was all part of the scheme, but people at the time did not see it that way. People under the trees did not say ‘Hurrah, coal in three million years.’ No, they said ‘Oh dear, oh dear, trees falling on us—that’s the last thing we want.’ And of course their wish was granted.

I am very interested in the universe—I am specialising in the universe and all that surrounds it. I am studying Nesbitt’s book—*The Universe & All That Surrounds It, an Introduction*. He tackles the subject boldly, goes through from the beginning of time right through to the present day, which according to Nesbitt is October 31, 1940. And he says the earth is spinning into the sun and we will all be burnt to death. But he ends the book on a note of hope. He says ‘I hope this will not happen.’ But there’s not a lot of interest in this down the mine.

The trouble with it is the people. I am not saying you get a load of riff-raff down the mine. I am not saying that. I am just saying we had a load of riff-raff down my mine—very boring conversationalists, extremely boring. All they talk about is what goes on in the mine — extremely boring. If you were searching for a word to describe the conversation, boring would spring to your lips. If ever you want to hear things like ‘Hello, I’ve found a bit of coal.’ ‘Have you really?’ ‘Yes, no doubt about it, this black substance is coal all right.’ ‘Jolly good, the very thing we’re looking for.’ It’s not enough to keep the mind alive, is it?

Whoops. Did you notice I suddenly went ‘Whoops’? It’s an

impediment I got from being down the mine. Because one day I was walking along in the dark when I came across the body of a dead pit pony. 'Whoops.' And that's another reason why I couldn't be a judge, because I might have been up there all regal, sentencing away. 'I sentence you to whoops.' And, you see, the trouble is, under English law that would have to stand. So all in all I'd rather have been a judge than a miner.

And what is more, being a miner, as soon as you are too old and tired and sick and stupid to do the job properly, you have to go. Well, the very opposite applies with the judges. So all in all I'd rather have been a judge than a miner. Because I've always been after the trappings of great luxury, you see. I really, really have. But all I've got hold of are the trappings of great poverty. I've got hold of the wrong load of trappings, and a rotten load of trappings they are too, ones I could have very well done without.

[Peter Cook, *Tragically I Was an Only Twin: The Complete Peter Cook*, St. Martin's Press, 2002, pp. 43-45]

Frustration http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvQq_tqBojA

Dud & Pete, sitting at a pub table, having a drinks [pause at 5:27 after 'Which cheek was that, Dud?' for Dud corpsing]

Dud: All right, then, Pete, are you?

Pete: Not too bad, you know, not too bad ... Cheers.

Dud: What you been doing lately, then?

Pete: Well quiet, pretty quiet, not been up to much - I had a spot of the usual trouble the other day.

Dud: Oh, did you - what happened, then?

Pete: A spot of the usual trouble - well, I come home about half- past eleven - we'd been having a couple of drinks, remember? - I come home about half-past eleven, and, you know, I was feeling a bit tired, so, you know, I thought I'd go to bed, you know, take me clothes off, and so on, you know.

Dud: Right - well, don't you take your clothes off before you go to bed?

Pete: Er - no, I made that mistake this time, got it the wrong way round - anyway, I got into bed, settled down, I was just about, you

know, reading "The Swiss Family Robinson".

Dud: Good, innit.

Pete: It's a lovely book, Dud, a lovely book - an' I got up to about page 483, second paragraph, when suddenly - 'bring, bring - bring, bring'.

Dud: What's that?

Pete: That's the 'phone, going 'bring, bring'. So I picked up the 'phone, and - you know who it was?



Dud: Who?

Pete: Bloody Betty Grable. Calling transatlantic, bloody Betty Grable - I said, 'look, Betty, what do you think you're doing, calling me up half-past eleven at night?' She said 'It's half-past two in the afternoon over here'. I said, 'I don't care what bloody time it is, there's no need to wake ME up'. She said, 'Peter, Peter - get on a plane, come dance with me, be mine tonight'.

Dud: I thought it was the middle of the afternoon?

Pete: Yes, what she probably meant was 'be mine tonight tomorrow afternoon our time'.

Dud: No - didn't she mean tomorrow afternoon - er ... Pete: Anyway, 'Be mine tonight' she said - I said, 'Look, Betty - we've had our laughs, we've had our fun, but it's all over'. I said, 'Stop pestering me, get back to Harry James and his trumpet. Stop pestering me,' I said. I slammed the 'phone down and said, 'Stop pestering me'.

Dud: Shouldn't you have said 'Stop pestering me' before you put the 'phone down?

Pete: I should have, yes ...

Dud: It's funny you should say that, 'cos a couple of nights ago, you remember, we had a couple of drinks ...

Pete: I remember that, yes ...

Dud: ...and I came home, you know, I was going to bed, felt a bit tired - I was having a nightcap ...

Pete: 'Course you were ...

Dud: ... and I was just dropping off nicely, and all of a sudden I heard this hollering in the kitchen.

Pete: Hollering?

Dud: And screaming and banging on the door, you know, and I thought I must have left the gas on - so I go down there - I fling open the door - you'll never guess - it's bloody Anna Magnani, up to her knees in rice, screaming at me - 'Lesse more entrate - amore me per favore!'

Pete: Italian.

Dud: Italian, yes - she was covered in mud, she grabbed hold of me, she pulled me all over the floor - she had one of them see-through blouses ...

Pete: All damp, showing everything through it ...

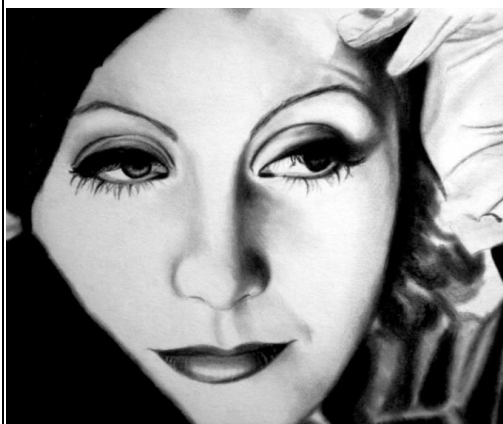
Dud: ... Yes, and we rolled all over the floor - I hit her, I said 'Get out of here! Get out of here, you Italian ... thing!' I said. 'Get out of here', I said ...

Pete: 'You Italian thing ...' a good thing to call her.

Dud: Yes ... I said. 'Don't you come here and mess up MY rice again, mate'.

Pete: I should hope not. I had the same bloody trouble about three nights ago - I come in, about half-past eleven at night, we'd been having a couple of drinks I remember - and I come in, I get into bed, you see, feeling quite sleepy, I could feel the lids of me eyes beginning to droop - a bit of the droop in the eyes - I was just about to drop off, when suddenly, 'tap, tap, tap' at the bloody window pane - I looked out - you know who it was?

Dud: Who?



Pete: Bloody Greta Garbo! Bloody Greta Garbo - stark naked save for a shortie nightie. She was hanging on to the window sill, and I could see her knuckles all white ... saying 'Pieter, Pieter'. You know how these bloody Swedes go on. I said, 'Get out of it!' Bloody Greta Garbo. She wouldn't go - she wouldn't go. I had to smash her



down with a broomstick, poke her off the window sill, she fell down on the pavement with a great crash ...

Dud: She just had a nightie on, is that all?

Pete: That's all she had on, Dud, just a ...

Dud: See-through?

Pete: ... a see-through, shortie nightie. Nothing else - except for her dark glasses of course. Dreadful business.

Dud: Well, it's funny you should say that ...

Pete: Yes, it's funny I should say that.

Dud: ... four nights ago, I come home, we'd been having a couple of drinks ...

Pete: Couple of drinks, yes ...

Dud: ... I come home, I come through the door, and - sniff - sniff, sniff, I went - you know - funny smell, I thought, smells like wood burning ...

Pete: Probably burning wood, Dud.

Dud: What's that?

Pete: 'Burning Wood' - that's a perfume worn by sensual, earthy women.

Dud: Funny you should say that, because I come in the bathroom, you know, I thought, 'bit stronger here', you know, 'funny' - I come in the bedroom - it's getting ridiculous, this smell, you know, so I get into bed, you know, turn the covers back - it's a bit warm in bed - I thought, 'funny', you know, being warm like that - and - I get into bed, I put out the light - and, I was just going off to kip - and suddenly



I feel a hand on my cheek.

Pete: Which cheek was that, Dud? ... Come on - which cheek was it?

Dud: It was the left upper. I said, I thought, you know, 'funny' ... I turned on the

light - bloody hand here, scarlet fingernails ...

Pete: Who was it?

Dud: You'll never guess - bloody Jane Russell.

Pete: Jane Russell?

Dud: Jane Russell, in bed with me, stark naked - I said 'Jane' ...

Pete: With the huge ...

Dud: With the things ... I said, 'Jane', I said, 'get out of here' ...

Pete: Get out ...

Dud: 'Get out of here', I said, 'you may be mean, moody and magnificent, but as far as I'm concerned, it's all over'. So I threw her down - I took her out of bed, threw her down the stairs - I threw her bra and her - er - gauze panties after her, I threw them down ... and the green silk scarf ... I said 'Get out of here! Get out of here, you hussy!'... I threw her fag-holder - I threw a bucket of water over her, I said 'Get out of here, you hussy!' - I said, 'don't come in my bed again, mate, it's disgusting!' Terrible ... I was shocked to the quick. **Pete:** You're quite right, you got to do something about these bloody women who pester you ...

Dud: What you doing tonight, then?

Pete: Well ... I thought we might go to the pictures.

