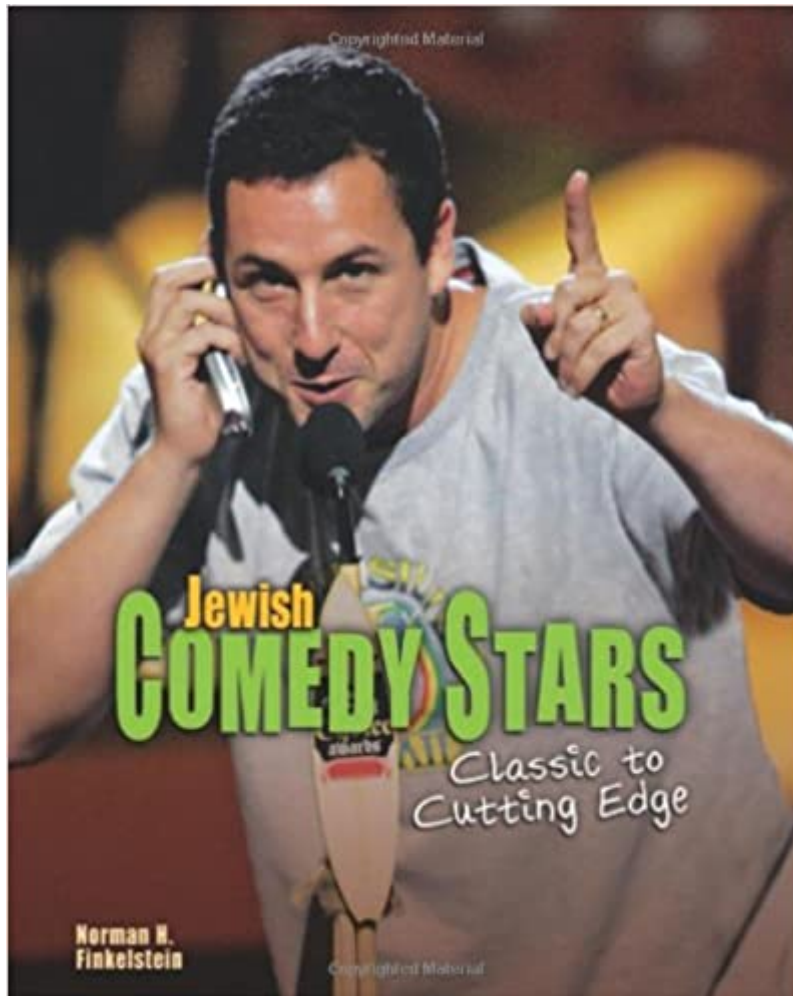


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# Jewish Comedy Stars: Classic To Cutting Edge



## Synopsis

From vaudeville to viral comedy on the web, here are more than 40 short biographies of Jewish comedians who heavily influenced the entertainment industry in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

## Book Information

Paperback: 96 pages

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

## Customer Reviews

When Jewish immigrants began to flood into the New World they not only brought their hopes and dreams, but also brought their sense of humor. No one can say with any amount of certainty why the majority of American comedy stars from vaudeville to the present day have been Jewish, but the one thing we do know is that generations of us have benefited from their ingenious wit and perfect punch lines. When the Jews began to arrive in early twentieth century New York, one of the ties that connected them was the Yiddish language, a language that quickly made its way to the stage in the Yiddish theater and vaudeville. Many of these stars, who were once common household names on the stage, on radio and television, have disappeared into the pages of history are resurrected in these pages. As the immigrant population assimilated, their language began to fade into the background as English became the primary language of their children. It did not die out totally and made its way to the Catskills, or "Borsch Belt," on the comedic tongues of the second generation of American Jews. It was there that many famous comics "developed a model for stand-up comedy that involved quick-thinking speech and one-liners." It also involved many name changes because

anti-Semitism didn't die out with Yiddish theater and vaudeville. The ability to think quickly was an asset once radio came into play because the most successful "invented their on-air styles as they went along." Radio was a "magical link to an enchanted world of free entertainment" and when it was eclipsed by television the magic continued. Their names may have been changed, but their tremendous talents are remembered to this day. Who are these people? Let's see if you recognize ...\* Fania Borach\* Margaret Pyekoon\* Joseph Sultzer\* Charles Marks\* Allen Stewart Konigsberg\* Benjamin Kubelsky\* Milton Berlinger\* Joseph Abraham Gottlieb\* Melvin Kaminsky\* Nathan Birnbaum\* Israel Iskowitz\* Jacob Cohen\* David Daniel Kaminsky\* Joseph Levitch\* Yacov Moshe Maza\* Allan Copelon\* Fischl Silver\* Isaiah Edwin Leopold\* Leonard Alfred Schneider\* Joan Molinsky

This book gives an excellent historical overview of Jewish comedy from early the 20th century to the present day. The reader will be mesmerized by this book in more ways than one. The well-written and well-researched background material was a great asset to this book. It helps the reader understand the history of not only the cultural background of the Jewish comic, but also where some of their material came from. There are numerous biographies, some longer than others, accompanied by a photograph of the comedian. The book travels from the Yiddish theater up to modern day stars such as Adam Sandler, Roseanne Barr, Jerry Seinfeld and Sacha Baron Cohen. In the back of the book are source notes, a selected bibliography and an index. This book is intended for the young reader, however this is one that can easily be appreciated by a much older and broader audience!

For those students choosing Jewish comedy as a school report-- this book is gang busters, though not a laugh a minute. Author Finkelstein does an excellent job developing the pivotal impact of Jewish comedians on American culture. He explains how styles morphed to fit the times, how the success of many funny Jewish men and few women (8 out of 46) affected entertainment and sensitized the wider society. Defining Jewish humor from the Bible (yes, the Bible) to right now, then presenting examples, Finkelstein identifies American comedy as Jewish comedy. Comedy is integral to Jewish tradition. Immigrants used comedy to explain their new world to each other; their children to explain it to the wider world. The organization is terrific; snappy, chapter headings are appropriate and accurate. Introductory background to each era provides succinct, insightful history of this Jewish art form. Each biography proving the point provides a photo, quote balloon, vitae including real names, but Wikipedia depth information. The problem is that excepting the trendy final section, examples are outdated for targeted readers. Children meet dead white males with little relevance beyond an offbeat academic assignment. Their parents, on the other hand, will enjoy the

nuggets of information about childhood favorites and laugh at the joke balloons, which today's youngsters will find too mature, stale, or both. Warts noted, this is a lively addition to a sparsely developed topic for young readers. Hooray for Jewish comedians: on stage, on air, and now on your book shelf. For ages 8-12. Reviewed by Ellen Cole.

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