

## TV & Radio

Contributed by Administrator  
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Morecambe & Wise were one of the few variety acts to successfully make the transition to television ... in fact, you could say that they flourished on the small screen. Their intimate style of delivery, and particularly Eric's asides to the camera, broke through the barrier of the TV screen and involved the viewer.

The road to TV stardom was not without it's pitfalls ... notably their first starring vehicle for television: "Running Wild". The critics panned it, and Eric & Ernie begged for it to be taken off of the air. The BBC held them to their contract, and six episodes were transmitted. It seemed as if their chance of TV fame had slipped them by. It would be seven years before they once again had their own show ... Below I have listed Radio and TV credits for Morecambe & Wise. This is probably not an exhaustive list, so I would welcome any comments, additions or corrections. Radio Worker's Playtime Various guest appearances Variety Fanfare Various guest appearances, leading to regular appearances. You're Only Young Once (known as "YOYO")

July 1954 - August 1954 Their first starring radio show found Eric & Ernie running the Morecambe & Wise Detective Agency. Featuring Pearl Carr as their secretary and Derek Guyler as the office boy, this series was broadcast live from Manchester on Sunday nights.

It was written by Frank Roscoe, incorporating additional material from Morecambe & Wise. It ran for 5 episodes.

The producer was John Ammonds, who would work with them much later on television. Television Parade Of Youth (BBC) 28th September 1951 Eric & Ernie's TV debut. Parade Of Youth was a talent show on BBC television. Running Wild (BBC) 21st April 1954 - 30th June 1954

Wednesday evenings A fortnightly live show, broadcast from BBCtv's new Television Theatre in Shepherd's Bush. The critics hated it, and the public didn't watch in significant numbers. It lasted for 6 episodes ... although if Eric & Ernie had had their way, it would have been pulled after the first three.

Alma Cogan was a regular on the show. Another important name was Ernest Maxim, the director. He would work with Morecambe & Wise some twenty years later ... under much happier conditions. The Winifred Atwell Show (ITV) 21st April 1956 - 23rd June 1956 A 10 week run as resident comics did much to revive Eric & Ernie's career in television. The scripts were written by Johnny Speight (creator of Alf Garnett and Till Death Us Do Part). Double Six (BBC) 11th August 1957 - 8th September 1957

Sunday evenings. A fast-moving revue hosted by Morecambe & Wise. Broadcast live. The Morecambe & Wise Show/Two Of A Kind (ITV [ATV]) Series 1 12 Oct. - 7th Dec. 1961

9 half hour shows. Broadcast live. Series 2 30th June - 22nd Sept. 1962

13 half hour shows. Series 3 15th June - 7th Sept. 1963

13 half hour shows. Series 4 4th April - 26th June 1964

13 35-minute shows. Series 5 22nd Jan. - 19th March 1966

9 35-minute shows. Series 6 1st Oct. 1967 - 31st March 1968

10 hour-long shows.

(This was Eric & Ernie's first series to be recorded in colour, although it was broadcast in black and white in the UK.) This was the breakthrough that Morecambe & Wise had been waiting for. Sid Green and Dick Hills were brought in to provide the scripts, and at one time it seemed that the show would suffer from the over-populated sketches that had plagued "Running Wild". However, fate stepped in and industrial action forced Sid & Dick to rehash the shows with less elaborate sketches, and to step out in front of the cameras themselves to fill the remaining "stooge" roles. The results were breathtaking, and Eric & Ernie and Sid & Dick were soon pulling in huge viewing figures.

Of course, as the show became more popular ... the more popular guests could be called upon to work with the lads. Even the Beatles joined in, singing "Moonlight Bay" with Eric & Ernie.

Dissatisfaction with their contract with ATV, and a desire to work in colour, prompted Morecambe & Wise to move to the BBC in 1968. Of course, Hills & Green moved with them ... The Morecambe & Wise Show (BBC) Series 1 2nd Sept. -

21st Oct. 1968

7 half hour shows. (BBC2) Series 2 27th July - 7th Sept. 1969

4 50-minute shows. (BBC2) Christmas Special 25th December 1969

60-minute show. (BBC1) Series 3 14th Jan. - 22nd April 1970

7 45-minute shows. (BBC2) Series 4 1st July - 26th Aug. 1970

5 45-minute shows. (BBC2) Special 8th October 1970

45-minute show. (BBC1) Christmas Special 25th December 1970

60-minute show. (BBC1) Series 5 8th April - 15th July 1971

7 45-minute shows. (BBC2) Series 6 19th Sept. - 24th Oct. 1971

6 45-minute shows. (BBC1) Christmas Special 25th December 1971

65-minute show. (BBC1) Christmas Special 25th December 1972

60-minute show. (BBC1) Series 7 5th Jan. - 23rd March 1973

12 45-minute shows. (BBC1) Christmas Special 25th December 1973

60-minute show. (BBC1) Series 8 27th Sept. - 1st Nov. 1974

6 45-minute shows. (BBC1) Christmas Special 25th December 1975

60-minute show. (BBC1) Series 9 7th Jan. - 19th April 1976

6 45-minute shows. (BBC1) Christmas Special 25th December 1976

60-minute show. (BBC1) Christmas Special 25th December 1977

60-minute show. (BBC1) Morecambe & Wise returned to the BBC as established stars. Their first series for the BBC was scripted by Hills & Green, as their shows for ITV had been. These shows were broadcast on BBC2, which was the only UK channel broadcast in colour at the time.

Disaster struck when Eric suffered his first heart attack, after the conclusion of the first series. The future of Morecambe & Wise was uncertain, and Hills & Green moved back to ATV ... signing and exclusive writing contract.

Once Eric was fit enough, the search began for new writers. Eventually, Eddie Braben was asked to write the scripts, following his successful run as a writer for Ken Dodd. Eddie placed Eric & Ernie within the confines of their flat "so that they could not get away from each other" (as he put it). These domestic situations, the double bed routines, the "musical extravaganas", and little Ern's plays "wot I wrote" achieved the impossible, and improved upon the original shows. Soon celebrity guests were queueing up to be made fools of.

It would be wrong to talk about these shows at the BBC without mentioning Des ("short for desperate") O'Connor. A few personal jokes, slipped into their routines by Eric, started a national joke about Des O'Connor's singing that continues to this day:

ERNIE: I hear Des O'Connor is a self-made man.

ERIC: It's nice of him to take the blame ...

Des did make an appearance on one of their shows ... memorably being thwarted in his attempts to sing on the show. The good-humored way in which Des takes this sort of a ribbing speaks volumes about the man.

The 1977 Christmas special made history ... it is still in the Guinness Book Of Records as having the largest audience of any British television show. The figures quoted are between 27.5 and 28.s million viewers. That's over half the population at the time.

As they say, all good things must come to an end ... and after 10 golden years at the BBC, Eric & Ernie announced that they were moving back to ITV to work with Thames Television. Motivated by a generous deal and the promise of film

work with Thames' Euston Films, it must have seemed an offer too good to refuse for two national institutions still on their way to Hollywood ... The Morecambe & Wise Show (ITV [Thames]) Special 18th October 1978

60-minute show. Christmas Special 25th December 1978

75-minute show. Christmas Special 25th December 1979

60-minute show. Series 1 3rd Sept. - 8th Oct. 1980

6 half hour shows. Christmas Special 25th December 1980

60-minute show. Series 2 1st Sept. - 13th Oct. 1981

7 half hour shows. Christmas Special 23rd December 1981

60-minute show. Series 3 27th Oct. - 8th Dec. 1982

7 half hour shows. Christmas Special 27th December 1982

60-minute show. Series 4 7th Sept. - 19th Oct. 1983

6 half hour shows. Christmas Special 26th December 1983

60-minute show. Morecambe & Wise did not fare well at Thames. Eddie Braben had been contractually obliged to stay at the BBC, and did not join Eric & Ernie at Thames until 1980.

By that time, Eric had had a second heart attack and a bypass operation. This may have contributed to the visible "slowing down" of the act, although the slight change of format to the show (to allow for adverts) may also have been a factor.

Whatever the reasons, the simple facts are that the shows did not shine in the same way that their shows for the BBC had ... and that is not to say that they weren't amusing, just not as amusing as the shows had been in the past. The recycling of old scripts did not help further their cause ... it looked as if they were going through the motions.

What Morecambe & Wise really needed at this stage was a change of routine ... perhaps a sitcom, or the film that they had been so eager to make.

In fact, a film was made called "Night Train To Murder". Whilst it contains one or two workable scenes, the direction moves it along with all the pace of a geriatric snail. Eric was particularly disappointed with it and requested that if it was to be shown, it should only be shown during the children's teatime slot. Thames agreed.

I can't think of a more disappointing way to end a glittering career, but "Night Train To Murder" was to be Eric's last work.

On 28th May 1984, Eric suffered another heart attack and died, shortly after leaving the stage of a charity concert in Gloucestershire.