



I had an English teacher in high school who was obsessed with Edie Adams to the point that he actually stopped a fight in class by singing part of a Muriel Cigars commercial that made the two girls fighting stop and stare at him as if he were completely insane. Of course, by then I'd seen some reruns of **The Ernie Kovacs Show** on PBS and had a whisper of an idea of what he was going on about. However, I also recall bumping into him during a lunch break (he was outside smoking a Muriel Air Tip, of course) and hearing tales of a TV series starring Edie that no one else I asked seemed to have a clue about.

It turns out what I thought was one man's fantasy life getting a wee bit too real was actually a real TV variety show. MVD Visual is about to unleash **Here's Edie**, a 4-disc set of her 21 half-hour specials unseen anywhere since they first aired. After spending some quality time this past weekend with this incredible lady and her talented friends, I can very safely say that fans of classic variety TV will absolutely want this one in their collections...

While the picture quality isn't consistent (expect to play around with the contrast on your TV or just use the default Sports setting if you're not too good at fiddling with that remote and just want the brightest image possible), each special is a truly fantastic showcase of Edie's skills as a well-rounded performer and at a half-hour each, none wear out their welcome. From operatic duets, comedy bits, dancing and even an early "music video" style clip showing a day in her life as she prepares for the show, Here's Edie is so packed full of surprises that you'll want to share what you've seen (legally!) by inviting a few people over and having a cocktail half-hour or so with this set. It's television nostalgia at its best, consistently entertaining and educational on a few fronts you definitely don't get with today's programs.

There are so many great moments that I could go on for days, but I'll be nice and just hit some highlights here. The pilot episode (which was actually aired seventh) has comedian Dick Shawn doing a comedy routine with Edie that turns into him singing and showing off a new dance craze called "The Cockamamie" (priceless!), The "New York" show has an excellent performance of "Take The "A" Train" by Duke Ellington and his band, a moody

short film featuring Edie on the subway and walking around a small bit of Manhattan, and a long comic monologue by Peter Falk as a taxi driver that's an excellent character piece. Classical, Folk, Show tunes and other types of music get their due here as well and show that America was a lot more cultured back then... at least in terms of some of its musical tastes and appreciation for experimentation.

As she was also working on a few movies during the show's run, actors from "It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, World" (Sid Caesar, Buddy Hackett and Terry Thomas) and "Call Me Bwana" (Bob Hope) appear and add some great fun to the shows they appear in. Sid Caesar's own ABC show ran every other week in the same time slot as Edie's, and some of his hilarious Dutch Masters ads are here (and it's still hysterically funny watching him do the "Brandy and Cigars" bit). A relatively svelte Buddy Hackett is the guest star in the "Love" episode where he makes light of his weight and how he took pills to drop pounds in a very funny routine that may be closer to the truth (which is why it's so funny). He then appears in an eye-popping skit singing "Food, Glorious Food" as a table of overweight extras mostly pretend to stuff their faces.

Terry Thomas nearly falls off the hood of a fake car in a skit (watch his face and the hand coming from behind him to try to prop him up as he recovers) and later teams up with Edie for a few numbers. Bob Hope hams it up and makes Edie nearly lose it a few times before doing a duet from their film that I think was lip synched for the show. Amazingly (well, for today), nearly every actor or comic who comes on the show sings at some point. Comedians Mitzi McCall & Charlie Brill sing, Rowan and Martin get away with sort of singing but not (it's a musical number gone wrong), Soupy Sales shows up and yes, there are pies involved in short order. Some of the bits fall flat thanks to today's comedy being more in your face, but as a time capsule this set is a total gem.

Edie's other friends making appearances include Nancy Wilson who gets some great screen time in a solo number, then a fun song/dance duet with Edie before appearing with her and Al Hirt's band in a great finale, a very funny, very hammy Sammy Davis Jr. who steals the entire show he's in thanks to his versatility and pure magnetic energy. Count Basie, Lionel Hampton (who I didn't know played the drums at all until his mind-blowing solo where he's juggling sticks and hitting the drums as they fall) and Johnny Mathis all roll in with great showcase performances that show Adams was quite clear on the range of entertainers she wanted to appear with her on the specials.

There are a few bits that will probably offend the easily offended, but they're of note and definite interest to anyone who wants to see how broadcast standards have changed over time. Zsa Zsa Gabor's appearance (in a parody of one of Edie's Muriel ads) on a really broken-down white horse that's one step from the glue factory is shocking and even more so because it was done in front of a live audience and you can practically feel the energy fly out of the room when she's taken off the old horse and its bowed back is revealed. The joke about her posterior making the horse that way falls flat (pun intended) and when the curtain quickly closes on the horse as it's taken offstage, you can almost feel a sigh of relief in the air. The other "controversial" bit is a version of "Casey at the Bat" with baseball player/folk singer Maury Wills narrating while Edie and some actors in "Japanese" makeup

and costumes perform a comedy routine. As with the Gabor and Hackett bits, this is best viewed as a historical record of the era more than anything else.

As this was a pure variety show, there's not much of a topical political slant to anything here other than President Kennedy getting mentioned in Dick Shawn's routine in that pilot and Edie having the United Nations Children's Chorus appear in a few episodes. More interesting is the Las Vegas show where Edie takes on the old sexist dirge "I'm a Woman" and at the end, gives it a role reversal that makes it a lot more palatable today. Although it's actually pretty damn funny to think of Edie as anything but a force to be reckoned with. After all, she was the one who got millions of men to smoke Muriel Cigars with a simple suggestion ("*Why Don't You Pick One Up and Smoke It Sometime?*") that wasn't a come-on at all, but delivered like one and in a few different ways in the commercials here.

Rounding things out are clips from The Ernie Kovacs Show featuring Edie singing solo pieces accompanied by the house band (or Ernie himself in one funny bit). It's too bad some of these clips are cut off or fade out before we get to see more of Ernie, but this is Edie's show, after all. Besides, her rendition of "Dancing on the Ceiling" while cuddling with a too frisky puppy and her Marilyn Monroe impersonation are too priceless to pass up (and you'll see Ernie get some in-camera devil horns at the end of that Monroe clip that crack him up because he wasn't expecting them). There's also a short Muriel promotional film from 1965 showing Edie flying into a small town for a parade and interacting with the locals and press. Like any promotional clip, there's lots of glad-handing narration for the shareholders and no one is having a bad time at all despite the all-day schedule of running around and making nice with as many people as possible.

As these are just the original 21 shows transferred straight to a disc with the Kovacs show extras don't expect any behind the scenes interviews or bonus features and other than the very pretty 16-page booklet and a nice cover insert (you can reverse it if you like!). That said, as an artifact from television's history that's remained unseen for far too long, this is an excellent deal At \$49.99 (or less if you poke around online). Get it for yourself, your parents or grandparents and if they remember this show, expect to hear some nostalgic waxing about the good old days that lasts into the wee hours...

Score: A- Pure entertainment value trumps the video quality here, but it's a more than worthwhile package for fans of Edie and/or classic variety TV. **BUY IT!**

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