H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michael Seth Starr. *Art Carney: A Biography.* New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1997. 256 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88064-173-9.

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Published on H-PCAACA (October, 1997)

When most Americans think of Art Carney, they remember him for his role as Ed Norton in the classic 1950s comedy series, *The Honeymooners*. While this role earned Carney an important place in television history as one of TV's best known and loved sketch comedians, few people are aware of this talented actor's other professional accomplishments. Long overdue, Michael Seth Starr has written an in-depth account of this legendary performer's life and career.

Starr begins in Mount Vernon, New York, where Carney spent his childhood. At an early age, the unexpectedly shy and introverted Carney showed enormous talent at being an exceptionally funny impersonator. This ability to impersonate others gave Carney his first break in show business. In 1937, bandleader Horace Heidt hired him as a mimic/announcer for the Musical Knights, a Big Band touring troupe. In 1942, Carney joined the cast of *Report to the Nation*, a radio show that re-enacted current events by using actors to imitate famous individuals. Other important radio work by the actor included his role as Newton on *The Morey Amsterdam Show* (1948) and as "the athlete" on the *Henry Morgan Show* (1950). Starr maintains that these performances were particularly important to the actor because they were early versions of Ed Norton.

On October 5, 1951, Jackie Gleason introduced the Honeymooners to the American public as a short sketch on the television show, *Calvacade*. Shortly thereafter, television history was made when Carney joined the cast and became dim-wit sewer worker, Ed Norton, in the Honeymooner skits. It is interesting to note that while the Honeymooners became a regular comedy sketch on *Calvacade* and then *The Jackie Gleason Show* from 1951 to 1954, it did not become the series, *The Honeymooners*, until the 1955-56 TV season and then it only ran for one year. More importantly though, Starr points out that Carney won five Emmys for his portrayal of Ralph Kramden's side-kick, and that by 1955, had already "emblazoned Ed Norton into America's pop-culture consciousness" (p. 79).

According to Starr, although Carney achieved stardom as a sketch comedian, his post-Honeymooners work earned him acclaim as a dramatic actor. These accomplishments included *Rope Dancers*, *Take Her, She's Mine*, and *The Odd Couple* on Broadway and his Oscar-winning performance in the movie *Harry and Tonto*. Starr also notes that although Carney spent the rest of his career trying to shake the Norton type-cast, it was Honeymooner re-unions that time and again revitalized his career. Other important features of the book include detailed information about the actor's relationship with Gleason and his lifelong struggle with alcoholism and depression.

Starr utilizes a wealth of information obtained from interviews with Carney's friends and colleagues and from articles written about the actor. Interestingly, no one that he interviewed appears to have had a negative thing to say about Carney. Even though it is apparent throughout the book that Starr is an ardent fan, he provides a well-researched and well-written history of a brilliant actor and genuinely kind man.

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Citation: Bernadette Zbicki Heiney. Review of Starr, Michael Seth, *Art Carney: A Biography.* H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. October, 1997.

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