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Stephen Cox, John Lofflin. *The Abbott & Costello Story: Sixty Years of "Who's on First?"*. Nashville, Tenn.: Cumberland House Publishing, 1997. xiv + 305 pp. $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-888952-61-2.

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Anyone finding involved in a discussion about vintage comedy, will no doubt hear the names of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello mentioned. For at least three generations of Americans, a simple reference to this classic comedy duo would lead to reminiscences of Abbott and Costello movies, laughter-filled afternoons, and, of course, the timeless "Who's on First" routine. In their book, *The Abbott & Costello Story: Sixty Years of "Who's on First?"*, Stephen Cox and John Lofflin provide a thoroughly researched account of the two comedians' personal and professional lives.

Using a wealth of information from interviews with family, friends, and colleagues, the authors trace Abbott and Costello's rise to stardom. Beginning their careers together in vaudeville, the team made their radio debut in 1938 on *The Kate Smith Hour*. As the popularity of their straightman/clown comedy routines continued to grow, they acquired their own radio show, *The Abbott and Costello Program*, in 1942. This success eventually lead to the production of 36 movies and a CBS-aired, half-hour situation comedy, *The Abbott and Costello Show*, in 1952.

According to Cox and Lofflin, Abbott and Costello, who were the biggest box office draw of the 1940s, maintain a significant place in American popular culture. They argue that the team's movies served as an escape for an American public experiencing the traumas of world conflict. It is also interesting to note that many of their films, which were produced before and during World War II, contained patriotic themes. For example, *Buck Privates*, a movie in which the boys are drafted into the army, was released on January 31, 1941, just five months after the draft bill was passed. Another example can be found in the 1942 release of *Rio Rita* where the boys are hired as detectives to get rid of Nazi spies. A second recurring theme found in many of their movies was a triumph of the "underdog" or "common man." Time and again, regardless of what predicament Lou got himself into, the audience always knew that, in the end, this average American would prevail. Indeed, the authors (correctly) argue that the duo's comedy routine, which "involved a smooth-talking sophisticated teamed with a bumbling Everyman" was, in fact, "a self-contained affirmation of the American democratic experience" (p. 14).

Cox and Lofflin also provide readers with a look at the personal lives of Abbott and Costello. They describe the enormous wealth earned by both men, their generosity, and their eventual financial difficulties. Also included and making the book more interesting is a review of literature written about the boys, a filmography, a television episode guide, a program synopses of Abbott and Costello cartoons, copies of the comedians' most famous routines, and reminiscences about the team from celebrities such as the Andrew Sisters, Buddy Hackett, and Milton Berle. This book is both entertaining and informative and is recommended for anyone with an appreciation for the art of comedy.

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