

Question time

Send us your questions and we'll track down the answers

Hancock's Half Heir

Q What became of Jim McManus who was possibly the best actor to have impersonated Tony Hancock?
David Ricks, Colchester, Essex

Best of British says: Born in Bristol but brought up in Clapham, south London, Jim McManus was educated at Buckhurst Hill County High School in Chigwell, Essex – a school with “a very successful school drama society.” Among his contemporaries there was Terrence Hardiman, the Demon Headmaster star who we paid tribute to in the July issue.

Trained at Theatre Workshop Stratford East under Joan Littlewood, McManus understudied Murray Melvin as Geoffrey in the West End production of A Taste of Honey. When Theatre Workshop took Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be to the Garrick Theatre, McManus worked as a dresser to the actor Wally Patch, who suggested that he try his luck at the Whitehall Theatre.

There, McManus was employed as an assistant stage manager, and understudied Ray Cooney in the farce Simple Spymen. Featuring Andrew Sachs and Timothy West in the cast, McManus would take over from

Cooney as Corporal Flight for its UK tour.

On television, he appeared in episodes of Z Cars, Softly Softly, Doctor Who and Crossroads, along with the comedies Hugh and I, Harry Worth, and Steptoe and Son. He also had a regular role in the Richard O'Sullivan sitcom Trouble in Mind. As well as acting, McManus was a writer, and read several of his own works on BBC Radio 4's Morning Story.

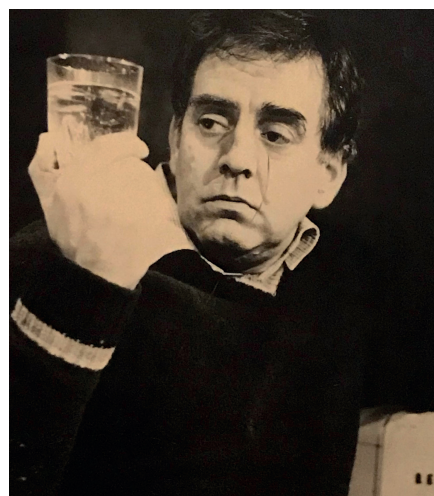
Often told by friends that he looked like Tony Hancock, McManus first played the lad himself in Hancock's Last Half Hour, a play by Heathcote Williams, which toured for several years. He also starred in Colin Bennett's Hancock's Finest Hour and appeared as Hancock on Super Troupers – a Channel 4 comedy series where the likes of Nicholas Parsons, Anita Harris, Bill Pertwee and Ken Dodd recreated performances by stars of the past.

For two decades from 1990, McManus performed as Charles Dickens in a one-man show that recreated the legendary author's reading tours.

Having made his film debut in Norman Wisdom's The Square Peg, McManus would go on to appear in the likes of The Day the Earth Caught Fire, Sweeney 2, Silver Dream

Racer, and Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.

A stalwart of The Players' Theatre Music Hall and an active supporter of The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre (020 3582 4912, streathamhilltheatre.org) – a campaign to save and "reawaken" the Grade II listed theatre not far from his home – Jim McManus died on 11 April 2023.



Jim McManus, as Tony Hancock, in a 1989 production of Hancock's Last Half Hour.



Having trained with Theatre Workshop Stratford East, actor/writer Jim McManus appeared on stage, TV, film and radio.

Can Any Reader Help?

Q Can anybody identify this iron figurine that has been in the family for at least 70 years? My mother thought it was John Dunlop but she saw a TV programme that displayed what she thought was the same item called the Manchester Man. Approximately 20cm high, it's been faithfully employed as a door stop for most of those years on account of its weight.

Stuart Freestone



Photographs: Courtesy of The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre

ASK US! If you've got a question, the Best of British staff will do its best to find the answer. Occasionally we get stuck and look to our readers for assistance. Whether you've got something to ask, can provide an answer, or want to add to the information provided, please email or write to us at the address on page 4.