

Today I am going to tell you about GROUCHO MARX, who was one of the funniest American comedians of all time. He became as famous as KARL MARX, the Communist thinker - and even today, when someone refers to 'Marx said...', someone else might say 'Karl or Groucho?'



Groucho (real name Julius - Groucho was his stage name) Marx was born in 1890, one of five brothers who grew up in a poor area of New York. His mother wanted Groucho and his brothers to make their living as performers on stage, and Groucho and his brothers Gummo and HARPO spent some time performing as a singing group. They weren't that good - but discovered that they could make everyone laugh by pretending to mess up, and telling jokes. So they turned their act into a comedy act, and had their other brothers CHICO and ZEPPO join them. Harpo was uncomfortable with speaking, rather than singing, and so ended up pretending to be mute - to

be someone who couldn't speak. Chico pretended to be an Italian on stage. Groucho painted dark greasepaint across his upper lip to make it look like he had a moustache, and started speaking really fast, rattling out one liners and observations. And Zeppo was the good looking, 'straight' guy who didn't tell jokes but just looked on in



amazement at what his other brothers were getting up to. Groucho and his brothers made the turn into comedy round about 1910, and by 1925 they were big stars on Broadway, in New York, appearing in a hit musical created especially for them called THE COCOANUTS. They soon took their act to Hollywood, appearing in a film of 'The Cocoanuts' in 1929, and then making four films that made the Marx Brothers - and in particular, Groucho, Chico, and Harpo - comedy legends: MONKEY BUSINESS (1931), HORSE FEATHERS (1932), DUCK SOUP (1933) and A NIGHT AT THE OPERA (1935).

*Duck Soup* was the Marx Brothers' masterpiece. Made in 1933, at the same time ADOLF HITLER came to power in Germany, the film was a warning to the world, as well as being extremely funny. The film is about a country called FREEDONIA, which is bankrupt (just like Germany was). So the financial interests (represented here by MARGARET DUMONT, who regularly appeared in Marx Brothers' films, despite not understanding any of the jokes and being regularly made fun of in the films by Groucho) promise to bail out Freedonia, but only on condition that RUFUS T FIREFLY (played by Groucho) be appointed leader of Freedonia (which is not so different from how Hitler came to power - see August 11. Rufus T Firefly turns out to be a maniac - just like Hitler was - and ends up getting Freedonia involved in a disastrous war, just like Hitler would six years later. Here is the scene where war is declared - it gives you a sense of how anarchic (meaning without any kind of rules or order) the Marx Brothers' comedy seemed, and allows you to see them all working together:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mEsXz-Bpog>

That's a very big scene. But in the very same movie, you get this small, completely magical scene, where Harpo is trying to fool Groucho that he is looking into a mirror by precisely mirroring his movements and dress. The bit where they swap position is absolute genius and completely surreal (which means totally weird):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKTT-sy0aLg>

The Marx Brothers films contain a huge number of really funny one liners - here's just a small sample of Groucho's one liners:

From *Monkey Business* - 'Oh I know it's a penny there and a penny here, but look at me. I worked myself up from nothing to a state of extreme poverty.'

From *Duck Soup* - 'Gentlemen, Chicolini here may talk like an idiot, and look like an idiot, but don't let that fool you: he really is an idiot', 'Remember - you're fighting for this woman's honour, which is probably more than she ever did.'

From *A Night at the Opera* - (on getting the restaurant bill at the end of a date with a girl) 'Let me see that...9 dollars and 40 cents? This is an outrage' (then, throwing the bill at his date) 'If I were you, I wouldn't pay it'.

The Marx Brothers continued to make more films, but after the end of World War II, there wasn't so much demand for their kind of comedy. So Groucho Marx took his talents for being funny to TV instead, hosting a game show called *YOU BET YOUR LIFE* from 1947 to 1961. The producers of the game show wanted Groucho to wear his famous greasepaint moustache, but he refused. Instead, he grew a moustache, which he kept for the rest of his life. Here is a very weird bit from *You Bet Your Life* where Groucho is interviewing someone who is pretending to be an Arab prince. He is, in fact, a writer of humorous books called *WILLIAM PETER BLATTY*, and a few seconds after this clip starts, he lets it slip that he's actually American:



<https://youtu.be/xrnzDMbFHkY?t=226>

This clip came from 1961, and the weird thing about it is that ten years later Blatty wrote a novel (I won't tell you its name) that was turned into one of the scariest movies ever made. But all that was in the future when he was joking around with Groucho Marx.

Here are some more funny Groucho Marx quotes:

'From the moment I picked your book up until the moment I laid it down I was convulsed with laughter. Someday I intend to read it.'

'I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member.'

'Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside a dog it's too dark to read.'

'I've had a perfectly wonderful evening. But this wasn't it.'

In 1974, three years before he died, Groucho was presented with an honorary Oscar for his and his brothers' contributions to film and comedy (by that time, Harpo and Chico were both dead). Here he is being presented with the award by the actor JACK LEMMON:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1YsAxiiH98>