



If muscle-bound Clark, sword-swinging Errol, and swinging-singing Frank were the men for their decades, why then is 'neurotic' Tony Randall

## THE MAN FOR OUR TIMES



BY CINDY ADAMS

"I AM DEFINITELY neurotic and psychotic," cheerily announced Tony Randall the first time we met.

The scene was the spring of 1962. The place: A New York saloon. The reason: Randall's press agent had said that his client is death on interviews at home—an apartment on Central Park West in New York. As we shared a pot of tea, the brown-haired, brown-eyed actor who, for awhile, played "Rock Hudson's best friend" in every movie (*Pillow Talk*, *Lover Come Back*), alternately laced and unlaced his fingers, folded then unfolded his arms, and dunked and undunked his tea bag.

Our second meeting was in the fall of '63. We were both in similar suites at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Los Angeles. At the appointed hour, the movie star (soon to be seen in Universal's *The Brass Bottle* with Burl Ives and in M-G-M's *The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao* this summer) came a-scratching at my door.

Ask what he's got against conducting interviews on his own stoop, and he'll answer passionately, "I hate it. Don't ask me why. I don't know. I just hate it!" On each "hate," nice Mr. Randall screwed his pleasant features into something that would frighten little children.

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After he reached the next word, his face resumed its sweet, benign smile, and he returned to shredding the hotel matches.

The comedian, who earns much of his “somewhere around half a million dollars a year” by being a light, gay, drawing-room type, has dark, serious, vigorous feelings on everything. Have an assortment of random Randallisms:



“**I hate** baseball. It’s a boring game. Absolutely stupefying. I only go to prove I’m a good American.”



“**I despise** cats. They’re vile. Wherever one’s around, the house and the owner smell of cat urine.”



“**I love** big noses. Even on women. That’s why I’m mad for Sophia Loren. I actually admire enormous noses. De Gaulle’s is marvelous. Why, he could lead a whole nation just with his nose.”



“**I hate** automobiles. They’re noisy and ugly. Until they manufacture electric cars that don’t pollute the atmosphere with fumes, I won’t have one.”



“**I love** exercising. Three times a week I weight-lift. To keep trim otherwise would mean participating in golf or tennis. And I hate competitive games. First of all, I always lose, and I find that humiliating. I once played tennis for seven years—until I realized I hadn’t won a game. If I vault over a net, I’m the type who catches my toe. Secondly, I don’t *want* to win. I hate winning. I find that depressing. I’m such a lousy player that if I beat anyone, the poor man would feel terrible. Then I’d have to joke with lines like, ‘Ha-ha-ha-ha—can’t win ’em all, y’know.’ And then he’d hate *me*.”



“**I hate** Los Angeles. It’s a mass of sprawling mediocrity. And I hate the outdoors. It doesn’t suit us. Human beings neither grow pelts nor eat raw foods. Nature created us to exist indoors.”

Who is Tony Randall—this bundle of “tics,” self-confessed “neuro-

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ses” and “hates”? First of all, of course, he’s an actor-comedian of remarkable skills. But is he, as some have said, very much a man of his times—a successful, popular star because he unconsciously reflects, in the way he plays his roles, so much of the neurotic age we live in?

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to a well-to-do art dealer and a housewife and educated at Northwestern, which he jumped to join New York’s Neighborhood Playhouse, Randall is a brilliant, erudite conversationalist. He liberally salts the dialogue with words like “concatenation” and “encapsulization.”

He’s a reader. A thinker. An opera lover. An art collector. “Anyone who entertains,” expounded Tony—massaging his chin with one hand and clawing a button out of the hotel’s new sofa with the other—“and I don’t mean the fellow who drops his pants and shows spotted underwear, but any performer in the public eye, should have an active mind.”

**RANDALL** freely admits that he goes through mental calisthenics now and again. So sharply honed are his thought processes that “A few times I’ve taken sleeping pills to try to get my mind to shut up. It’s like I’m walking around with energizer pills inside.

“I’m a graduate of psychotherapy,” he explained happily. “That’s different from psychoanalysis, you

“For me, self-hate is the worst. Occasionally I’ve hated myself so murderously that it’s almost suicidal. Now I’m learning to see my mistakes as *faux pas*. I don’t condemn myself so much. I’m realizing there’s a lesson to be learned every day. Actually, we’re all a little sick, but being psychotic and neurotic is normal for actors.”

**EVEN AS A** child he had “a neurotic need for attention.” It was his “protective coloration” for always being the littlest. At his GI weigh-in, he cranked up the scale to a hot 115 pounds.

And, too, our wee, skinny hero was the town clown in that “insipid, merciless, unfunny way kids have.” If singled out in school to merely sharpen a pencil, he’d hop there

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on one foot and skip back. He wasn't very amusing, he recalls, but he was persistent. He remembers vividly his teachers' sighs. "It was like they were thinking, 'Oh, no, that miserable kid isn't going to do *that* again!'"

Theorizes Tony, "A completely contented person has no itch to prove something. That's why I'm an actor. I have a tremendous drive. I must satisfy the neurotic need to be successful and my psychotic need to live in an imaginary world, to escape from myself, to live in fantasy."

Maybe there's a World War going on inside Tony's talented bones periodically, but despite the finger-crushing, button-picking, and "hate" facials, on the surface he's a happy soul. A hearty laugh. A big joker. A knee slapper. He's admittedly Charley-Good-Natured. Gets along well with everyone. Our boy is also loyal and devoted. Close to his sister and her four children whom he sees every week. Buddy-buddy with old-time cronies like the druggist in Chicago whom he sees rarely but long-distances frequently.

He's "merciless" only if a fellow actor doesn't know the lines or a property man forgets a prop. "Then," snarls Tiger Randall, "I become icy cold. I can't take ineptitude. See, my sole aim in life is a good performance. Each time it has to be my very *best!*"

Oh, he has a few weensy peculiarities, I guess. That is, if you consider his aversion to years and dates strange. Randall is on the green side of 45, yet ask his birth date, and he'll answer, "Just say I'm the oldest living juvenile." Ask his wedding date, and he'll hedge, "A long time ago." Even with an obvious one like "Which war were you in?" he'll say only, "The big one, honey."

So, if that's considered oddball, then. . . . Of course, there's that other teensy oddity. His wife's name (Florence). He'll tell one reporter that it's Frances. Another Bernice. Another Gertrude or Pauline.

Good-looking Florence (who has a small nose, incidentally) is a non-professional. He spied her in a bank during his school days. He didn't speak to her. Didn't even know her

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name. And yet, quoth Anthony, "I knew immediately I was going to marry her." He did, too. And they've lived happily ever after, too. However, he shies from discussing her, and circumvents it by either making up things or explaining, "I prefer keeping that part of my life private."

Meanwhile, back at the plot, Tony ultimately lassoed some small legit roles after his long run on the therapist's chair. He played in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* with Katharine Cornell and in *Caesar and Cleopatra* with Sir Cedric Hardwicke. A spot on Henry Morgan's radio show gave place to the second-banana role on the *Mister Peepers* TV series starring Wally Cox. This led to a bit of Broadway fluff called *Oh Men! Oh Women!*, which led to the cinematic version of *Oh Men! Oh Women!*, and the heavy tragedian—a professional actor since teenhood—became what *Life* magazine called "The finest new comedian in decades." He has yet to be unemployed one day since.

"Everything depends on the confluence of events," muses Randall. "Crosby and Gable were so exactly right for the 'thirties. Sinatra's the-hell-with-'em attitude is so exactly right for now.

"Actually, I was born during the wrong time," philosophizes Mr. Randall, breaking his soliloquy to smear Chapstick on his lips. "I should have lived during the trouping-repertory-company period. I want to play Shakespeare. I intend to devote a year of my life to this for peanuts [possibly in Elia Kazan's forthcoming New York repertory company]. My \$1500-a-day salary in pictures isn't what makes me happy.

"For instance, I got very successful doing light comedy where you play second to leading men. But I suddenly decided never again. No more. I've done the last I'll ever do. I'm tired of losing the girl. In *Mating Game*, I got Debbie Reynolds, and I found I genuinely liked it. Those other roles give you security. You can go on in pictures for years. But money doesn't do anything for me.

"I know it's my ego, but I must

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have a challenge. In repertory, I could act constantly—new plays, new characterizations every week. I could satisfy my burning desire to be before the public. My need to be liked is probably the reason I'm a comedian in the first place."

**MR. R. ADMITS** to being a crashing howl offstage, too. To everybody, that is, except Mrs. R. "I originally won her with humor," he chuckled. "When I used to cross my eyes I'd render her helpless. But she doesn't laugh at me anymore. I do such funny things as wriggling into the room on my stomach like a snake, and all she says is, 'Just what are you doing down there?'"

"She also says I talk too much. And I fidget. She says I can't sit still," said Tony, wringing his hands. "She says I keep twitching around. Would you believe it?"



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