

This is the first transcript of The Twilight Zone Podcast for hearing impaired fans of The Twilight Zone. Although perhaps “transcript” isn't quite the right term, as this document is actually the notes I make prior to recording the show, which I then read from. Instead of just deleting them each time as I have done for 100 plus episodes of The Twilight Zone Podcast, I hope they will be of some enjoyment to hearing impaired fans of the show. Please bear in mind that these notes are made for me to riff on and read from, so the style and cadence may be different from if they were written for an article, and much as I've tried to clean them up they may be rough round the edges in places.

My apologies that I didn't do this sooner, but I hope you enjoy them now.

Best Wishes – Tom Elliot

Five Characters in Search of an Exit

Introduction:

Where are we? What are we? Who are we? Three questions that we've probably all asked at some point in our lives, perhaps not in the plural sense, but certainly in the singular. Where am I? What am I? Who am I?

Why am I here? What am I doing with my life? Who am I supposed to be?

We're seconds into this Twilight Zone Podcast and already things are getting kind of heavy. But in this case, how can we not be? It's always a bit of a balancing act with this show. The Twilight Zone has many levels. On one end of the spectrum there's the pure enjoyment of it – the stories, the actors, the production. But on the other end there's the philosophy and the existential aspect, and hopefully somewhere in-between, the poetry.

I try to find that balance, to not be too far one way or the other but this time, when the episode begins we're presented with such an abstract scene in front of us that I have to then ask myself those questions. Where am I and what am I doing? How do I approach this one?

An army Major awakes on our screen, in a cylindrical room with high walls, then he encounters a clown, a ballerina, a tramp and a bagpiper – five people in all, but not just any people, but people with very distinct and different roles and looks. People who you immediately identify with a certain thing the moment you see them. So surely, if you encounter these people, then maybe that's a clue as to where you are...

CLIP: 02:29

The Clown: A circus, there must be a circus. Hahahaha yes. Yeas there must be a circus. A clown, a circus, an officer, a war. That's logic isn't it. But it doesn't figure at all, not at all.

The Major: Why not?

The Clown: Because there is no circus and there is no war. You're just like the rest of us...

The Major: The rest of us?

[Bagpipe music plays]

The Major: What's going in here? Where are we? What are we? Who are we? WHO ARE WE?!

The Ballerina: None of us knows Major. We don't know who we are, we don't know where we are. Each of us woke up one moment and here we were in the darkness.

The Major: How could that happen?

The Ballerina: That's the question we asked ourselves. A question with no answer Major. We're nameless things with no memory. No knowledge of what went before. No understanding of what is now. No knowledge of what will be.

Each of us woke up one moment and here we were in the darkness. It's almost too obvious for me to point that out as being how we all flicker into existence. But what an abstract, bizarre and completely surreal opening scene this is when we meet these Five Characters in Search of an Exit...

OPENING NARRATION – 04:50

Clown, Hobo, Ballet Dancer, Bagpiper and an Army Major. A collection of question marks. Five improbable entities stuck together in a pit of darkness. No logic, no reason, no explanation. Just a prolonged nightmare in which fear, loneliness and the unexplainable walk hand in hand through the shadows. In a moment we'll start collecting clues as to the "whys", the "whats" and the "wheres". We will not end the nightmare, we'll only explain it because this, is The Twilight Zone...

First Broadcast December 22nd 1961

Written by Rod Serling but based on a short story by Marvin Petal

Directed by Lamont Johnson

Wonderful opening narration by Rod Serling with that ominous music creeping along in the background. The camera pans up and there he is at the rim of the room. And he gives us no comfort at this point, no indication that these people are going to be okay or why they're there, only an indication that there will be an explanation, but no end to the nightmare. Just brilliant.

Our director Lamont Johnson returns after his triumph in *The Shelter* earlier in the season, and this is his second of his eight *Twilight Zones*. Next up is *Nothing in the dark*, so what an amazing trio to begin his run.

Seeing as we met him not so long ago, I won't go through his full bio, but there is one thing that I will mention that I don't think I did last time around that is in its own way, rather wonderful. Lamont

Johnson's final directing job was an episode of a show called Felicity. I'm not familiar with this show and I'm not sure it ever aired in the UK, but the synopsis on IMDB goes like this:

“It all starts the moment shy, beautiful Felicity Porter asks Ben Covington to sign her high school yearbook. It's graduation day... he's gorgeous... and she's had a four-year crush on him. Even though the two have never spoken, what he writes is so insightful, so perfect, it persuades Felicity to change the course of her future. A future defined by medical school and the dreams of her parents. She surreptitiously follows Ben to UNY (the fictional University of New York) and is quickly swept into a romantic triangle that brings both discovery and heartache. Felicity moved to New York to find romance but ends up finding herself.”

I'm not sure it's a show that would ever have caught my attention, except for a couple of things. One of the creators of the show was JJ Abrams, who of course has gone on to become an A list presence in the movie world. But, in the year 2000 Abrams wrote an episode of Felicity called Help For the Lovelorn. And rather like the gimmick episodes I spoke about in the last episode, the gimmick this time round was that it was staged like The Twilight Zone, and the director was Lamont Johnson...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJf4aNi8tDM>

I watched this episode and it is quite an affectionate homage. Completely in black and white with Twilight Zone-esque music and nods to several Twilight Zone episodes like What You Need and of course, Five Characters in Search of an Exit. Considering that the episode we're speaking about tonight is considered such a classic, it is I think quite nice that he was brought back for this by Abrams and fitting that it was his last work.

Now back in our episode the Major is trying to find a way out of the room in which he's been trapped. Having the major as the introductory character was a smart move because we as an audience see a military man and I think we automatically think of him as level headed and probably dependable. If we had been introduced by the clown maybe, or the hobo, I don't think we'd have started with our feet on the ground. We see him, and we think perhaps he's been kidnapped by a foreign government or aliens or “something”. So we're effectively as surprised as him at the bizarreness of the situation.

William Windom – The Major

After serving in World War two, Windom began his screen acting career in 1949 and when he started, he never stopped. Windom was a very busy actor and he was in so many of the high profile television shows over the years, Columbo, Quincy, The incredible Hulk, the list just goes on and on. Looking down his bio he seems to be someone who would jump from show to show rather than taking a long time recurring role, but there are so many in the list that it's possible he may have done. But there are a couple of prominent Rod Serling links. Apart from appearing in The Twilight Zone again in the episode Miniature, he played The President in one of the better Planet of the Apes sequels, Escape from Planet of the Apes. And he also played a couple of roles in Night gallery too. He played Professor Putnam in the story Little Girl Lost – not the same story as the Twilight Zone episode that we'll be coming to soon. But he also plays the lead in the episode They're tearing down Tim Rileys Bar.

That is often mentioned as being one of the more highly regarded Night Gallery episodes and I always think of it as the third of Serling's man in mid life crisis trilogy along with Walking Distance and a Stop at Willoughby. I prefer Walking distance and Willoughby, but I really do like They're tearing down Tim Riley's bar too, and it's fascinating to see Serling going back to that theme again.

In this I think he is perfect as the level headed soldier thrust into this bizarre situation and he really gives us that footing and purchase. We can experience this with him as the one we identify with. In The Twilight Zone Companion he said:

"I just poured on the coal. You try to make it un-doll-like as long as you can, which isn't hard to do, because they're all sort of strange people"

- Credit: The Twilight Zone Companion by Marc Scott Zicree

Now if you recall, at the end of the last episode when I handed over to Rod Serling to find out what episode was next, he really talked up the ending to this episode, like it was something that would blow your mind. There was a confidence there – as if to say not only will you be blown away by this one, but you'll never guess it.

So confident is the episode, that at one point the characters even trot out a list of possible explanations which likely would have been used in several stories in the past and of the time, and would be used again in the future....

CLIP 07:07

The Major: What's up there?

The Clown: You name it. Sky, artificial light, flourescent lamp, an illuminated microscope. You name it, one guess is as good as another.

The Ballerina: Maybe we're on another planet, or maybe we're on a spaceship going to another planet. Maybe we're all insane, or maybe this is a mirage, an illusion.

The Tramp: We're dead and this is limbo.

The Bagpiper: We don't really exist. We're dream figures from somebody else's existence.

The Clown: Or we're each of us having a dream and everyone else is part of the other person's dream. You call it, you can have it. That's the one thing we have an abundance of....possibilities. An infinite number of possibilities.

All explanations that could conceivably be used at the end of this, and have been used in other stories. But what about this story, where did this one come from?

I mentioned earlier that it was based on a short story by Marvin petal. I would dearly have loved to get my hands on that story, but I believe that it went unpublished – probably because it was bought for The Twilight Zone.

In Unlocking the door to a television Classic, Martin Grams Junior quotes Marvin Petal and he says:

"I attended a Democratic Rally held at the home of Robert Ryan. That was 1960, I guess, and it was for the Democratic Party in general. I knew Rod Serling was going to be there so I typed a synopsis about 4 or 5 pages called 'The Depository' and wrote the whole scenario on speculation, mostly with dialogue. I approached Serling at the party and said, 'Listen, I have a story that I think would make a great script for The Twilight Zone.' Serling said 'Well, submit it to my producer, Buck Houghton.' So I did and they said 'Okay, we'll buy it but Rod wants to do the script' which I believe paid about \$2000. I was paid only \$250 and no residuals. As many times as that episode has been re-run on television, I regret not getting any residuals."

– **Credit: Unlocking the Door to a Television Classic by Martin Grams Junior**

So that's where the story came from, but as we know, it didn't keep the name The Depository. And Martin Petal explains why:

"They changed the title of the original story because, as they explained to me, they felt it sounded too much like 'suppository'. Rod kept the story pretty damn close to how I had it. I believe he took out one character, but it was pretty much the same as I had written it"

– **Credit: Unlocking the Door to a Television Classic by Martin Grams Junior**

The title then became Five Characters in Search of an Exit, inspired by Luigi Pirandello's stage play from 1921 called Six Characters in Search of an Author. And the plot of that play, goes like this:

An acting company prepares to rehearse the play *Mixing It Up* by Luigi Pirandello. As the rehearsal is about to begin, they are unexpectedly interrupted by the arrival of six strange people. The Director of the play, furious at the interruption, demands an explanation. The Father explains that they are unfinished characters in search of an author to finish their story. The Director initially believes them to be mad, but as they begin to argue among themselves and reveal details of their story, he begins to listen. The Father and The Mother had one child together (The Son), but they have separated and Mother has had three children by another man - The Stepdaughter, The Boy and The Child (a girl). The Father attempted to buy sex from The Stepdaughter, claiming he did not recognize her after so many years, but The Stepdaughter is convinced he knew who she was the entire time. The Mother walked in on The Father and The Stepdaughter shortly after The Father's proposal and informs The Stepdaughter that he is her ex-husband; they both express their disgust and outrage. While The Director is not an author, he agrees to load it their story despite disbelief among the jeering actors.

The final act of the play begins in the garden. It is revealed that there was much arguing among the family members as The Father sent for The Mother, The Stepdaughter, The Child, The Boy, and The Son to come back and stay with him. The Son reveals that he hates the family for sending him away

and does not consider The Stepdaughter or the others a part of his family. The scene ends with The Child drowning in a fountain, The Boy committing suicide with a revolver, and The Stepdaughter running out of the theater, leaving The Son, The Mother, and The Father on stage. The play ends with The Director confused over whether it was real or not, concluding that in either case he lost a whole day over it.

I'm not sure when the term "meta" was originated, it's used quite regularly these days, but that certainly has that aspect to it. And the story seems to feature characters who are who they are, because they were created that way.

Now Rod Serling promised us clues, and perhaps this is one of the biggest:

CLIP: 08:22

The Major: Someone knows we're here.

The Ballerina: How so?

The Major: They have to, you've all been here a while, possibly a long while. Someone must feed you, someone must give you water. Well? Someone must bring food down.

The Ballerina There's been no food or water.

The Major: But we'll starve to death or die of thirst.

The Ballerina: Do you feel hungry Major? Or thirsty, or heat or cold or fatigue or discomfort.

The Clown: Or anything, do you feel anything Major?

Of our cast, the main speaking parts go to The Major, the Clown and the Ballerina...

Susan Garrison – The Ballerina

Susan was born in 1938 and had a relatively short acting career. In 1957 she had a prominent part in the film, *The Sweet Smell of Success* with Tony Curtis and Burt Lancaster in which she plays Lancaster's sister - and then only has eight more credits to her name – this episode being her second to last and the last being in 1963 in the TV series *Breaking Point*.

In *The Sweet Smell of success*, she played the sister to Burt Lancaster's gossip columnist, but in real life – her daughter appeared in one of the TV shows that rode the crest of the emerging reality television trend and raised its profile even further. Here daughter is Darva Conger who won the TV show who wants to marry a millionaire, and then went on to marry said millionaire Rick Rosenthal, for a while at least.

I really enjoy Susan's part here. I think of them all she is probably the biggest clue as to what they are. Early on when we see her, she is moving, not quite just as a ballerina, but like a doll ballerina, with the stiffness of limbs. And when she speaks, she has that slightly vacant air about her. And when she smiles, it's like she smiles because she has a face that is made to smile and not necessarily because she knows why she smiles.

As our story continues, the Major also continues to try and find a way out, but then the ballerina has an idea...

CLIP: 15:39

The Major: I see what she's getting at, don't any of you see it? One on top of the other, standing on each other's shoulders. How about that? Isn't that the way they do it in circuses?

The Clown: I'll ask him when he comes in. I assure you that though I may wear the costume of a clown, I have no recollection whatsoever of having been one. It is true we don't feel hunger or thirst, but pain is quite another thing. And a drop from twenty feet up down to this hard floor, that is a sensation that I could do without.

Now the clown said something there, and it's referred to earlier on by the Major as well when he says that they must have been severed from their lives in some way. These characters are all something, and they act in a certain way because they are that thing, but they have no past. They are what they are, because they are. And that's something I'll come back to later on.

Murray Matheson – The Clown

Despite his very upper class British accent, Murray Matheson who played the Clown was actually born in Australia. Despite working some regular jobs like being a bank clerk, his desire to act eventually brought him to Melbourne where he trained in the theatre. He then moved to England where he trod the board on the London stage until his acting career took a back seat when he served as an intelligence officer in the RAF attached to the British Embassy in Moscow.

Following the war, he then moved to Canada and his screen career began to take off.

He popped up in several of the popular shows of the time like Alfred Hitchcock Presents and later in life continued to be a presence on television with parts in Battlestar Galactica and Kolchak the Night Stalker. So he has quite a few genre credits to his name. And although this was his only appearance in this Twilight Zone, he went on to have a part in the Night Gallery story The Doll of Death, and also had a part in the Kick the Can segment of Twilight Zone the Movie.

What I really love about him in this episode is that dual aspect of his personality. One minute he's playing the fool, clowning around. The next he's saying the most insightful and philosophical things of all of them. Is that the domain of the clown though? And considering he's a clown, because he's a

clown and knows nothing of life before, why is he like that? Perhaps it is the clowns who know more than most of us why we're here. And that's why they laugh so much.

In the *Twilight Zone Companion* he said:

“I was upside-down for most of the time, but I started as a dancer on the stage and so that part of it was easy for me.”

– **Credit: *The Twilight Zone Companion* by Marc Scott Zicree**

CLIP: 16:26

The Major: I'll start. The Clown on my shoulders. Then the Tramp, the Bagpiper and then the girl.

Now if it were me I'd have put the Bagpiper on the bottom, but seeing how we are quite close to the end, let's have a look at our last two of five.

Kelton Garwood – The Tramp

Kelton Garwood was born in 1928, so would be in his thirties by this point. In early life while at university, he would appear in plays and work as a magician and then went on to study acting in New York. By all accounts this role is the one that he is most remembered for, but he did work fairly steadily in the sixties, most notably with a recurring role in *Gunsmoke* as Percy Crump, but then seemed to stop acting onscreen in the early seventies, until a single role in 1988 in *Return to Snowy River*. Kelton sadly died young at the age of 63.

Clark Allen – The Bagpiper

Clark Allen only had four screen credits to his name. He was in the shows *Peter Gunn* and *Michael Shayne* and in those shows he's only credited as guitarist. Then there's *The Twilight Zone* where he's the Bagpiper and then only one more credit in 1963 in a show called *Channing* and there doesn't seem to be a name attached to whatever that character was.

But rather than consider this a short and failed acting career, I think the truth of it seems to be that Clark Allen had a lot more going in his life. He seemed to want to do different things. Apparently he was a musician, singer, nautical historian, model maker, linguist. He owned a nightclub where he was shot in a robbery attempt once. And he was a painter and sculptor and Vincent Price was a collector of his work.

He passed away in 2008, and the artist Nathan Fowkes said of him:

“Clark Allen passed away last week. He was a delightful man and a favorite subject for local artists, especially me. I started drawing and painting Clark in '92 when I first moved to LA and have been

working with him off and on ever since. I have stacks of drawings and paintings of him that I will scan and post here from time to time.

He lived a more colorful life than many of us can hope for, (I thought his stories were tall tales until I visited his home and we looked through his old photo albums) and it was my pleasure to get to know him. He will be missed.”

I remember interviewing the actor and writer Nicholas Vince once, most famous for playing The Chatterer in the film Hellraiser. He then went on to have a part in the Clive Barker film Nightbreed. But after Nightbreed, he left acting and I asked him “why did you leave acting when it was what you'd wanted to do for the rest of your life?” It was a poorly worded question and Nick who is a wonderful gentleman answered, without any malice or judgement because of my bad question “it's interesting that you thought I wanted to act for the rest of my life”.

And he's right. I think we all think, how great to be a successful and famous actor. But it is like anything. Unless you're doing the thing you want to do most of all in life, we do get bored of jobs, or only want to do them for a short while or opportunities come up that take us elsewhere. So that's just something to think about I suppose with those Twilight Zone actors that we come across, like Clark Allen and Susan Garrison in this episode.

CLIP: 17:30

The Bagpiper: Alright Miss, it's up to you.

The Ballerina: Can you see the top, is there a ledge or anything?

The Bagpiper: It's several more feet top to the top.

The Ballerina: I can't reach it, it's just a little above me.

The Major: Try, stretch...stretch a little. All of us stretch, try, you've got to try.

[A Bell rings, and they all fall to the floor]

Now our five characters try to climb to the top, but their first attempt fails. The Ballerina is almost there, but the sound of the mysterious bell that also rang earlier in the episode, causes them all to fall.

So let's take a moment to look at this most unusual set. It would seem, that Martin Petal may have had some input into the production. He said:

“I recall they were worried about how they were going to produce it. The vertical climb was a challenge for them., but I suggested they build half of the huge container and make it horizontal and that's how they shot it. I wasn't on the set when they filmed it. But they took my suggestion and went with it. I never saw Serling before that party and I never saw him since.”

– **Credit: Unlocking the Door to a Television Classic by Martin Grams Junior**

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So that's how it was done. This half tube or barrel was built at MGM and they used a combination of stunt performers and the actors in close up to achieve the effect.

William Windom said:

“I also remember how the entire set was constructed so it could be tilted. In the scene when we stand on each others shoulders, the tube was tilted so we wouldn't hurt each other”

– **Credit: Unlocking the Door to a Television Classic by Martin Grams Junior**

In The Twilight Zone Companion, Lamont Johnson said:

“It was like a theatre experience, like working on a unit set in a theatre, and I've done a lot of theatre so it didn't hold any particular problems for me. The barrel was two different sets. One was vertical, the other was horizontal or at an angle so that we could cant it and make it whatever angle we felt we needed for the camera”

– **Credit: The Twilight Zone Companion by Marc Scott Zicree**

But this set would pose its own problems for cinematographer George Clemens, he said:

“It was a round aluminium set that we just kept moving around. And I could not use direct lighting, I used what we call indirect lighting, reflected. I had a great big sheet that was treated so as to reflect light.”

– **Credit: The Twilight Zone Companion by Marc Scott Zicree**

In the great tradition of Forbidden Planet and The Twilight Zone, the set would later be used in various ways in productions of The Outer Limits and again in The Twilight Zone in No Time Like the Past.

Despite their first effort failing, the characters persevere, and this time, the Major makes it over the rim.

CLIP: 22:09

The Clown: What's there?

The Tramp: What do you see?

The Ballerina: Major, where are we?

[The Major falls from the rim of the barrel and screams, landing in the snow outside]

Little Girl: I found this in the snow, someone must have dropped it.

Woman: Oh thank you dear. Just drop that in the barrel over there will you?

The little girl we just saw was Mona Houghton, the daughter of Buck Houghton the producer, and apparently she was so nervous about her scene, that her Dad walked her around the set until she was so tired she couldn't be nervous any more.

Of course we see that our characters are dolls in a charity barrel and as the Major is placed back in, the Ballerina sheds a tear. Although they bear the likenesses of the actors, these are not them in make-up, nor are they actual miniature dolls. They are mannequins fitted with life sized mask of the actors to achieve this, rather haunting effect.

Summing Up

One anecdote I've said several times is that my introduction to the show as a child, was staying up until two in the morning to watch *The Twilight Zone*. And if I think back to that time and place and think of the show, this is the first episode that comes into my head. Second is *Mirror Image*.

I think the thing that each of those episodes share, is that complete lack of an element of judgement in some way, or a moral to the story. They're both episodes where the *Twilight* is doing something for a reason that we just don't know. In *Mirror Image* it's a frightening situation, having a doppelgänger try to take over your place in life, but *Five Characters in Search of an Exit* is frightening in a similar way. Not knowing where you are and whether you will ever escape that place, but also not knowing how you got there, and only knowing who you are because, you just are.

Even more than *Mirror Image* though, this is is evening more bleak and frightening. At least *Mirror Image* had recognisable locations, and the main character knew who she was. But *Five Characters in Search of an Exit*, is just the complete removal of everything from a person except for their designation. Their profession or most identifiable role. They are those things, and that's all they know.

The ending, offers some kind of explanation, but at the same time it doesn't. We get it. These are dolls in a charity barrel, but why has this happened? If we create something and give it some semblance of identity, a ballerina, soldier and so on, does it on some level take that on? I don't think the episode is really suggesting that either. What is it suggesting?

Zicree comments on the production in *The Twilight Zone Companion*, but he doesn't offer any kind of theory on what this episode is telling us. Even Douglas Brode in *Rod Serling and The Twilight Zone The Fiftieth Anniversary Tribute* doesn't have an entry on it – and that book is very much about subtext and meaning.

When I spoke to Arlen Schumer last year he offered an explanation along the lines of we're all looking for a way out. With Five Characters in Search of an Exit, I think if we are to look for any meaning in it, then we really do need to look at it from a more philosophical perspective, because there is no science fiction explanation. It's not about dolls animated though whatever means, this is a story that is purely existential.

So to look into this further I'll turn to the book Philosophy in The Twilight Zone which is edited by Noel Carroll and Lester H Hunt. And in it there is an essay called Existentialism and Searching for an Exit by Susan L Feagin. I'll just read a few snippets of it from someone who is clearly more comfortable in this arena than me. The essay identifies a couple of themes here:

“the idea that what is fictional from one point of view is real from another, and, second, the challenge to personhood and a sense of self that can arise when characters are identified in terms of roles rather than as individuals with proper names”

“We are confined to circumstances we have not chosen and do not understand, that we are compelled to search for knowledge, both of ourselves and of the world, that necessarily eludes us, and that the need to act in the absence of sufficiently good reasons to believe our actions will be successful makes life absurd”

– **Credit: Existentialism and Searching for an Exit – Susan L feagin**

I adore this episode. It's top drawer Twilight Zone for me. From the interplay between the characters, especially the Major and the Clown, to the sheer sense of disorientation and the sense that they are in a place that is beyond what we understand. And when we do understand it, it makes sense but not in a way that comforts us.

I think that existential aspect is all very interesting, but if you ask me. I don't really want to have this episode all figured out. In this case, I want to remain the kid who watched this at two o'clock in the morning and just had his mind blown. I see what's happening. I understand the flow and the purpose of the story, but the why and the how is beyond my comprehension. And while I like the stories with morals and lessons and judgement, sometimes...maybe not all the time, but definitely sometimes I think Five Characters in Search of an Exit, an episode where I just don't have any answers, is the most Twilight Zone episode of them all.

CLOSING NARRATION

Just a barrel, a dark depository where are kept the counterfeit, make-believe pieces of plaster and cloth wrought in the distorted image of human life. But this added hopeful note...perhaps they are unloved only for the moment. In the arms of children...there can be nothing but love. A clown, a

tramp, a bagpipe player, a ballet dancer and a major. Tonight's cast of players on the stage known as The Twilight Zone.

Submitted For Your Approval

Now lets read some listener email in, Submitted for your approval...

1 - Hi Tom,

This TZ episode has never been one I've appreciated very much. And so when I heard your creative intro to the podcast episode, I was pretty amused, and looking forward to your take on the production. As it turns out, your overall perspective is pretty much the same as mine, although I really appreciated the biographical and historical backstory that you provided on Keaton and the episode's creation. I have a better feeling for this production than before...although it is still one that I will not seek out for viewing.

In your introduction to the podcast, you mentioned the one-off episodes that TV series would often do in the 1990's and 2000's. It immediately brought to mind one that involves the Twilight Zone itself. In fact, knowing that your next podcast will feature the very Zone episode that ties in here, I'm wondering if perhaps you left it out of the examples you gave on purpose so that you could tell the story next week.

If you don't know what I'm referring to, it is the episode of Felicity that was done in 2000, written by JJ Abrams. Abrams, a major fan of Rod Serling and The Twilight Zone, wanted to create a tribute episode of Felicity. He selected "Five Characters in Search of an Exit" as the template for his story. He even went to far as to bring back LaMont Johnson to direct. You may recall that Johnson had directed the Five Characters episode of The Twilight Zone. And as a great touch, the episode was produced in beautiful black and white. I thought it was cool that, just like Serling & Houghton did for "Once Upon a Time," Abrams brought back a vintage director for this episode, which is entitled "Help for the Lovelorn."

Here's a promo for the episode, which can be viewed on Hulu if you have a subscription or downloaded from Vudu for a buck.

Anyway, thanks for the work you put into your podcast, Tom. Your research adds depth, and your production work and creativity adds a degree of fun to your program that keeps it at the top of the TZ podcast heap. Keep up the superior work.

Best,

Roger Scarlett

Edinboro, PA

USA

2 - Hi Tom,

I hope your well, I'd just like to send you a little personal view on the stage play at the Almeida theatre which I saw along with my brother in law last Saturday night.

It was great to arrive at the theatre and experience the buzz and anticipation that was very evident in the foyer and bar, I picked up a programme and a couple of freebie postcards showing the twilight zone logo and 50s tv which was also present on a large poster, so already we were feeling like we were on the brink of entering the TZ for real at last.

We were actually sat on the front row right in the middle so when the white screen went up and we saw the set and actors we really did feel like we were in it, in fact someone joked that we were so close that we probably had a mention in the programme.

I felt that the stage play really took the audience on a trip to remember, it was quite different from any other play I'd experienced which says a lot as I work in a theatre, the stage area was fundamentally a large black box It was like taking the front off an old tv to see that the actors were in fact 3 dimensional and real, the featured stories were presented in a unique way as well I thought, each one bringing the viewer to a point of anticipation and then moving on to another story before finally later coming back to complete the story with the twist and "punchline ".

Most of the selected stories were not what I'd expected either, mostly being the ones that are a little bit more obscure which was probably on reflection the only down side for me, I would have liked to see walking distance and time enough at last but the ones chosen were done really well, I think the twilight zone stage play does in a lot of respects what the tv show did, and that is to surprise the viewer, challenge them, take them out of the norm and present the message in an exciting and thought provoking way. All the actors in their "black and white" shades of 50s dress were excellent, playing multiple parts and being believable in them all.

All in all a very enjoyable different theatre experience, the audience clearly got into the spirit and were moved in all the right places as far as I could make out. My hope is that the show tours because with the right publicity it could bring the show to a new audience. Just to finish I'd like to say that I loved the way Rod Serling himself appears in the guise of some of the actors when they find themselves smoking a cigarette at unexpected moments, only people who have seen the show will know what I mean but I thought it was clever, witty and fun.

Well that's it Tom, looking forward to the new podcasts I've introduced a few friends to it and they agree like me that it's really one of the best shows we've heard.

Regards from Sheffield, UK

Steve

3 - Hello Tom!

I am a long time listener and consider myself a "friend of the show". My life has taken many turns lately so it has been over a year since I have emailed. However, I have tried to keep up to date on your show and finally caught up.

I wanted to comment on the two previous episodes starting with The Jungle. While John Dehner did a fine job with what he had to work with I was not a big fan of the episode. I didn't feel there was much story there and the ending was a bit disappointing. In the beginning, the character of Alan Richards scolds his wife for believing in protective tokens. In the next scene, he is lecturing the other businessmen about the reality of jungle magic and revealing their own superstitions. There was no evidence that he was aware of this hypocrisy and it made his character confusing. I also found the final act, which consisted of him darting his eyes around at stock sound effects, to be a bit silly. The brutality of the last scene, with the lion racing towards him, was shocking, especially considering it was 1961! In my opinion, this saved the episode.

Moving on to Once Upon a Time, I think your review was spot on. The silent scenes with Buster Keaton were excellent and I was surprised when you revealed they had not planned it that way from the beginning! The scenes in 1960 were much flatter and most of the scenes with Rollo didn't work at all. I have been a fan of Buster Keaton for a long time and was gratified to hear about your exploration of this founding father of cinema. More people should be aware of his genius! Oh - and your introduction to the episode (where you pretended to put on a helmet to move forward in time) was a perfect touch.

It has been so long since I have written and I want to once again thank you for all the time you put in on the show. I take such enjoyment in listening to the podcast that it saddens me to be caught up and have to wait to hear the next one. Listening to these shows is like reading a letter from a distant and dear friend.

All the best!

Rob Gilleece

4 - Hi Tom,

I am a relatively new listener to the podcast (started listening about 3 months ago) and I have integrated your show into my weekly schedule. Thank you for making my Los Angeles work commutes much more tolerable, it has become my traffic therapy over the past few months. As probably one of your youngest viewers, 18, I commend your ability to time and time again appeal to an audience from all ages and locations.

My mother introduced me to the show when I was a young kid with "The After Hours" and for many years that episode would haunt me as I found the premise and the mannequins themselves to be quite creepy. Since then The Twilight Zone has become a comfort to me through many life changes and after watching all episodes multiple times I have determined my top two episodes are "A Stop At Willoughby" and "And When the Sky Was Opened". Willoughby time and time again caters to the "daydream" like experiences where we picture ourselves in a world that brings us eternal peace and to quote the episode, "A place where a man can live his life full measure". "And When the Sky Was

Opened" leaves me with this eery feeling after each time I finish it. After listening to your episode from way back when, you articulated perfectly that the mystery is that we don't know what prompted the three astronauts to disappear and with the lack of special effects, it creates an even more thought provoking conclusion.

I live in Pacific Palisades, a small coastal town in Los Angeles that Rod Serling and his family resided in for many years. It's a small town so I attended the same schools as Rod's two daughters, much later obviously and my grandmother was actually a friend of Rod's wife Carol Serling. A couple years ago in our town newspaper she sat down for an interview which I feel like you would find quite fascinating so I will leave it below for you to read. She details their earlier life and Rod's writing experiences throughout the seasons.

Keep up the great work Tom, I look forward to the next podcast.

Thanks,
Spencer

5 - Hi Tom

I'm a UK listener and I want to say how much I enjoy listening to your podcast. Your shows are thoroughly entertaining and informative, and really manage to capture the mood and feel of those classic Twilight Zone episodes.

I first started watching the Twilight Zone sometime in the late eighties or early nineties when it was shown on Friday nights on Channel 4. I was about 15 at the time and I was hooked from the very first episode I saw.

I used to look forward to it every Friday, and even remember convincing my mum to drive home a day early from a family holiday (from Kerry in Ireland to Belfast where I lived) so I could make it home in time to watch the Twilight Zone on a Friday night. The fact that it had lashed solidly for a week in Kerry probably helped my cause!

Then one week Channel 4 just stopped showing the Twilight Zone. I ended up writing to them asking if they were going to show it again, and I did get a letter back saying they didn't have any plans to show it in the short term, but maybe they would show it again at some stage. As far as I'm aware that was the last time the Twilight Zone was shown on terrestrial television in the UK.

It's nearly 30 years later and my friends still take the piss out of me for writing to a tv station. I have lost count of the number of times they have started a conversation with the words 'Dear Channel Four...' before giving a sly look in my direction.

Thanks again for the podcast. The care and passion you put in to each episode is really appreciated.

Keep up the good work!

Richard

Thanks to new iTunes reviewers: DJ Shea

Thanks to new Patreon supporters: Christina Snyder, Rafael, Michael Binney, Julian Bucholz, Rob Gilleece, Steve Badger, Paul Joggerst, Alexandria Brooks

If you want to comment on The Twilight Zone Podcast, please email me at tom@thetwilightzonepodcast.com

Next Episode: A Quality of Mercy

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