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Sid Raymond at 90 still playing it cool

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He may have become famous 50 years ago as the voice of the popular Baby Huey series, but now, at 90, Sid Raymond is just hitting his stride.

Raymond, a cherubic face with a wide grin, says, "I can hardly believe they were calling me from Canada to do a remake of the cartoons, but I'm ready for The Return of Baby Huey and I guess they feel audiences are, too."

The North Miami Beach resident just played an airline passenger in Big Trouble, which was filmed in Miami and stars Tim Allen -- who plays a Herald reporter -- with Rene Russo and Dennis Farina. The Miami International Airport was a crucial location for this caper, based on Herald columnist Dave Barry's best-selling novel. It is scheduled for release next month.

"It may only have been a bit part," Raymond says philosophically, "but I've been making a living playing second banana to some of the greatest stars and I love it."

He has appeared in several made-in-Miami movies, including Too Much with Antonio Banderas, and Let It Ride, filmed at the Hialeah racetrack, with Richard Dreyfus.

His face became a landmark for the Schlitz Beer ads and other popular commercials of the day. "In fact, I just received a residual -- would you believe a check for \$6?"

On a moment's notice he can transform his gravelly voice to imitate Edward G. Robinson (whom he resembles), Mayor Fiorella H. LaGuardia, and Al Jolson. He still remembers when they called him to audition for the part of Baby Huey.

"They wanted the voice for a cartoon series starring a huge, fat-bottomed duck. He was the kind of duck, clad in a bonnet and diaper, that was sort of a loser, usually rejected by his peers. They showed me this cartoon of Baby Huey, a big ugly duck. I asked them, 'But is he a lovable duck?' 'Lovable, but also stupid,' they told me. He's the kind who would save the others from a horrible fate, like becoming the object of a fox's appetite. So I gave them a voice that fit that character. The series first ran in 1951, and was so popular, it continued for years. I remember getting paid \$100, which was a lot of mezumah [money] in those days -- 50 years ago."

Raymond's long and colorful show-biz career started way back

when, as a youth of 21, he became a social director in the Catskill mountains, a breeding ground for many of the top comedians of that era.

“I did anything for a laugh, even if it meant falling into the hotel pool with my clothes on. I was what they called “a tumler” [a rowdy] who made the crowd laugh.”

After the Catskills’ stint, he formed a group called The Fox Hole Unit, and as MC together they toured almost every little theater from coast to coast, with Raymond doing his imitations of famous actors, and other schtick.

“One of the greatest experiences of my life happened in Valdosta, Ga., where we performed, not realizing at first, that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was in the audience sitting in his wheelchair. When I turned away from the audience to take a rubber cigar out of my back pocket, two secret servicemen jumped me thinking I might have a gun since I was doing an imitation of Edward G. Robinson’s Little Caesar. The President laughed loudly, and actually said to me, ‘Fine work, fine work.’ Boy, was I thrilled!”

The multi-talented Raymond appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show and in more than 400 TV shows, rubbing elbows with Paul Newman, Elki Sommers, Ernie Kovacs and Dom DeLouise. In Broadway productions and feature movies he shared the stage with Liza Minelli and Eli Wallach.

Howard Weinberg, one of his great admirers and president of the New York Film/Video Council, said he has just completed a 26-minute documentary titled Sid at 90, spotlighting the work of the actor, comedian, and impersonator.

“I’m challenging the popular assumption that celebrity defines success. Sid Raymond concedes that, as an actor, he was never a star. But in the context of his enduring spirit, fame seems somehow beside the point,” says Weinberg. “Sid at 90 is an inspiration for anyone who has ever clung to a passion.”

And Sid certainly has. Dorothy, his wife of 64 years, can attest to that. “He’s always gung-ho to go,” she says with a chuckle. “Sometimes he worries too much, but he just goes on and on.”