

1968

Kovacs Special Due Next Week

By CHARLES WITBECK

HOLLYWOOD — The imaginative, visual funnyman Ernie Kovacs who died back in 1962, was considered to be far ahead of his time.

Just how far can be measured Tuesday, April 9th, in ABC's special, "The Comedy of Ernie Kovacs," a compilation of whimsy including The Nairobi Trio, the famous "no-talk" sequence, bathtub gags and the appearance of poet Percy Dove Tonsils, choice items selected by Ernie's widow, Edie Adams, and Milt Hoffman from Eight 1960-61 shows.

Seven years later, only TV's "Laugh-In," that barrage of sight gags, blackouts and silly one-liners, compares to Kovacs way-out ideas, but "Laugh-In" doesn't go in for effects as much, according to writer and comedian Bobby Lauher, a Kovacs regular who gets frustrated watching the new "Rowan and Martin Hour." "Most of Ernie's ideas were so wild they couldn't fit in his show," says Bobby.

Both Lauher and Jolene Brand join music leader Kovacs, conducting with a banana, in the special's Nairobi Trio segment, and Jolene appears in other bits including a series of bathtub gags.

"It's funny, my husband (Laugh-In' producer George Schlatter) just

taped a series of bathtub gags for his show, and junked them when he learned the Kovacs ones were picked for the special," said Jolene. Ernie, in Mrs. Schlatter's opinion, was a genius, and she believes the hour will be "a whole new in-thing for kids who haven't been exposed to Kovacs."

As "nutty George's wife," Jolene hasn't worked since the last Kovacs show in 1961, and says she won't come out of retirement until another genius comes along with a mustache and big cigar. She misses Ernie's calls at 3:00 a.m., explaining an idea he'd just dreamed up, like "You'll love this Jolene, you're going to be a germ."

"Jolene was an English germ, I was an American," recalls Lauher, "and Kovacs peered at us through a microscope."

Bobby's angry because he never kept Ernie's scripts containing silly asides about everyone. "They were like Christmas presents, you never had any idea what he was sending. One week you would be Bela Lugosi, then a German scientist. Ernie never asked if you could do a German accent, he just figured you ought to be able to do it."

Kovacs usually spent about three days and nights writing a script, dictating it, then getting his strength back in the steam room.

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