

Allen Swift: The Man Behind The Voice Behind The Fish

By 1960, When Diver Dan first aired, Allen Swift was already a veteran of children's television. His first job was with one of the most popular kid's show ever on television, **Howdy Doody**, where he provided voices and did puppeteering for nearly all of the characters. "I originally came into the show to do all of the characters other than Howdy, but then after I was in the show for a short time **Bob Smith** had a heart attack and I took over the role of Howdy Doody 'til I left the show."

In 1956, on WPIX in New York, he hosted a popular kid's show as **Captain Allen Swift**, where he showed Popeye cartoons. "I wore a white beard and a p-coat and I had an old ship (for a) set. And I used to welcome the kid's - 'Ahoy ye maties, (he said in an old sea captains voice) welcome aboard the S.S. Popeye. Captain Allen Swift on deck to greet ya.' And I did that for about 4 years."

Then he got a call from the producers of Diver Dan. "I think Hal Tunis was the guy who suggested me to Kellman (for the job)." Allen is surprised that people still remember Diver Dan today. "It's interesting, I just did a commercial voice over yesterday for Charmin toilet paper and the producer there said, 'We've never met, but I remember you so well as Baron Baracudda.'" That kind of thing always comes as a big surprise to me."

Allen would come in and do all of the voices switching from character to character even though there would be as many as seven or

eight different voices in one episode - and he'd do it in one take! His experience from the Howdy Doody Show made this task, as he termed it, "chicken feed to me." "When I was on the Howdy Doody Show I not only did 15 different live characters on that show - but I also puppeteered. While I was puppeteering - and you have to remember this show was live - and I would be talking for not only for my own puppet that I was handling but I was talking for the other puppets that other people were handling because I did all those voices! They didn't even have a teleprompter, they had cue cards, and the entire script was on cue cards and I would have each one of my differ-



"Captain" Allen Swift, as he appeared on WPIX in 1956.

ent characters underlined in different colors so I could very quickly see what character I was doing. So everything that I've done, even on King Leonardo and all of the animated cartoons that I've done - I've just dubbed them right off, as a script, changing my voice

each time for the different characters. I'd just go right through as though it were a radio show."

After Diver Dan, Allen Swift went on to provide the voices for many cartoons that Baby Boomers still love today. He was **Itchy Brother** and **Tooter The Turtle** on **The King Leonardo Show**, he also did many characters on **Underdog** including **Simon Bar Sinister**. Today, Allen Swift acts in off-Broadway plays and does voice-overs for national TV commercials.

Diver Dan has long been absent from U.S. airwaves since it's heyday of the 60's. But just a few years ago it was shown on the Nickelodeon channel in England. John Ferlaine told us, "What they did is put an English soundtrack on it. And what they do is kind of make fun of it; they kind of treat it like an antique piece . . . and guess what the title of it was? Deep Sea Dick!"

In the mid-eighties an Italian production company made a new Diver Dan pilot called Spaceman Dan. Done in claymation, the Baron and Triggerfish were fish-shaped spaceships, battling Spaceman Dan for control of the galaxy. It never reached an audience though, as it never made it past the pilot stage.

Today, Brian Kellman (Louis Kellman's son), John Ferlaine, and Martin Young are trying to revive interest in the show. With the Baby Boomer fascination for the pop culture they grew up on at an all-time high, Diver Dan seems a natural for some attention. In fact, for over a year now, the Nickelodian cable channel has been toying with the idea of rerunning Diver Dan. Maybe a little prodding from fans would convince them to take the plunge and bring back this little treasure.



At a recent business meeting, from left: Diver Dan creator John Ferlaine, Martin Young (Young Development), Brian Kellman (Louis Kellman's son), with unidentified businessman.

Would You Like To See Diver Dan Back On The Air?

The Nick at Nite cable channel has recently been entertaining the idea of rerunning Diver Dan. Email them and tell them you'd like to see Diver Dan episodes as a regular part of their TV line up.

Nick at Nite's email address:
mailtv@nickatnitestvland.com