

Redd Foxx

John Elroy Sanford^[1] (December 9, 1922 – October 11, 1991), better known by his stage name **Redd Foxx**, was an American stand-up comedian and actor.^[3] Foxx gained success with his raunchy nightclub acts during the 1950s and 1960s. Known as the "King of the Party Records", he performed on more than 50 records in his lifetime. He also starred in TV shows *Sanford and Son*, *The Redd Foxx Show* and *The Royal Family*. His film projects included *All the Fine Young Cannibals* (1960), *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), *Norman... Is That You?* (1976) and *Harlem Nights* (1989).

In 2004 Foxx ranked 24th in *Comedy Central Presents: 100 Greatest Stand-ups of All Time*.^[4] Foxx not only influenced many comedians,^[3] but was often portrayed in popular culture as well, mainly as a result of his catchphrases, body language and facial expressions exhibited on *Sanford and Son*. During the show's five-year run, Foxx won a Golden Globe Award and received an additional three nominations, along with three Primetime Emmy Award nominations.^{[5][6]}

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Redd Foxx



Foxx circa 1966

Birth name	John Elroy Sanford ^[1]
Born	December 9, 1922 ^[1] <div>St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.</div>
Died	October 11, 1991 (aged 68) <div>Los Angeles, California, U.S.</div>
Resting place	Palm Eastern Memorial Park ^[2]
Medium	Stand-up · Television
Nationality	American
Education	DuSable High School
Years active	1935–1991
Genres	Word play · observational comedy · black comedy · blue comedy
Subject(s)	African-American culture · human

MF Records discography
Master Classics Records discography
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References

External links

	sexuality • race relations • everyday life
Spouse	Evelyn Killebrew (m. 1948; div. 1951) Betty Jean Harris (m. 1956; div. 1975) Yun Chi Chung (m. 1976; div. 1981) Ka Ho Cho (m. 1991)
Notable works and roles	Fred Sanford in <i>Sanford and Son</i> and <i>Sanford</i>
Website	reddfoxx.com (http://reddfoxx.com)

Early life

Redd Foxx was born **John Elroy Sanford** on December 9, 1922 in St. Louis, Missouri and raised in Chicago's South Side. His father, Fred Sanford, an electrician and auto mechanic from Hickman, Kentucky, left his family when Foxx was four years old. He was raised by his half Seminole mother, Mary Hughes, from Ellisville, Mississippi, his grandmother and his minister. Foxx attended DuSable High School in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood with future Chicago mayor Harold Washington. Foxx had an older brother, Fred Jr., who provided the name for his character on *Sanford and Son*.^[7] On July 27, 1939, Foxx performed on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour radio show as part of the Jump Swinging Six.

In the 1940s, he met Malcolm Little, later known as Malcolm X. In Malcolm's autobiography, Foxx is referred to as "Chicago Red, the funniest dishwasher on this earth." He earned the nickname because of his reddish hair and complexion.^[3] During World War II, Foxx dodged the draft by eating half a bar of soap before his physical, a trick that resulted in heart palpitations.^[8] On September 30, 1946, Foxx recorded five songs for the Savoy label under the direction of Teddy Reig.

Career

Nightclub act

Foxx's raunchy nightclub act proved successful. After performing on the East Coast, his big break came after singer Dinah Washington insisted that he come to Los Angeles, where Dootsie Williams of Dootone records caught his act at the Brass Rail nightclub. Foxx was one of the first black comics to play to white audiences on the Las Vegas Strip. He was signed to a long-term contract and released a series of comedy albums that quickly became cult favorites.^[9]

Sanford and Son

Foxx achieved his most widespread fame starring in the television sitcom *Sanford and Son*,^[3] an adaptation of the BBC series *Steptoe and Son*. He used his starring role on *Sanford and Son* to help get jobs for his acquaintances such as LaWanda Page, Slappy White, Gregory Sierra, Don Bexley, Beah Richards, Stymie Beard, Leroy Daniels, Ernest Mayhand and Noriyuki "Pat" Morita.

The series premiered on the NBC television network on January 14, 1972 and was broadcast for six seasons. The final episode aired on March 25, 1977. Foxx played the role of Fred G. Sanford ("Fred Sanford" was actually Foxx's father's and brother's name), while Foxx's co-star Demond Wilson played the role of his son Lamont. In this sitcom, Fred and Lamont were owners of a junk/salvage store in Watts who dealt with many humorous situations that would arise. The series was notable for its racial humor and overt prejudices which helped redefine the genre of black situation comedy.

The show also had several running gags. When angry with Lamont, Fred would often say "You big dummy" or would often fake heart attacks by putting his hand on his chest and saying (usually while looking up at the sky) "It's the big one, I'm coming to join ya honey/Elizabeth" (referring to his late wife). Fred would also complain about having "arthur-itis" to get out of working by showing Lamont his cramped hand. Foxx depicted a character in his 60s, although in real-life he was a decade younger.

Demond Wilson was asked whether he kept in touch with everybody from *Sanford & Son*, especially the series' star himself, after the series was canceled: "No. I saw Redd Foxx once before he died, circa 1983, and I never saw him again. At the time I was playing tennis at the Malibu Racquet Club and I was approached by some producers about doing a Redd Foxx 50th Anniversary Special. I hadn't spoken to him since 1977, and I called the club where (Redd) was playing. And we met at Redd's office, but he was less than affable. I told those guys it was a bad idea. I never had a cross word with him. People say I'm protective of Redd Foxx in my book (Second Banana, Wilson's memoir of the Sanford years). I had no animosity toward Foxx for (quitting the show in 1977) because I had a million dollar contract at CBS to do *Baby I'm Back*. My hurt was that he didn't come to me about throwing the towel in - I found out in the hallway at NBC from a newscaster. I forgave him and I loved Redd, but I never forgot that. The love was there. You can watch any episode and see that."^[10]

Post-Sanford and Son career

In 1977, Foxx left *Sanford and Son*, after six seasons (the show was canceled with his departure) to star in a short-lived ABC variety show. In 1980 he was back playing Fred G. Sanford in a short-lived revival/spin-off, *Sanford*. In 1986, he returned to television in the ABC series *The Redd Foxx Show*, which was cancelled after 12 episodes because of low ratings. Foxx appeared as an Obi-Wan Kenobi-like character in the *Star Wars* special of the *Donny & Marie* show. In an homage to his show, he mentioned the planet Sanford, which has no sun. Foxx made a comeback with the short-lived series *The Royal Family*, in which he co-starred with Della Reese.



Photo of Redd Foxx in 1977.

Personal life

Marriages

Redd Foxx was married four times. His first marriage was to Evelyn Killebrew in 1948 and ended in divorce in 1951. His second marriage in 1956 was to Betty Jean Harris, a showgirl and dancer, who was a colleague of LaWanda Page (later to be Foxx's TV rival Aunt Esther on *Sanford and Son*). Foxx adopted Harris's nine-year-old daughter Debraca, who assumed the surname "Foxx". This marriage ended in divorce in 1975. Foxx next wed Korean-American Yun Chi Chung in 1976, but the marriage ended in 1981. At the time of his death, Foxx was married to Ka Ho Cho, who used the name Ka Ho Foxx.^[11]

Financial and tax problems

According to *People* magazine, "Foxx reportedly once earned \$4 million in a single year, but depleted his fortune with a lavish lifestyle, exacerbated by what he called 'very bad management.'" Contributing to his problems was a 1981 divorce settlement of \$300,000 paid to his third wife. In 1983 he filed for bankruptcy, with proceedings continuing at least through 1989.^[12] The IRS filed tax liens against Redd Foxx's property for income taxes he owed for the years 1983 to 1986 totaling \$755,166.21. On November 28, 1989, the IRS seized his home in Las Vegas and seven vehicles (including a 1927 Model T, a 1975 Panther J72,^[13] a 1983 Zimmer, and a Vespa motor scooter) to pay the taxes which by then had grown to \$996,630, including penalties and interest. Agents also seized "\$12,769 in cash and a dozen guns, including a semiautomatic pistol," among some 300 items in total,

reportedly leaving only Foxx's bed.^{[14][15][16]} Foxx stated that the IRS "took my necklace and the ID bracelet off my wrist and the money out of my pocket ... I was treated like I wasn't human at all."^[17] It has been reported that, at the time of his death in 1991, Foxx owed more than \$3.6 million in taxes.^[11]

Death

On October 11, 1991, during a break from rehearsals for *The Royal Family*, Foxx suffered a heart attack on the set.^{[18][19]} According to Della Reese, Foxx was about to have an interview with *Entertainment Tonight* when he was called onto the set to practice a scene. An angry Foxx did as he was asked but as soon as he finished he collapsed to the floor. Reese said that nobody initially suspected anything was wrong; Foxx had often performed a fake heart attack routine on *Sanford and Son* and, as Reese recalled, was skilled at doing pratfalls. When Foxx did not immediately get up, Reese rushed over to check on him.^[20] When she leaned down to Foxx as he was on the ground, Foxx said, "Get my wife" repeatedly and went into cardiac arrest. According to Joshua Rich at *Entertainment Weekly*, "It was an end so ironic that for a brief moment cast mates figured Foxx – whose 1970s TV character often faked heart attacks – was kidding when he grabbed a chair and fell to the floor."^[21] Foxx, who had temporarily been resuscitated while being treated initially, was taken to Queen Of Angels Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center, where he succumbed to the attack and died that night at the age of 68.^[22]

Foxx was posthumously given a star on the St. Louis Walk of Fame on May 17, 1992.^[23] He was buried in Las Vegas, at Palm Eastern Memorial Park.

Foxx's mother, Mary Carson (1903–1993), outlived Foxx by two years, and was buried beside him.

Influence

Comedian and actor Richard Pryor cited Redd Foxx as an influence.^[24] "He gave me inspiration and encouragement so I could be more me", Pryor told *Ebony* magazine in 1990.^[25] Comedian Chris Rock cites Redd Foxx as an influence. An episode of his show *Everybody Hates Chris* shows young Chris Rock overhearing his parents' Redd Foxx albums and getting started doing stand-up through retelling the jokes at school.^[26]

Portrayals of Foxx in popular media

In 1990, in the first-ever episode of *In Living Color*, in reference to Foxx's financial troubles, Foxx was portrayed by Damon Wayans, who is making a public service announcement to encourage people to pay their taxes. In the film *Why Do Fools Fall in Love*, Foxx is portrayed by Aries Spears. He is shown performing a stand-up comedy and routine. In the animated television series *Family Guy* parody of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* episode "Blue Harvest", Redd Foxx appears very briefly as an X-wing pilot. When his ship is shot down, he cries "I'm coming Elizabeth!" before dying. In addition to this, he has been parodied on *Family Guy* by Francis Griffin acting as Foxx's *Sanford and Son* character.

Foxx was meant to be featured in the MTV show *Celebrity Deathmatch*, advertised as taking on Jamie Foxx in the episode "When Animals Attack". Instead of Redd Foxx though, Jamie Foxx fought Ray Charles. In the *Boondocks* episode "Stinkmeaner 3: The Hateocracy" he is portrayed as Lord Rufus Crabmiser, one of Stinkmeaner's old friends coming to kill the Freeman family. Childhood friend and *Sanford & Son* co-star Lawanda Page is also portrayed in the same episode as Lady Esmeralda Gripenasty.

Redd Foxx appears as a minor character in the 2009 James Ellroy novel *Blood's a Rover*. He gives a bawdy eulogy at the wake of Scotty Bennett, a murdered rogue LAPD detective including the line "Scotty Bennett was f*****g a porcupine. I gots to tell you motherf*****s that it was a female porcupine, so I don't see nothing perverted in it."^[27] In the 1999 film *Foolish* starring comedian Eddie Griffin and rapper Master P, the ghost of Redd Foxx gives Griffin's character advice from behind a stall door in a men's restroom at a comedy club before he goes onstage to perform a show. In 2015, it was said that comedian Tracy Morgan would portray Redd Foxx in a Richard Pryor biopic starring opposite comedian Mike Epps.^[28]

Filmography

- *All the Fine Young Cannibals* (1960) as Redd, Piano Player at Rose's (uncredited)
- *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) as Uncle Budd / Booker Washington Sims
- *Norman... Is That You?* (1976) as Ben Chambers
- *Harlem Nights* (1989) as Bennie Wilson

TV shows

- *Sanford and Son* (1972–77) as Fred G. Sanford / Himself
- *The Captain & Tennille Show* (one episode) (1976) as Himself
- *The Redd Foxx Comedy Hour* (1977–78) as Himself
- *HBO On Location with Redd Foxx* (1978) as Himself
- *Sanford* (1980–81) as Fred G. Sanford
- *Viva Shaf Vegas* (1986) as Himself
- *The Redd Foxx Show* (1986) as Al Hughes
- *Ghost of a Chance* (1987) as Ivory Clay
- *The Royal Family* (1991) as Alfonso Royal

Discography

Savoy discography

78 Singles

- 630A – *Let's Wiggle a Little Woogie*
- 630B – *Lucky Guy*
- 631A – *Fine Jelly Blues*
- 631B – *Redd Foxx Blues*
- 645B – *Shame on You*

Dooto /Dootone Records discography

Albums

- DTL01 – *The Best Laff*
- DTL214 – *Laff Of The Party Vol. 1* (1956)
- DTL219 – *Laff Of The Party Vol. 2*
- DTL220 – *Laff Of The Party Vol. 3*
- DTL227 – *Laff Of The Party Vol. 4* (1956)
- DTL234 – *Best Of Foxx Vol. 1"*
- DTL236 – *Laff Of The Party Vol.7*
- DTL249 – *Burlesque Humor*
- DTL253 – *The Side Splitter Vol.1* (1959)
- DTL265 – *The Laff of the Party Vol. 8* (1957)
- DTL270 – *The Side Splitter Vol. 2* (1959)
- DTL274 – *Best of Fun (Red Foxx and Others)*
- DTL275 – *Racy Tales* (Also released as *The New Race Track*) (1959)
- DTL290 – *Redd Foxx Funn*

- *DTL295 – Sly Sex (1960)*
- *DTL298 – Have One On Me (1960)*
- *DTL801 – Laffarama (1961)*
- *DTL804 – Wild Party (1961)*
- *DTL809 – This is Foxx*
- *DTL815 – He's Funny That Way (1964)*
- *DTL820 – Red Foxx at Jazzville U.S.A. (1961)*
- *DTL830 – The New Fugg (1962)*
- *DTL828 – Hearty Party Laffs (1962)*
- *DTL832 – Laff Along With Foxx (1962) (compilation)*
- *DTL834 – Crack Up (1963)*
- *DTL835 – Funny Stuff (1963)*
- *DTL840 – Adults Only (1967)*
- *DTL845 – Jokes I Can't Tell On Television (1969)*
- *DTL846 – Shed House Humor (1969)*
- *DTL853 – Sanford & Foxx (1972)*
- *DTL854 – Foxx and Jazz*
- *DTL858 – Dirty Redd (1973)*
- *DTL860 – Funky Tales From a Dirty Old Junkman 1972"*

Singles

- *DTL385 – The New Soap/Song Plugging*
- *DTL390 – The Jackasses/The Race Track*
- *DTL397 – The Honeymooners/The Sneezes*
- *DTL402 – Beans And Pineapple Sauce/The Army*
- *DTL408 – The Two Oars/The Preacher's Bicycle*
- *DTI411 – The Dead Jackass/Women Over Forty*
- *DTL416 – Real Pretty Baby/It's Fun To Be Living In The Crazy House*
- *DTL418 – Best Of Redd Foxx Parts 1&2*
- *DTL421 – The House/Sex And Orange Juice*
- *DTL426 – Hollywood Playboy/The Dogs Meeting*
- *DTL436 – South Of The Border/The Plastic Surgeon*
- *DTL453 – The Dear John Letter/Honesty Is The Best Policy*
- *DTL455 – The Shoe Shine Boy/The Royal Thighs And Others*
- *DTL458 – 118 Ways To Make Love/Pregnancy Co-Operation*
- *DTL460 – No Teeth/With My Teeth/The Best Years/Deep Sea Diver*
- *DTL464 – Christmas Hard Ties/Jaw Resting*

Atlantic Records discography

- *SD 18157 – You Gotta Wash Your Ass (1976)*

Island Records discography

- *314-528 061-2 – Uncensored (1980)*

Gusto Records discography

- *KSD-1072 – Bare Facts*

King Records discography

- *KSD-1073 – Pass the Apple Eve*
- *KSD-1074 – In a Nutshell*
- *KS-1135 – Matinee Idol*
- *SK-754 – X-Rated v. 4*
- *SK-756 – X-Rated v. 6*

Laff Records discography

- *A170 – Pryor Goes Foxx Hunting* (split LP including one half of Richard Pryor's "Craps")
- *A203 – I Ain't Lied Yet*

Loma Records discography

- *5901 – Both Sides of Redd Foxx* (1966 – Loma/Warner/Rino)
- *5905 – On the Loose*
- *5906 – Redd Foxx "live" : Las Vegas!* (1968)
- *5908 – Foxx-A-Delic* (1968)

MF Records discography

- *RF1 – Laff Your Head off*
- *RF2 – Laff Your Ass Off*
- *RF3 – Redd Foxx At Home*
- *RF4 – A Whole Lot of Soul*
- *RF5 – At His Best*
- *RF6 – Doin' His Own Thing*
- *RF7 – Say It Like It Is*
- *RF8 – Is Sex Here To Stay*
- *RF9 – Where It's At*
- *RF10 – Huffin' And A Puffin'*
- *RF11 – I Am Curious, Black*
- *RF12 – Three Or Four Times A Day*
- *RF13 – Mr. Hot Pants*
- *RF14 – Hot Flashes*
- *RF15 – Restricted*
- *RF16 – Superstar*
- *RF17 – Spice can Be Nice!*
- *RF18 – Strictly For Adults*
- *RF19 – Vegas we Come*
- *RF20 – Elizabeth, I'm Coming!*
- *RF21 – Redd 75*

Master Classics Records discography

Albums

- *Gettin' Down N' Dirty* (2008)

Comedy Classics discography

Albums

- *The Ultimate Comedy Collection* (2011)

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External links

- Redd Foxx (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0289359/>) on IMDb
 - Redd Foxx (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/2704>) at Find a Grave
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