

A TOAST FIT FOR A KING

BY BARRY DOUGHERTY

This is a mitzvah for me. I'm a lifelong Friar, a former Abbot—there is nothing more rewarding than being honored by your own, said Friar Larry King when asked about his being honored with a Testimonial Dinner on November 14th. Not to mention a soon to be sold-out event at the Sheraton Hotel.

It's also pretty cool for the Friars who, let's face it, have been more than happy to skewer and sear their guests of honor lately rather than shower them with accolades to show the love in a more orthodox way other than our famous roasts.



Friar Larry King, Shawn King, Friar Joan Rivers

As Dean Freddie Roman noted, "Larry King is such a revered show business presence that honoring him transcends even our beloved Roasts—which is why he so richly deserves a Testimonial Dinner. Our dinners are an institution, conceived over a century ago and reserved for those individuals who deserve the accolades not only from our comedians but artists from all areas of entertainment—singers, musicians, speakers and journalists. We are proud to salute this Friar whose contribution to the arts is immeasurable." How testimonialish of Freddie, perhaps he is hoping others will follow suit.

We're sure that Katie Couric, as Master of Ceremonies, will have her class on and bring to



Larry is hoping Katie praises him while praying she hasn't heard the one about...

the event that certain refinement and sophistication we would expect from her. Although, note to Larry, this is what she had to say to Friar Matt Lauer at his Roast: "We had this yin yang thing going. I was really good at my job, he wasn't. I kept the show on track, he'd derail it. He'd ask for a raise and I'd get it." She also gave a top 10 list, number 10 being, "According to his wife he isn't exactly an early riser." Let's hope someone told her the difference between a Roast and a Dinner.

The Friars Testimonial Dinners have been a very special tradition of the Friars since their first one in 1907 honoring Clyde Fitch. That's Fitch. Well, trust me he was huge at the time. After his dinner the press wrote, "There was a freedom, a wit and a comradeship uncommon

in public dinners. The next day this feast was town talk." King is joining quite an impressive roster from the early days of Oscar Hammerstein, George M. Cohan and Irving Berlin to ratpackers Abbot Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin to the lovely Elizabeth Taylor, Barbra Streisand and the über-cool John Travolta whose Dinner King emceed.

These events started as a way for the Friars to honor their more venerated members with a fine feast, toasts and testimonials from friends and peers. Victor Herbert wrote, *Here's to the Friars*, for his dinner speech—perhaps Mr. King might want to whip up an updated ditty for us that he can have Jon Bon Jovi perform (since he'll be attending). After all, the eloquent King has a very special bond with the Friars owing to his tenure as Abbot of the LA Friars.

King's accomplishments are an open book, having been a radio and television staple for more than fifty years. His first break came as a disc jockey on a Miami station and soon became a popular fixture of the South Florida radio scene. In 1960, he debuted with his first program on Miami television. Throughout the 60s and early 70s he built up his local following, adding a newspaper column to his radio and television responsibilities.

In 1978, *The Larry King Show* went national, the first nationwide call-in show. In 1985 the fledgling Cable News Network put *Larry King Live* on television, the first international live phone-in television program. King interviewed



Friar Larry King interviews Friar Jerry Seinfeld—maybe he's asking for some amusing tidbits to add to his acceptance speech

athletes, actors, writers, politicians and foreign dignitaries. Many of whom we expect to join him on the dais at his Dinner.

In 2007, King celebrated his 50th year in broadcasting. He has conducted more than 30,000 interviews. His 25-year run as host of *Larry King Live* has been the longest tenure of any broadcaster as host of the same program in the same time slot. All fodder leading up to a Dinner in his honor which will feature such guests as Friar Joy Behar, Friar Tony Bennett, Wolf Blitzer, Mario Cuomo, Kathy Griffin, Judge Judy, Suze Orman, Regis Philbin, Dan Rather, Friar Joan Rivers and Tavis Smiley along with Larry's wife, Shawn King, with so many more names to come.

The unique nature of the Friars Testimonial Dinners allows for guests from all entertainment genres to honor King in their own special way, be it through comedy, singing or speaking. When the Friars honored Friar Clive Davis he just had music—Dionne Warwick, Whitney Houston, Friar Barry Manilow, Kenny G, Aretha Franklin—a night of pure song. So you never know what direction these Dinners will take.

Don't tell Larry that Friar Carol Burnett ended up with a pie in her face at her Dinner or that Friar Johnny Carson wasn't able to make a beeline for the nearest restroom, so in his politeness to remain for every performer utilized a champagne bucket instead. And it was eons ago when Friar Jimmy Durante was carted away by police while sitting on a Testimonial Dinner dais for journalist/cartoonist Bugs Baer for owning a speakeasy during prohibition. So no worries about that happening this time.



Friar Larry King talks with Bill Clinton—perhaps his upcoming Dinner is the topic

As for Katie, her job is to keep the evening moving at an enjoyable pace and maintain the dignity that such an evening affords. So let's hope she hasn't read about Frank Sinatra's emceeding Friar Dean Martin's Dinner, noting, "We are paying tribute to a man who doesn't even know he's here. One of the rarest of men: a wit,



King with talk show queen Oprah Winfrey

singer, raconteur and a drunk. In his constant state of illusion, he is perpetually in Disneyland." This, spoken by the man who wed twenty-one year old Mia Farrow when he was fifty. But, of course, Katie will be on her best behavior.

The show is produced by Friar Mark Krantz who is in the process of putting together Larry's friends in the biz to join him on a star-studded dais. If anyone knows anyone in entertainment it's Larry King so there won't be any lack of shining stars that's for sure.



Katie Couric in Roast mode at Friar Matt Lauer's Roast, hopefully a far cry from her Toast mode with Friar Larry King

It will be refreshing to honor one of our more esteemed members with a toast and enjoy an evening dedicated to applauding King's accomplishments and praise his broadcasting genius. We should all wear suspenders in homage to the man who made them fashionable and raise a glass and yell, "NEW YORK, YOU'RE ON THE AIR!"

Photo by Richard Lewin

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