



## Review: LUCY LOVES DESI: A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE SITCOM at Reynolds Performance Hall

This radio theatre comedy starred Laila Ayad, Ellis Greer, Gerard Marzilli, Bill Mendieta, Ozzie Rodriguez and Tom Virtue

By: Theresa Bertram    Feb. 20, 2023



It's a fact-Everybody Loves Lucy, and this was definitely the consensus at Thursday night's, February 16, performance of LUCY LOVES DESI: A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE SITCOM at Reynolds Performance Hall, 223 Beatrice Powell St., in Conway. This creative radio play, written by Gregg Oppenheimer, son of Jess Oppenheimer, who happen to be the producer and head writer of *I Love Lucy*, brought the laughs, the history, and star power for the live studio audience's entertainment.

*I Love Lucy* was a pioneering show in a lot of ways, and LUCY LOVES DESI told the story that brought this classic to life. Before the show *I Love Lucy*, [Lucille Ball](#) was in a radio comedy called



*My Favorite Husband*. It was a hit, and CBS wanted the show transferred to television. Lucy was willing to oblige, but she was having marital issues with Desi and wanted him home, so she requested for Desi to be her husband on TV. After pushing back and forth with the network, CBS gave in. Then they added [Vivian Vance](#) and [William Frawley](#) as Ethel and Fred Mertz, and the show ran from 1951 to 1957. During this time, Lucy and Desi were able to convince the network to let them stay in California and put the show on film. They were also able to keep the negatives of the show, and *I Love Lucy* was the

first sitcom to have reruns. Lucy was also the first female to head her own production company, Desilu Studios.

This history was covered during the radio stage show. If you haven't been to a radio play, let me explain. Instead of acting it out with a set, microphones line the stage and most of the actors take

on different characters. The cast included: [Bill Mendieta](#) as [Desi Arnaz](#); [Ellis Greer](#) as [Lucille Ball](#); Ozzie Rodriguez as [Richard Denning](#) (husband in *My Favorite Husband*), Harry Ackerman (TV Producer), Don Sharpe (agent), and others; Tom Virtue as Bob LeMond (announcer), [William Frawley](#) (Fred Mertz), Hubbell Robinson (creator/producer), and others; [Laila Ayad](#) as [Betty Garrett](#), [Eliot Daniel](#) (theme song creator), [Vivian Vance](#) (Ethel Mertz), and others; and Gerard Marzilli as Jess Oppenheimer (writer).





Video Cast included: [Matthew Floyd Miller](#) as William S. Paley and Martin Leeds; [Paul Culos](#) as CBS Executive, Eddie Feldman, Rabbi Wolf, and Dr. Harris; and [Desiree Mee Jung](#) as Parker McComas, Stagehand, and Monsignor Devlin. This particular show had a small props table for different sounds like a door and telephone and minimal costumes.

Directed by Brendon Fox, this troupe of radio storytellers were transformative. They not only told the story without having a lot of excess scenery, props, and costumes, but they also did it in various voices and mannerisms. When Rodriguez, Virtue, and Ayad took on the random characters, they literally became different people right before our eyes. They changed how they sounded, looked, and moved. It was amazing watching them metamorphosize like that.

The three leads had great chemistry. Because he has played Desi over 500 times, Mendieta is a master at the character. Greer took on a more serious Lucy and represented her story with grace. And, though I do not have a preconceived idea of how Oppenheimer was to be portrayed, Marzilli was definitely entertaining. The whole show was creative and had a lot of the audience members looking at I Love Lucy in a whole new way. To learn more about this fabulous radio theatre company, visit LA Theatre Works at [latw.org](http://latw.org).



Reynolds Performance Hall is an asset to Conway and the students at the University of Central Arkansas. Not only did they bring in this fabulous one-night only show, but they had the cast come in a few days early and give master classes to the UCA Theatre students. This is just one of the many ways Reynolds utilizes their theatre to educate the students of Central Arkansas.



Coming up next is Mnozil Brass. Reynolds Performance Hall Director Amanda Horton says these guys are the Monte Python of brass instruments. That sounds like an amazing show. For more information for this or other future shows, visit their website at <https://uca.edu/publicappearances>.