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The Pink Panther

By Jeremy Quinton



What makes you laugh?

Not everyone in Britain enjoys (or understands!) Monty Python or Mr Bean. I'm sure that not everyone in the USA is a big fan of Married with Children or Frasier.

What about the Spanish...What gets you laughing?

What makes you laugh might not be the same as what makes your friends or family laugh, right? A sense of humour is something as personal as your taste in food, films or football. But how many times have you found, in your language studies, that you "understand the words, but not the humour"?! It seems that different cultures have different senses of humour...although some things successfully manage to get the whole world laughing at the same time.

The Pink Panther cartoon character originally appeared in the opening and closing sequences of the 1963 film of the same name, which was directed by Friz Freleng from Kansas City. The popularity of the character was such that a series of short animated films was then created. No less than 124 Pink Panther cartoons were produced.

With cartoon titles ranging from "The Pink Phink", to "Pinkfinger" and the London-based "Pinkadilly Circus" - all "puns" which are typical of the sense of humour shared by many parts of the world where English is spoken - the Pink Panther grew to be adored by millions, the world over.

But in nearly all his cartoons, the *Pink Panther* never said a word! He remained silent, speaking only in two theatrical shorts, *Sink Pink* and *Pink Ice*. By the late-1960s, the *Pink Panther* cartoons were being shown on Saturday mornings on NBC in the USA.

Later there were also a series of animated shorts called *The Inspector*, with the bumbling Clouseau-inspired Inspector and his Spanish-speaking assistant Sgt. Deux-Deux, whom the Inspector is forever correcting.

In February 2006, all of the Pink Panther cartoons were released on DVD from Sony Pictures.

Industry critics say that The Pink Panther made creative use of absurd & surrealistic themes and visual puns, a type of silent pantomime style which allowed it to cross continents & oceans and, as a result, to enjoy success not shared by contemporaries such as Yogi Bear (el Oso Yogi) or The Flintstones (Los Picapiedras). Freleng's colleagues credit his sense of creative timing as a key element to the cartoon's artistic success

The Pink Panther first came into my life back in England when I was 6 or 7 ...sitting mesmerised by what I saw on screen, with my sister too. If you've got similar childhood memories & haven't heard the accompanying music for a long time, I wonder what the first few notes on the saxophone bring back to you!...

I met up with my idol last year...in Bolivia. I'd entered a local bar in the morning to get a coffee. As they heated some milk, the Pink Panther appeared on the small tv in the corner. We were all watching. Everyone. Mesmerised. And we all laughed at the same moments. Incredible.

"Humour is just another defense against the universe." *Mel Brooks*

Learning a language isn't *only* a question of internalising lists of words & phrases, grammar and (!) *pinktuation*. It's more human, fluid, interactive than that. (Don't forget that sometime you can communicate without words - the Pink Panther could, anyway!).

Learning a bit about the cultures where the language is spoken...will be of great use to you in two ways. Not only in understanding the context in which things are being said, but also in knowing what to say, and - as Friz Freleng understood so well - *when* to say what you want to communicate...whether you'd like to make people laugh, or not!