

## FOREWORD

by Robert Mankoff

The two compact disks in this set hold more than sixty-eight thousand *New Yorker* cartoons by almost four hundred cartoonists. Some cartoonists have drawn more than a thousand cartoons. Others have drawn just one. They're all here for you to enjoy: an on-demand electronic index enables you to browse by year, by decade, by artist, or by subject matter. Nevertheless, sixty-eight thousand cartoons is quite a bit, and it's not realistic to expect one person to look at all of them. I have, of course, but not in a single sitting. If you spent, say, seven seconds on each panel—and many require much more—it would take you five straight days and nights to view them all. That's one way to make an ordeal out of what should be fun. Even an average year has more than a thousand cartoons, and looking at all of them is a daunting prospect.

So I wouldn't advise using the disks that way. Don't simply page through cartoons from the beginning of the magazine's life, or select a year (say, the year of your own birth) and plow ahead heedlessly from January to December. Instead, use the CDs wisely. How? Well, here are some suggestions for maximizing your enjoyment.

Don't start here. Instead, look first at the cartoons in the book. Those have been selected by editors and organized on the page. They have been complemented by wonderful thematic essays and artist bios. Those cartoons will furnish the context for these cartoons, and, once you understand a bit more about the history of *New Yorker* cartoons, you'll be able to set out on more expansive explorations and meander without any fear of getting lost entirely. The sixty-eight thousand cartoons are an ocean. Without the book, you may drown in it. With the book, you can swim in it.

In short, these disks are intended to be an extension of the book, not a replacement. Roger Angell, in his opening essay on the years 1925-1934, writes that there has “never been a younger or livelier assemblage of artists than the group that found its way onto the magazine’s pages in the late twenties.” With these CDs, you can test that assertion by looking at the early work of cartoonists like Peter Arno, Helen Hokinson, James Thurber, and others. Nancy Franklin, in her opening essay on the years 1935-1944, writes that cartoons of that era “open a window onto the history of our imaginations and desires and preoccupations, and those of artists who drew them.” Once again, the CD furnishes additional evidence, whether it’s the cartoons about the sex and the speakeasies of the twenties, the car culture of the fifties, or the Internet mania of the nineties.

The CDs also help restore a sense of history to certain ideas. You may think that the most familiar cartoon archetypes (the deserted island, the Grim Reaper, the supplicant at the Pearly Gates) have been around forever, that they were the subject of cave-painting cartoons. They weren’t. The truth of the matter is that they have distinct points of origin, like any other idea. But don’t take my word for it. Check the CDs. And while you’re checking them, you’ll start to develop your own ideas about *New Yorker* cartoons, about the past and how it informs the present, and about what that holds for the future. Hey, maybe someday you’ll write your own book, or, better yet, become inspired to be a *New Yorker* cartoonist.

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