

Luis van Rooten

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Luis d'Antin van Rooten was born November 29, 1906, in Mexico City, before emigrating to the United States with his parents and moving to Pennsylvania at age eight. He earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1927 and was a successful architect in Cleveland for several years. During that time, he began participating in amateur productions at the Cleveland Playhouse, then decided to pursue acting full time, initially in radio, in the mid-1930s.

Van Rooten was fluent in Spanish, Italian and French. While serving in the armed forces during World War II, he did special broadcasts for the military in those languages. His abilities led to film work, often roles requiring accents, or playing villains like Heinrich Himmler in *The Hitler Gang* (1944) and *Operation Eichmann* (1961). Other notable appearances included *Two Years Before the Mast* (1946), *Beyond Glory* (1948), *The Big Clock* (1948), *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948), *Champion* (1949), *Detective Story* (1951), and *The Sea Chase* (1955). He also portrayed both the King and the Grand Duke in Disney's *Cinderella* (1950).

He was also a very successful free-lance radio actor, working on as many as 50 shows a month. He said he rarely knew what role he was going to play until he arrived at the studio and recalled that once he "was 'bumped off' in ten different crime shows in a single week."

He regularly appeared in series like *2000 Plus*, *Best Plays*, *Escape*, *I Love a Mystery*, *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, *Let George Do It*, *The Mysterious Traveler*, *Theatre Five*, and *X Minus One*. He had recurring roles as the evil Roxor in *Chandu the Magician*, Emilio in the soap opera *Valiant Lady*, and as the sidekick, Denny, in *Bulldog Drummond*. Showcasing his versatility as an actor, in an episode of *Radio City Playhouse*, "Joey Was Different", he played all 12 characters in a show about a neurotic actor confronted by eleven of the characters he'd played in the past.

Van Rooten also appeared on Broadway, debuting as the French inspector in *The Dancer* in 1946. He successfully transitioned from radio to television, making appearances on *Gunsmoke*, *Studio One*, *The Armstrong Circle Theater*, *Omnibus*, *Perry Mason*, and as fight manager Knobby Walsh in *The Joe Palooka Story*. All told, he appeared in several Broadway productions, 30 major films, several hundred television episodes, and more than 9,000 radio episodes.

He was also known for being the author of several sophisticated humor books. His best known was *Mots D'Heures: Gousses, Rames* (1967), ostensibly a collection of obscure French poems. In that book, van Rooten used French words and phrases that, when spoken aloud with a French accent, sounded like English Mother Goose rhymes.

Van Rooten was married to Catherine Gaylord Kelly, and they had two children. He retired from acting in 1970, and returned to his first love, architecture. He designed his own retirement home in Chatham, Massachusetts. He passed away June 17, 1973, in his Massachusetts home at the age of 66.

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