

# TCM THE PLOT THICKENS

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## EPISODE 6: I LOVE LUCY

**MY FAVORITE HUSBAND:** You have been listening to My Favorite Husband, starring Lucille Ball with Richard Denning. Lucille, did you want to say something?

**LUCILLE BALL:** Yes Bob. Sad things are best said simply, so I'll just say: tonight, is our last show.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucille Ball said goodbye to her radio show in March of 1951. My Favorite Husband had been on for 124 episodes and had millions of listeners. Lucy's announcement came as a surprise.

**LUCILLE BALL:** But now I'd like to thank everyone connected with the show...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** She held it together as she thanked the sponsor and the cast. But when she got to the crew, her voice cracked. Lucy was crying on the air.

**LUCILLE BALL:** And of course, our director, Jess Oppenheimer. Madelyn Pugh and Bob Carroll Jr. who wrote the scripts with him.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy wasn't leaving them behind. She was taking them to a new show -- a TV show. A show that was the biggest gamble of her career. Television was new back then. Compared to radio and movies, the TV audience was tiny. The new TV show was going to be called I Love Lucy. With Lucy's real life husband Desi Arnaz as her costar. Putting Desi in the show was also a gamble. CBS hated the idea. Desi was Cuban. The network thought it would be scandalous for them to play husband and wife.

Lucy and Desi had only a few months to land a sponsor, hire a cast, shoot the show and most importantly -- make it funny. The pressure on them was enormous. That's why Lucy was crying on the radio. She was 39 years old and risking everything. And there was something else. After trying for ten years to have a baby - Lucille Ball was five months pregnant. I'm Ben Mankiewicz, and this is season three of The Plot Thickens, a podcast from Turner Classic Movies. This season we're telling the story of how Lucille Ball became the funniest, most recognizable woman in America.

This is Episode Six: I Love Lucy.

**I LOVE LUCY PILOT:** Ricky Ricky! Yes, Lucy what it is?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy made a pilot episode for I Love Lucy before she left her radio show. Jess Oppenheimer produced it. He was Lucy's producer on My Favorite Husband. She trusted him -- even though he had zero experience in television.

**JESS OPPENHEIMER:** By the time the radio show quit for the season, we'd already been sold as a television show. So, we moved right into it, into a whole business that none of us know the slightest thing about.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The first thing they needed was a sponsor. Shows didn't have commercials when television started. They had sponsors. One company that would pay the production costs for an entire season. Everything from salaries to equipment to studio space. Lucy and Desi even talk about sponsors in the I Love Lucy pilot.

**I LOVE LUCY PILOT:** On television you have to have a pretty girl that demonstrates the sponsor's product. Sure, she eats it or drinks it or smokes it or waxes the floor with it or cuts potatoes with it or drives off in it!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Jell-O was the sponsor for My Favorite Husband, but they passed on I Love Lucy. Jell-O told CBS they preferred Lucy's radio husband, Richard Denning, over Desi Arnaz. They didn't like that Lucy was married to a Cuban.

**DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK:** The network, the agencies, everybody involved said nobody was going to believe that a Latin bandleader could ever be married to a typical redheaded American girl.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Desi began to doubt himself. This is from his memoir. It's read by an actor.

**DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK:** Look, honey, maybe they're right, I said, maybe you and I don't make any sense playing husband and wife. As a matter of fact, lots of people say it didn't make any sense for us to get married in the first place. Maybe is not good for your career or for mine either.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy disagreed. She wanted Desi. More sponsors passed... and without one, there would be no show. Finally, one company showed interest.

**I LOVE LUCY COMMERCIAL:** Call for Philip Morrriissss!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Philip Morris -- the tobacco giant. Cigarette commercials haven't been allowed on TV since 1970. But you saw them all the time in the 1950s.

**PHILIP MORRIS COMMERCIAL:** When you change to Philip Morris, you'll feel better. Did you say I'll feel better smoking Philip Morris? Yes, you'll feel better.

**PHILIP MORRIS COMMERCIAL:** The clear, clean taste of fine mellow tobacco. And your food will taste better too!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Philip Morris hadn't advertised much on TV, but they liked Lucy. So, they offered to sponsor the show for around \$20,000 an episode. At the time, most shows cost twice that. CBS didn't have any other options. They said yes. Lucy and Desi planned to shoot I Love Lucy in Hollywood. CBS and Philip Morris had a different idea.

**LUCILLE BALL:** CBS said, well, we can't do that. You have to come to New York, and you have to do it. I said, oh, no way, I'm not going to New York.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Most TV was done live in the 1950s. Lucy and Desi assumed I Love Lucy would air live on the West Coast. The rest of the country would see a recording of it later. And you're not going to believe how they made this recording. Back then, they literally took a camera, pointed it at a television set while the show was on, and press record. Kinda like what you do to make a bootleg copy. It was called a kinescope. And the quality, as you can imagine, was lousy. Philip Morris was based on the east coast. They didn't want to see a crappy/grainy kinescope version of the show they were sponsoring. And they had a point: in 1951, 85% of TV viewers lived east of the Rockies.

**LUCILLE BALL:** I would not do it on kinescope, and I would not go to New York.

**DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK:** Lucy was in the last two months of her pregnancy. Everything we had done trying to work as a team, we had done in order to see if we could at last be together and stay home. And now in particular, when we were anxiously awaiting the arrival of our first child, this man was asking us when we were going to win New York.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It was Desi who came up with a solution. They wouldn't broadcast the show live. They would shoot it on film.

**DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK:** That was it. Of course! We will do it on film. We would be able to make as many prints as needed and the whole country would get the same top quality.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Shooting on film seemed like the perfect solution. Lucy and Desi could stay in California. They could shoot episodes weeks ahead of time. Then they could make copies and send to stations around the country. No kinescopes. Only high-quality film. But shooting on film wasn't easy.

**LUCILLE BALL:** So, to do it on film, the union, the law said that I had to do it within a studio and that almost crashed the whole idea. Do it in a studio. Where the hell would I find a studio that had the room?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They needed room for cameras and lighting and equipment. And room for an audience.

**LUCILLE BALL:** I wouldn't work unless I had an audience.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy knew that's how she performed best. She had the star power to convince CBS to let them shoot on film and in a studio in LA. But it was Desi who had to figure out how to get it done.

**LUCILLE BALL:** Desi didn't know, but he was a born innovator, showman. He was a gambler, a big gambler, not just with money, but I mean with his ideas, with his -- what he dared try.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Desi took control - he put together a team and sent them on a mission. Find a studio - a big studio. And they did - General Service Studios, on Las Palmas Avenue in Hollywood. Stage 2. It was big enough - for the film cameras - and the bleachers where the audience would sit. Nobody had ever put a studio audience on a film set before. But that didn't stop Desi.

**LUCILLE BALL:** But he made it possible. He found a way. He got the fire department, the police department, everybody was involved, the construction, the studio people. And they knocked holes through walls. They put in restrooms. They had made sure that the exits were on a boulevard. He did everything that we wanted to do and saw that it was done well.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Now Desi had to find a way to pay for it. Shooting on film is expensive -- much more expensive than broadcasting a show live. Between that and constructing a new set, I Love Lucy was quickly going over budget. So, Desi went to CBS and struck a deal. The first of many deals he'd make with the network. CBS would pay for the film stock if Lucy and Desi both took a pay cut. They were supposed to be paid \$5000 an episode -- now it was down to \$4000. Desi had one condition. He and Lucy would own the negative - the original film version of the show. CBS agreed. They figured -- who'd want to watch an episode they'd already seen?

**LUCILLE BALL:** We didn't have any idea that it would run for a long time, that it would be successful. Nobody knew what television was!

**JESS OPPENHEIMER:** Here I was producing a television show, I'd never worked one day in the movie studio, knew nothing about film. It's amazing that it ever got on the air at all.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Jess Oppenheimer was the producer. He came from radio. He knew story. He knew comedy. But shooting a TV show was new to him. He needed a specialized crew. And lighting was the biggest problem. TV shows typically had three cameras -- one for a wide shot, one for medium shots, and one for close-ups. But film needs different lighting for every shot. The crew couldn't figure out how to make it work. In fact, nobody in Hollywood could figure it out. Then Lucy thought of someone from her past.

**DU BARRY WAS A LADY:** Du Barry was a lady...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In 1943, Lucy starred in an MGM musical called Du Barry was a Lady. The director of photography was a man named Karl Freund. He was best known as a cinematographer, but he was also a director, an inventor... and a genius. Lucy loved Karl. He was round and jovial. He carried around a thermos full of martinis. Everyone called him Papa. Karl knew how to light Lucy and how to shoot her - he knew how to make her look absolutely gorgeous.

**DU BARRY WAS A LADY:** If you're ever in a mess, SOS.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy's hair was dyed red for the first time in *Du Barry was a Lady*. Karl Freund shot her in Technicolor. Lucy and her hair popped off the screen. She looked so good she stayed a redhead for the rest of her life. Karl was also the man who shot *Dracula*.

**DRACULA:** I am Dracula.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And he'd won an Oscar for his work on *The Good Earth*. By the time *I Love Lucy* came around, Karl was in his 60s and semi-retired. He was working for the government in Washington. He was developing a camera that was small enough to be swallowed. It was the Cold War. The golden age of crazy spy gear. That's when he got a call from Desi.

**DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK:** I called Karl and told him what I wanted to do. I want to stage the show as a play film, maintain continuity in front of an audience of perhaps 300 people using three thirty-five-millimeter cameras and recording the audience's laughter and reactions simultaneously with our dialog.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Karl told Desi it was impossible to light three camera angles at the same time. Desi didn't argue with him - he flattered him instead.

**DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK:** Well, I know that nobody has done it up to now, but I figure that if there was anybody in the world who could do it, it would be called Karl Freund. "Well thanks for thinking of me," he said, "but you know that Lucy's no chicken. You want her to look good, don't you?" "Of course." "Well, then for her closeups I will have to use special lighting. Put a little gauze on it." I interrupted: "I don't know that end of it Papa. You are the master of that." I could feel I was getting to him.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Desi did get to him. Karl left Washington DC and returned to California.

**LUCILLE BALL:** He lived near us in the valley, and he was coming over and giving just the advice and whatnot. And we just did innovation after innovation after innovation.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Karl eventually came up with the solution to the lighting problem. He put all the lights on the ceiling above the set. This provided plenty of light at any angle and didn't block the view of the studio audience. It sounds simple enough but in 1951, it was revolutionary. And it paid off. I Love Lucy looked better than any other show on the air. Now the only issue -- was the script. CBS ordered a full season of I Love Lucy. 35 episodes. Incredible if you think about it. Shows today top out at 22 episodes and most have around ten per season. And they come with a whole staff of writers. I Love Lucy... had three.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** Well, the writing team consisted of my father and Madelyn Pugh and Bob Carroll Jr., who were staff writers at CBS.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's Greg Oppenheimer - Jess Oppenheimer's son.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** They weren't long out of college at that point, very young. And Lucy referred to them as the youngsters.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Madelyn and Bob had worked with Lucy on My Favorite Husband. And when Lucy made the jump to television, she brought them along.

**MADELYN PUGH:** And so, we said, I guess we better learn to write for television.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's Madelyn Pugh. She was a comedy writer when there were no female comedy writers. She was the one who got saddled with typing the script while her writing partner Bob paced the floor.

**I LOVE LUCY PILOT:** Ricky Ricky!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Together, they wrote the pilot for I Love Lucy.

**MADELYN PUGH:** We had no idea what Desi could do. But of course, he turned out to be just gold because of the accent and the nightclub and all the things we could use.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In the pilot, Lucy plays an upper middle-class housewife. She's married to Ricky, who was a bandleader, just like Desi. They live in a Manhattan high rise. Lucy's character wants to be in show biz too - and tries to get in on Ricky's nightclub act. But Lucy wanted to be more relatable.

**LUCILLE BALL:** I wanted middle America. I wanted to be the housewife, worrying about the same things that housewives all over the world worry about.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The writers moved Lucy and Ricky out of the high-rise and into a more modest brownstone. They also got some new neighbors. Here's Gregg Oppenheimer again.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** Before they actually started shooting, they realized they needed someone else for Lucy and Ricky to talk to and plot with. And so, they created Fred and Ethel Mertz.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Oh, I don't think those Italian actresses are so much. Not one of 'em's got her hair combed. Well, they look great to me. If I let my hair go like that, you'd never let me hear the end of it. Honeybunch, if the rest of you looked like that, I wouldn't care if you were bald.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Fred and Ethel were Lucy and Ricky's landlords, and most of the time, their best friends. Adding another couple changed the dynamic of the show. Now, instead of it always being Lucy versus Ricky, it could be the Ricardos against the Mertzes, or the women against the men. Finding the right actor for Fred was easy.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** Bill Frawley called Lucy and said he wanted the part.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** William Frawley was a balding character actor with a pot belly. He was usually cast as a hardnosed cop, or a baseball manager.

**ALIBI IKE CLIP:** Good pitchers don't turn up every four years like Presidents, y'know.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy knew Bill was perfect for Fred Mertz. But he had a problem.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** They were worried about hiring him because he had a reputation of drinking too much.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's putting it kindly. Bill Frawley was an alcoholic. CBS and Philip Morris both said: find someone else for the role. But Desi also knew his way around a bottle, and he was sympathetic to Frawley. The two of them met for drinks, and Desi made him a deal:

**DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK:** Look, I don't give a damn whether you drink or not. I like to drink myself and I'll drink you under the table any time you'd like to give it a try. Except during working hours. The first time you are not able to do your job, I'll try to work around you for the day. The second time I'll try to manage again. But if you, do it three times, you are through.



**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They shook on it. Bill Frawley got the job.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** But they had a hard time casting Ethel Mertz.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They were five weeks away from the start of production, and they still didn't have an Ethel. Their director had an idea.

**LUCILLE BALL:** He said, for God's sake, get down and see a girl named Vivian Vance. At La Jolla. So, Jess Oppenheim, our producer and Desi went down.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Vivian Vance, who worked regularly on the stage, was a triple threat who could sing, dance and act. She was starring in a play at the La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego, about two hours away. Desi and Jess climbed in the car and drove down to catch the Saturday evening show. At intermission, Desi and Jess ran to find a phone.

**LUCILLE BALL:** And they called me back and said, we just saw her, believe us. You will love her on sight.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy took their word for it, and Vivian was hired.

**MAURY THOMPSON:** I met Lucille Ball on stage A, same day that she met Vivian Vance.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Maury Thompson was I Love Lucy's script supervisor. He spoke to PBS in 1999 and remembers the moment Desi introduced Lucy to Vivian.

**MAURY THOMPSON:** Desi said, oh, honey, I don't think you've met Miss Vance. Oh, no. No, I haven't. How do you do? What part are you reading for? And Desi says, for Ethel Mertz, honey, what's the matter with you? Ethel Mertz! Well, you don't look like a landlady. Why, your hair is the same color as mine! And Viv says, Miss Ball, I can dye it black. It doesn't matter to me at all.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy expected someone older, someone heavier. Instead, she got Vivian Vance. Pretty and trim - just two years older than her. Lucy didn't want competition -- Vivian, for her part, wasn't happy either.

**ROBERT OSBORNE:** Vivian was very, very upset because she was used to being on Broadway or in road companies, playing the elegant second woman.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Before he became the host of TCM, Robert Osborne was a friend of Lucy's. He talked to PBS in 1999.

**ROBERT OSBORNE:** She didn't like being in a house dressed as a frumpy woman playing the second woman and supposedly old enough to be married to Fred Mertz.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy and Vivian eventually became friends. But Vivian never got along with her TV husband.

**ROBERT OSBORNE:** I mean, Bill Frawley was a very difficult man and didn't like Vivian Vance at all, and she didn't like him at all. He was an old curmudgeon, but he used that, you know, and the scripts are so written that it worked out perfectly.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Hey Rick, are you doing anything Monday night? I don't think so. It's my night off, why? I'd like you to join me in commemoration of an 18-year-old tragedy. What do you mean? Well, it's our wedding anniversary.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** Bill Frawley would contribute some insults that he wanted to make for Ethel. Like she has a figure like a sack full of doorknobs or something.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Aside from those insults, Bill Frawley was happy to have as few lines as possible.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** He would take the pages that he'd have lines on, and you would tear them out of the script and that's the only thing he would read. And then when he wasn't actually in a scene, he would be off in his dressing room reading the racing form.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They weren't all one big happy family, but on set they had chemistry. They were funny. All except one.

**JESS OPPENHEIMER:** If you came to a rehearsal, first reading of Lucy, you'd say keep everybody but the redhead. She's terrible, fire her.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's the show's producer - Jess Oppenheimer, talking about Lucy in 1961.

**JESS OPPENHEIMER:** Lucy was the kind of performer that never seemed to know what she was reading the first time through. So, she was looking for meanings and not paying any attention to how it came out. And slowly over the days of rehearsal, she would polish and polish. And finally, if she got enough rehearsal, she was just sensational.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Before rehearsals even started, Lucy went to the hospital. It was on July 17, 1951. Remember, Lucy was pregnant. By now, she was two weeks overdue, and the baby was in the breech position. She went in for a c-section and delivered a healthy little girl, weighing 7 pounds, 8 ounces. Lucy and Desi had picked the name Susan for a girl. But after the surgery, while Lucy was still unconscious, Desi made the last-minute decision to name their daughter... Lucie. With an i-e at the end. Lucille Ball, who was about to turn 40, was a mom for the first time. But she wouldn't get much time off. In just seven weeks, she would step in front of the camera for the very first episode of I Love Lucy.

After the break -- it's showtime.

**I LOVE LUCY PROMO:** Hey! We're on TV now! Watch for I Love Lucy! With Lucille Ball! And Desi Arnaz, he's, my husband. Typecasting I calls it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Promos for I Love Lucy started airing on CBS in the fall of 1951.

**I LOVE LUCY PROMO:** Don't forget about us! She's Vivian Vance! And he's Bill Frawley! Watch for us in I Love Lucy!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The show was set to premiere in October. They began shooting in front of a live audience on a Saturday in September. LA's summer heat was just starting to fade. On Romaine Street, one block south of Santa Monica Boulevard, 300 fans lined up in front of the door to stage two. The tickets were free, but this was a high-class affair. The men wore suits and ties. The women wore pencil skirts and fitted jackets. It was so formal they wore gloves. They walked up the steps and took their seats in the bleachers. The specially designed lights hung from above. Lucy was in her dressing room. Just a thin wall separating her from that very first live studio audience. She could almost feel them pouring into their seats. And for Lucy, it was the greatest feeling in the world.

**LUCILLE BALL:** It was just so exciting. I can't tell you it was so exciting.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In front of the set, cinematographer Karl Freund stared at the ground. He was checking the masking tape they put down the night before. The tape showed the cameraman where to go. Freund was looking for bumps, cracks, any imperfections in the smooth floor that could jostle the cameras as they moved. Next to the stage was a band -- Desi's band. As they started to play, the audience applauded -- and out came Desi Arnaz.

**DESI ARNAZ:** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** We found some old footage of how Desi introduced the show. He is the ultimate showman - in his velvet smoking jacket. A mic in his right hand, a lit cigarette in the other. He waves the cigarette around, gesturing to all the equipment.

**DESI ARNAZ:** As you know this is film, and that's why you see all these cameras down here, and the boom and the lights, all the people and all the stuff because it's just like making a movie, see?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** If there's one thing Desi knows, it's how to warm up a crowd.

**DESI ARNAZ:** First of all, I'd you to meet a young lady, she plays our landlady in the show, she plays Ethel Mertz, Miss Vivian Vance ladies and gentlemen!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Vivian takes a bow and Desi continues. He introduces the cast one by one, as if he's in a nightclub, and they're members of his band.

**DESI ARNAZ:** Uh, the fellow who plays our landlord, he plays Fred Mertz, he's married to Vivian -- in the show that is. Mr. William Frawley, Bill Frawley, Fred Mertz! Come out here Bill!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Bill waves to the crowd, and Desi waves him off. He doesn't keep the audience waiting too long. He knows who they've come to see.

**DESI ARNAZ:** And now the other girl in the show, my favorite redhead, my favorite wife, the vice president of Desilu Productions incorporated. I am the president. She plays Lucy -- Lucille Ball!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy bursts onto the set from behind a door. She runs up and down the small set and waves to the audience. She's dressed in a blue, fur-trimmed negligee on top of a pair of plain pajamas. The pajamas are her first costume of the night. Lucy wants to get things started as quickly as possible. To her, this is no nightclub act -- it's live theater, and the worst thing they could do is bore the audience. Finally -- those expensive film cameras are ready to roll.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Phillip Morris, America's finest cigarette presents The Lucille Ball Desi Arnaz show: I Love Lucy!

**I LOVE LUCY:** Oh, hello honey there you are? What's the matter you got an itch or something? No nothing's the matter, what's new?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** At one point during the filming, Jess Oppenheimer disappeared.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** He wasn't in the booth. And they finally went down, and my dad was pacing back and forth behind the bleachers. He couldn't even see what was going on. He was just listening to see how the audience was reacting.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They were reacting exactly how he'd hoped... They were laughing.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Lucy's acting crazy! Crazy for Lucy or crazy for ordinary people?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** For the first episode, they shot everything in sequence, straight through -- just like a play. Including the music. Because that's how Jess Oppenheimer always did it on radio.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** They were doing all the music live, the transitions between scenes and everything. Afterwards, Danny Kahn, the editor, came up to him, said, you know, it'd be a hell of a lot easier to edit this thing if you just put the music in afterwards. And he said, good idea! So that was the last time they did that.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They called that first show "Lucy Thinks Ricky is Trying to Murder Her." It was a nightmare to edit, and it ended up being the fourth episode to hit the air. Instead, when I Love Lucy debuted on Monday, October 15, 1951, they aired "The Girls Want to Go to a Nightclub."

**I LOVE LUCY:** Ricky hates nightclubs. But he works in one! Your life should be just one gay round of nightclubs. Yeah, that's what I thought when I married a bandleader. But ever since I said I do, there are so many things we don't.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The critics loved it. And so did the people at home. A few months after its debut, I Love Lucy had become the most popular television program of all time.

**ROBERT OSBORNE:** It was a magic combination, and that kind of thing happens so rarely in anything today, where you've got the perfect people for the perfect parts. Because there's so many talented people out there and so many people that can do everything that Lucy, Desi, Vivian, and Bill Frawley could do. But the four of them doing it together were the perfect mix for that, and if you changed any one of those elements, the whole history of the I Love Lucy show could have been different.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Here I am with all this talent bottled up inside of me and you're always sitting on the cork.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The first season of I Love Lucy was produced at a breakneck pace. 35 episodes shot in 35 weeks. The writers packed physical comedy into every episode. They came up with crazy scenarios. But Lucy was so good -- so committed -- that she made even the wackiest story seem plausible.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Ricky's not gonna be the only one in the family with a moustache! I'm gonna glue on a false one and I'm not gonna take it off until he shaves off his!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy was game for any stunt. But the biggest laughs came from her face. It was like she was made out of rubber. She would move her eyebrows and puff out her cheeks. And in the center were those big blue eyes, which got wider and wider as a scene went on. And she made noises.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Eughhhh!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The writers called that "the spider."

**LUCILLE BALL:** They just said make some kind of a noise, that sounded like I don't want to do that or that, you know, so that just came out. I just went eughhh and it became known as the spider.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Eughhhh! Eughhhh! Eughhhh!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy developed another signature move -- crying.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Waaaaaaah. Oh, Lucy don't cry! Waaaaaaah!

**I LOVE LUCY:** The crying was fun to do. It served many a purpose, ended many a scene, and I love doing it.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Now Lucy, you've got to be brave. I'll be brave. Waaaaaaah.

**GUSTAVO PEREZ FIRMAT:** Lucy's signature is the number of faces that she used to do. Her signature was very visual.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's Gustavo Perez Firmat. He's a Cuban American professor -- and an expert on Desi Arnaz.

**GUSTAVO PEREZ FIRMAT:** Desi's signature was aural. Desi's signature was the sound of his voice. Desi's signature was the show begins; he opens the door. Lucy, I'm home.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Lucy, I'm home!

**GUSTAVO PEREZ FIRMAT:** Desi's signature is his accent.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It's amazing to remember that CBS didn't want Desi because he was Cuban. Ricky Ricardo's accent became the writers' favorite running gag.

**I LOVE LUCY:** And don't you make fun of my English. That's English?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** When Ricky got angry, he would lapse into Spanish.

**I LOVE LUCY:** How dare you say that to me? What did I say? I don't know. But how dare you?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I Love Lucy fully embraced Desi's heritage - especially during the musical numbers.

**I LOVE LUCY:** They call me Cuban Pete, I'm the king of the rumba beat, when I play the maracas, I go chick chickee boom chick chickee boom.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** During those nightclub scenes, Lucy's talents were also on full display.

**I LOVE LUCY:** They call me Sally Sweet, I'm the queen of Delancy street, when I start to dance everything goes chick chickee boom chick chickee boom.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I Love Lucy was the culmination of years of training. It showcased every one of Lucy's skills: The poise she learned as a model... The physicality she brought to a movie set... The work ethic she learned from Lela Rogers... And the facial expressions she used to get laughs from the studio audience when she was in radio. Lucy brought it all to every episode of I Love Lucy. Perhaps nothing showcased Lucy's versatility more than Episode 30 -- Lucy Does a TV Commercial.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Hello Friends, I'm your Vitameatavegamin girl.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy auditions for a commercial to sell a wonder tonic. She has no idea it's laced with alcohol.

**I LOVE LUCY:** The answer to all your problems is in this little bottle.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** As Lucy drinks more and more Vitameatavegamin, she starts swaying back and forth... her eyes begin to flutter... her words begin to slur.

**I LOVE LUCY:** It's so tasty too. Tastes like candy. Honest! Hahahaha.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Playing drunk is one of the hardest things for an actor to do. It takes a great deal of control to look like you're losing control.

**I LOVE LUCY:** So why don't you join the thousands of happy peppy people and get a great big bottle of vitamitameetamigimin.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy made it seem easy. And the country loved her for it. Coming up -- Lucy changes television again... by breaking another taboo.

**I LOVE LUCY:** And now, the biggest TV news of the season. Just three weeks from tonight, Philip Morris again proudly presents America's #1 television show, I Love Lucy.



**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** As Lucy and Desi were preparing for the second season of, I Love Lucy, they got a surprise: Lucy was pregnant. Again. They panicked. Not because Lucy was 40 years old -- but because they thought this meant the end of their show.

**MADELYN PUGH:** In those days, nobody had a baby on the television. I mean, it hadn't been done. So Desi was frantic. He thought we were all off the air.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Madelyn Pugh was a writer on the show. It was considered scandalous to see a pregnant woman on television. Not only that, you couldn't even say the word "pregnant." In 1952, the censors decided the rules - about race, about gender, and about sex on television. On I Love Lucy, Lucy and Ricky Ricardo slept in separate beds. Desi talked about Lucy's pregnancy with David Letterman in 1983.

**DESI ARNAZ:** I told the head writer at the time, Jess Oppenheimer, and I said, Lucy is going to have a baby. He says, what are we going to do? I said, what do you mean we're going to do? She's going to have a baby. That's what we're going to do.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Jess Oppenheimer had an idea -- instead of hiding the pregnancy, they'd make it part of the story. They always needed new story ideas anyway. And this one was a doozy. CBS immediately said no.

**DESI ARNAZ:** They said, well can you hide her behind highchairs or sitting down? Not Lucy. When she gets pregnant, brother, there's no question about it. She waddles around like a big elephant. There's no way, no way to hide her for six months.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Desi went over the heads of the CBS executives - to the people who paid the bills. The show's sponsor - Philip Morris. At first, they vetoed the pregnancy storyline too. So, Desi called their bluff. He told them if they didn't go along with the idea, they'd lose the most popular show on television.

**DESI ARNAZ:** Finally, the head of Philip, Morris who is a wonderful old guy called Alfred Lyons, he wrote 'em a note saying, don't fool around with a Cuban. I cleaned it up a little.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** What Alfred Lyons really said was don't fuck with the Cuban. Now, Lucy and Desi had the backing of Philip Morris. CBS reluctantly agreed to let Lucy be pregnant on television. But they had some conditions.

**DESI ARNAZ:** They said I had to say "spectin." It was better for me to use "spectin" anyway.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** CBS also paid close attention to all the baby storylines. Every script was scrutinized. They even had a rabbi; a priest and a minister review them. Being pregnant on TV generated a lot of laughs. Like the time Lucy wanted ice cream at four in the morning... ice cream with a very unusual topping.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Now pour that right on top of this. But honey these are sardines!

**LUCILLE BALL:** I did have cravings, but it wasn't for sardines. But the script said sardines and ice cream. So, I said, all right, get me mashed potatoes, it looks like ice cream. And get me a brown gravy, good brown gravy, because after we put the sardines and that'll help cover up the, the look and the taste because I really had to eat it. And I want to tell you, my eyes crossed.

**I LOVE LUCY:** How Can you possibly eat that? It's wonderful!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy needed to take maternity leave from the show. She and Desi talked about it and decided she should be off from November through March. But that left a hole in the production schedule. They wouldn't have any new episodes for four months. Here's Gregg Oppenheimer.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** My dad had the idea of re-running some shows.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It had never been done before. Because I Love Lucy was shot on film, it would look just as good the second time around as it did the first. I Love Lucy created the rerun.

**GREGG OPPENHEIMER:** It worked so well that the ratings of the reruns exceeded the ratings of the first run shows. During I Love Lucy's first season, not many people had TV sets. Just a very small fraction of homes, just affluent people. The number of people with TV sets exploded between the first and second season. So, there were millions and millions more people who it wasn't a rerun for them. They didn't have a TV the year before.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The writing team started working on the most important episode of the season -- the one where Lucy has a baby.

**I LOVE LUCY:** Ricky this is it. This is it! This is it!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Desi and Jess realized they had a public relations opportunity right in front of them. Their star AND their main character were both pregnant. Maybe they could time it so that Lucy Ricardo's baby would be born on the same day as Lucille Ball's baby.

**MADELYN PUGH:** And since she was going to have a caesarean, they picked a Monday.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I Love Lucy aired on Monday nights. But there was one thing the writers couldn't predict: whether Lucy was having a boy or a girl.

**MADELYN PUGH:** It's like a 50/50 chance. So, we went with a boy. That's what they wanted because they had a little girl. And we were lucky! And we understood that when it was a boy that everybody in the operating room just screamed. It's a boy! And carried on.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** On Monday, January 19, 1953, Lucille Ball gave birth to Desiderio Alberto Arnaz IV. Everyone called him Desi Junior. Desi Senior passed out Havana cigars at Cedars hospital in Los Angeles. He finally had a son. Someone to carry on the Arnaz name. His alter ego Ricky Ricardo celebrated on TV that same night.

**I LOVE LUCY:** It's a boy. You hear that I had a boy!

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** TV and reality were blurring together, and Philip Morris was there to make a buck off it.

**PHILIP MORRIS COMMERCIAL:** Yes, there there's a new baby, a wonderful baby at the Ricardos, and we at Philip Morris rejoice in the blessed event. To Lucy, to Ricky and to the new baby, love and kisses from Philip Morris and from all America.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** "All America" might seem a bit much... but it wasn't far off. That night, more than 90 percent of the people who had televisions watched I love Lucy. The morning after Lucy gave birth was January 20th. Inauguration Day.

**DWIGHT D. ESENHOWER:** I, Dwight D. Eisenhower, do solemnly swear...

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** 29 million people tuned in to watch Dwight David Eisenhower become the 34th President of the United States. But 44 million watched Lucy the night before. Fans sent flowers and toys and onesies.

**ROBERT OSBORNE:** Nothing like that had ever happened in television before. Television hadn't been around that long on that big a basis, that everybody fell in love with a family and watched the family every week.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The episode called "Lucy Goes to the Hospital" united America in a way that no movie, and no radio show, had ever done before. Television was now dominant, and Lucy and Desi were its queen and king. The girl from Jamestown had everything she could ever imagine: Fame -- a husband -- a son and a daughter -- and an audience of millions. But Lucy didn't trust it - all that happiness. She was waiting...waiting for something to go wrong. For all that luck to disappear.

**JOHN HOWARD LAWSON:** The question is, have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** On our next episode.

**HOLLYWOOD FIGHTS BACK:** For the past week in Washington, the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities has been investigating the film industry.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Lucy's past catches up with her when the U.S. government comes knocking -- and tries to turn the country against her.

**AARON SORKIN:** HUAC, you know, they may have looked at each other and said Lucille Ball isn't a communist and it's not fair to hurt her like this. But that just doesn't quite sound like HUAC does it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Angela Carone is our Director of Podcasts. Story editor and creative consultant is Joanne Faryon. Audio editing and sound design by Mike Voulgaris and his exceptional ears. Scriptwriting by Angela Carone, Yacov Freedman, Dale Maharidge, Maya Kroth and Joanne Faryon. Yacov Freedman is our senior producer. Associate production from Josh Lash. Additional editing and sound design by Paul Robert Moundsey and Heather Frankel. Additional script editing by Bryant Urstadt and Susan White. James Sheridan is our researcher, fact-checker and resident Lucy expert. Mixing by Glenn Matullo and Tim Pelletier. Production support from Jordan Boge, Bailey Tyler, Alison Firor, Julie Bitton, Mario Rials, Susana Zepeda, Liz Winter and Reid Hall. Web support by Betsy Gooch. Thanks to David Byrne, Taryn Jacobs, Diana Bosch and the entire TCM Marketing team.

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Check out our website at [tcm.com/theplotthickens](http://tcm.com/theplotthickens). It has info about each episode and photos from throughout Lucille Ball's life. Again, that's [tcm.com/theplotthickens](http://tcm.com/theplotthickens).