

Fred + Ginger: The Later Years



“Car 54, Where Are You?” is a situation comedy of the early 1960s that chronicled the exploits of NYPD officers Toody and Muldoon, convincingly played by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in heavy make-up. It was filmed entirely on location in the Bronx to help achieve the director’s desire for cinéma vérité. But that wish for über-realism was the show’s downfall. Episode 60, which turned out to be the show’s last, followed Toody and Muldoon as they stood watch over a confiscated marijuana plant, which was crucial evidence in an upcoming trial. Fred and Ginger were unacquainted with the “recreational” effects of the plant, so the director bade them sample its leaves. Soon, glassy-eyed stares replaced the actors’ typical attention to detail, and they had a devil of a time repressing fits of giggles. Then the two nascent potheads chucked their scripts and waltzed over to the studio commissary for a dozen ice cream sandwiches – each! Although they eventually came down from their psychotropic high, Fred and Ginger never returned to the Car 54 set, citing “personal reasons.”