

## The Farewell Tour of Sydney's Longest Serving Public Servant | Rodney Marks

Written by [lloyd bradford \(brad\) syke](#)

Wednesday, 11 September 2013 05:46

Rodney Marks [www.comedian.com.au](http://www.comedian.com.au) and Benjamin Marks [www.comedywriter.com.au](http://www.comedywriter.com.au)



**Rodney Marks** is something of a chameleon. Possibly the most personable comic you could ever hope to meet, he is the very picture of respectability, in pinstriped suit, fastidiously-pressed business shirt and old school tie (though look carefully, the traditional-looking emblem thereon may bear a trap). But when the jacket is removed, colourful suspenders betray a hint of mischief and eccentricity. Which means *The Farewell Tour of Sydney's Longest Serving Public Servant* should be approached with some caution, lest you become snagged on one of countless barbs, or fall into

another of the traps he almost compulsively sets. This is to be expected, because **Marks** is a professional practical joker.

Any lengthy address by a senior public servant in the context of The Roxbury Hotel, in Glebe, on a Sunday afternoon, has to come under scrutiny and suspicion as a hoax. But the genius of **Rodney Marks**, MBA (Master of Bullshit Artistry), is that his comic monologue, to the unsuspecting or uninitiated, may not be immediately recognised as such. After all, he embraces all the buzzwords that would make him sound the part. He looks the part. And his sober demeanour does nothing to dispel one's reflexive credulity. The address is even flooded by an apparently earnest Q & A. Under the skin, though, his Farewell Tour *'is, as you might imagine, a clarification, elucidation, explanation and illumination of waffle, piffle, double-talk and bureaucratic nonsense'*. So steeped are we in such, however, so bombarded by evasive, non-specific polliwaffle, we become susceptible to falling, haplessly, hopelessly and helplessly, into unwitting, sympathetic complicity with his *'self-referential parody and self-deprecating satire'*, which are *'underemployed and so is Rodney, hence this season'*. Our compliance constitutes the comic elegance. Even having realised what we're in for and up against, we must remain, at all times, vigilant, so as not to have the parody do a one-eighty and bite us on the face.

If you've ever been to a convention, conference, congress, colloquium, seminar, tutorial, brainstorm, workshop or breakout session, you'll have something to laugh at, somewhere between the mission and vision statements, white papers, what-have-you. **Marks** covers all this ground. In his public service persona, he's a man of many words. Most, utterly and intrinsically meaningless which, of course, is as it should be. Much time is spent on linguistic assessment and analysis; because semantics matter.

As a child, I had the Professor Branestawm books. One of the good professor's revolutionary theories, as best I recall, was that if you go double your speed travelling between points A & B and keep doubling it, pretty soon you'll get to B at precisely the same time you left A and, should you go even faster, you'll get to your destination before you even left for it. The same internal logic seems to apply when **Marks** appeals to us, as follows. 'Perhaps if I talk for five minutes and you listen for five, we might both finish at about the same time. If you finish listening before I finish speaking, perhaps just sit quietly and think privately to yourself until I catch up; it would be most appreciated.'

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And, of course, **Marks** is every bit as clever as Branestawm. By way of but one example, he's been able to put into a system he's developed the framework of a structure for the activities he describes. Well, something like that. We 'free radicals' can't be expected to penetrate such sophisticated modelling at first byte. Much of the modelling, as I'm sure you'll appreciate, proceeds from a semiotic and pragmatic viewpoint, as well it should. I mean, is there any other way of looking at it?

What's more, when **Marks** shares something (as he's only too pleased to do, being nothing if not generous with his knowledge, such as it is) off-the-record, he does so in the utmost confidence, moving the meeting into camera, so that what goes on is as discreet as it would be if it took place under a cone of silence. In the era of Assange, Manning, Snowden and wholesale identity theft (which, at least, is cheaper than retail), it's damn reassuring.

Just as a car that yes like greased lightning is likely to be automatic, systematic and hydromatic, **Marks'** thinking system, *'based as it is on systems thinking, isn't so much circumlocutory, annular, or radial, as systemic and, ultimately, cyclic; albeit in a roundabout sort of way'*. In terms of process, I'm sure you'll be as relieved to learn, as I was, that *'the system itself is part of its own feedback loop'*, somewhat akin to *'the snake in Taoist philosophy, impossibly swallowing its own tail'*. Inputs are input as input and then, as throughput, transformed, cunningly, into output, which is then measured; *'initially, qualitatively and, ultimately, quantitatively, against a plethora of hierarchies, an aggregation of continua and a collection of assessment criteria'*, before being put back into the system as refined input.

**Marks** even deigns to discuss the emerging popularity of research into the subject of deferred gratification, but promises *'more of that later'*.

The co-writer (with his son, **Benjamin**) and performer is best summed-up, methinks, in his own words. 'Rodney performs mostly at business events for the corporate, government and non-profit sectors, so this is a rare opportunity to see him expose himself in public'. Except, in truth, he lays bare much more. As a result, I'm a Marksist.

### Farewell Tour of Sydney's Longest Serving Public Servant

*Rodney Marks and Benjamin Marks*

**Venue:** The Roxbury Hotel | 182 St Johns Rd, Glebe, NSW

**Dates:** until Dec 15, 2013 (1st + 3rd Sundays each month)

**Bookings:** [www.roxburyhotel.com.au](http://www.roxburyhotel.com.au)

### Reference:

The Farewell Tour of Sydney's Longest Serving Public Servant | Rodney Marks. 2013. The Farewell Tour of Sydney's Longest Serving Public Servant | Rodney Marks. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.australianstage.com.au/201309106521/reviews/sydney/the-farewell-tour-of-sydney-s-longest-serving-public-servant-%7C-rodney-marks.html>. [Accessed 15 September 2013].