

November 15, 2021

Your Hit Parade - Aired on NBC, Saturday evening, on December 24, 1955 at 10:30PM.

Your Hit Parade was an American radio and television music program that was broadcast from 1935 to 1953 on radio and seen from 1950 to 1959 on television.

André Baruch continued as the announcer when the program arrived on NBC television in summer 1950. Del Sharbutt succeeded him in the 1957–58 season.

Julia Meade - came to public attention in 1953 as the public face of the Lincoln division of the Ford Motor Company. She did live commercials on The Ed Sullivan Show for such products as Kodak cameras and Life magazine for years, earning recognition from TV Guide as the "favorite salesgirl" of the program's host. Meade's pitch work involved doing live commercials that ran for up to five minutes.

From 1969 to 1971, Meade hosted the syndicated program *Ask Julia Meade*, a daily broadcast in which she answered letters from the viewers. She also was a host of *Playhouse 90* and appeared as a panelist on *What's My Line?* and *Get the Message*.

Julia's stage appearances include *The Tender Trap* on Broadway in 1954. She won the 1962-63 Sarah Siddons Award for her performance in the Chicago production of *Mary, Mary*. She continued to do Theatre well into the 1990s.

Her Movies include *Pillow Talk*, in which Rock Hudson sings a song to her at the piano, *Tammy Tell Me True* with Sandra Dee, and *ZOTZ!*, which she starred in with Tom Poston.

Vocalists on the show were:

Gisèle MacKenzie - In 1951, she changed her last name, LaFleche, to her father's middle name, MacKenzie because she felt her name sounded "like a striptease artist's." In addition to her sing talent, she was also an accomplished classical violinist. During her summer breaks from *Your Hit Parade*, she appeared in musical comedies such as *Annie Get Your Gun*, *The King and I*, and *South Pacific*.

Dorothy Collins - In early 1942, at age 15, she became a featured vocalist with Raymond Scott's orchestra, performing on radio and on tour. In 1950, *Your Hit Parade* moved to NBC television, with Raymond Scott as conductor. Shortly thereafter, at Scott's urging, Collins auditioned for a vocalist slot and was hired.

Snooky Lanson - was chosen to replace Frank Sinatra on radio and became one of America's first TV stars when *Your Hit Parade* came to television in July of 1950. He guest-starred in 1958 on *The Gisele MacKenzie Show*, MacKenzie having been a co-star with Lanson on *Hit Parade*. In 1961, he was one of five rotating hosts on the NBC-TV program *Five Star Jubilee*

Russell Arms - began his career on radio, including working at WNEW in New York City. He later worked as a freelance performer, mostly in westerns. Subsequently, he appeared in supporting roles in both feature films and television. From 1952 to 1957, he was best known as a vocalist on *Your Hit Parade*.

These four were the headliners during the show's peak years. Ice Skater **Andra McLaughlin** was featured on this Christmas Eve episode.

Some people believe that big band singer Snooky Lanson's weekly attempts to perform Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" hit in 1956 was the beginning of the end of the series.

In the fall of 1957, the show was updated and production was moved to Hollywood with a new cast to a younger, more "contemporary" lineup, including Tommy Leonetti, Jill Corey, Alan Copeland and Virginia Gibson. It was also now broadcast in color on NBC.

Your Hit Parade left NBC on June 7, 1958. Dorothy Collins and Johnny Desmond reintroduced it on CBS on October 10, 1958. The show ended on April 24, 1959.

An attempt was made at reviving the show in the summer of 1974, with the emphasis on *Your Hit Parade* songs from selected broadcasts of specific weeks in the 1940s and 1950s, mixed with current popular hits performed by the original artists.

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet - Episode Title: Piano For The Fraternity. Aired on ABC at 8:30PM, Wednesday evening, December 21, 1960.

Ozzie Nelson Harriet Nelson David Nelson Ricky Nelson

Skip Young - Between 1956 and the end of the series in 1966, Young appeared in 66 of *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. He was a friend of David and Rick Nelson who frequently rescued Wally from messes of his own doing. When producers needed a last name

for his Wally character on "Ozzie & Harriet", he suggested Plumstead which was his real name.

Mack Williams - made his big screen debut in Repeat Performance in 1947 then went on to appear in over forty feature films. Among his credits are *Command Decision*, *Backfire*, *Flying Leathernecks*, *Retreat Hell*, *Chartreuse Caboose* and *Cape Fear*. In television, he could be seen on *Dragnet*, *Surfside 6*, *Twilight Zone*, *My Three Sons* and *Perry Mason*.

Will Wright - was a former newspaper reporter in San Francisco. He switched careers and entered vaudeville, then took to the stage. Wright went from acting to producing and staged shows on Broadway as well as other cities. He eventually found his way to Hollywood.

Charity Grace - was a school teacher until retiring at the age of 60 to become a stage and television actress.

Will Wright and Charity Grace are billed as Mr. & Mrs. Stewart in the end credits, but are called Mr. & Mrs. Stevens in the program.

The Four Preps - Glen Larson, Bruce Belland, Ed Cobb, Marvin Ingram. Larson would go on to become a producer of television programs such as *Alias Smith and Jones*, *McCloud*, *Quincy M. E.*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *B.J. and the Bear* and several others.

James Burton - has been playing the guitar professionally since he was 13 years old. His dynamic style of playing brought him to the attention of Ricky Nelson, who hired Burton as his regular band member. James Burton became one of the most in-demand Los Angeles session guitarists during the 1960's, playing on recordings by artists, ranging from Frank Sinatra to The Monkees, as well as regularly appearing on the popular music show, *Shindig!*.

Elvis Presley hired James Burton as lead guitarist of his band until Presley's death in 1977. Since then, he has performed with John Denver, Johnny Rivers, Kenny Rogers and many others.

Burton was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001 under the category Side-Men. He has also been inducted into the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame in 2009.

At 82 years of age, James is still actively playing.

The Honeymooners - Episode Title: 'Twas the Night Before Christmas. Aired on CBS, Saturday evening, December 24, 1955 at 8:30PM.

Jackie Gleason - was named Herbert Walton Gleason Jr. at birth, but was baptized John Herbert Gleason.

He grew up at 328 Chauncey Apartment 1A which was the address he later used for Ralph and Alice Kramden on *The Honeymooners*. The set was based on Gleason's memories of the Brooklyn tenement where he lived with his mother.

Gleason worked his way up to a job at New York's Club 18, where insulting its patrons was the order of the day. Gleason greeted noted ice skater Sonja Henie by handing her an ice cube and saying, "Okay, now do something".

Gleason's big break occurred in 1949, when he got the role of Chester A. Riley for the first television version of the radio comedy *The Life of Riley*. William Bendix originated the role on radio, but was initially unable to accept the television role because of film commitments. Despite positive reviews, the show received modest ratings and was cancelled after one year.

He was hired to host DuMont's *cavalcade of stars* variety hour in 1950. During the 1954 – 1955 season, the show was renamed *The Jackie Gleason Show* and became the country's second-highest-rated television show.

Some of the characters developed by Gleason were: Reginald Van Gleason III, Rudy the Repairman, Joe the Bartender, The Poor Soul, Rum Dum, Fenwick Babbitt, Charlie Bratton, Stanley R. Sogg and The Bachelor.

In a 1985 interview, Gleason related some of his characters to his youth in Brooklyn. Mr. Dennehy, whom Joe the Bartender greets is a tribute to Gleason's first love, Julie Dennehy. The character of The Poor Soul came from an assistant manager of an outdoor theater he frequented.

The Honeymooners first was featured on *cavalcade of stars* on October 5, 1951. Initially, Art Carney was in a guest appearance as a cop. A few episodes later, Carney's Ed Norton was introduced. Character actress Pert Kelton as Alice. As a result of Kelton's ill health, Audrey Meadows would later replace Kelton as Alice for the duration of the series. Joyce Randolph played Trixie, Ed Norton's wife.

He disliked rehearsing, even in the early days of live television, but was renowned for his total mastery and control over each production detail and insisted on the show credit: "Entire Production Supervised by Jackie Gleason."

Since Jackie Gleason did not rehearse for any of *The Honeymooners* episodes, **Barney Martin** (best remembered as Jerry Seinfeld's father on *Seinfeld*) was Gleason's stand-in. He also did not like working with young children.

In addition to his unforgettable portrayal of Ralph Kramden on *The Honeymooners*, he had turned to writing original music and recording a series of popular and best-selling albums with his orchestra for Capitol Records by the mid-1950s.

Among some of his many memorable films were *Requiem For A Heavyweight*, *Soldier In The Rain*, *The Hustler*, *Smokey and The Bandit* and *Nothing In Common*.

He was nominated three times, but never won an Emmy Award. Gleason was inducted into the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame in 1986.

He was once quoted as saying:

"I'm no alcoholic. I'm a drunkard. There's a difference. A drunkard doesn't like to go to meetings."

"I have no use for humility. I am a fellow with an exceptional talent."

Art Carney - In addition to his role as Ed Norton in *The Honeymooners*, Carney is also best remembered for his portrayal as Harry Coombes in film *Harry and Tonto* for which he won the Academy Award for Best Actor. He beat out Jack Nicholson, Dustin Hoffman, Albert Finney, and Al Pacino that year.

He had only a high school education, no formal training and never took an acting class.

During the 1930's, Carney was a singer with the orchestra of Horace Heidt. They appeared in radio shows and were regulars in the game show *Pot o' Gold*. Carney had an uncredited cameo in the film version of *Pot o' Gold*, which was his film debut. He was also a voice-over regular on the popular 1930's radio series *Gangbusters*.

Carney's first teaming with Jackie Gleason took place in 1950, in a comedy sketch appearing in *Cavalcade of Stars*. Gleason appeared as lunchroom loudmouth Charlie Bratten with Carney as mild-mannered Clem Finch.

Before playing Ed Norton on *The Honeymooners*, Carney played a policeman who gets hit by a barrel of flour in the first *Honeymooners* sketch on *The Jackie Gleason Show*. Jackie Gleason once said that Carney was 90% responsible for the success of *The Honeymooners*.

Carney originated the role of Felix Unger (opposite Walter Matthau as Oscar Madison) in Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* on Broadway in 1965.

Quotes from Art Carney:

"I love Ed Norton and what he did for my career. But the truth is that we couldn't have been more different. Norton was the total extrovert, there was no way you could put down his infectious good humor. Me? I'm a loner and a worrier."

"How would you like to go through life with your name synonymous with sewage?"

Audrey Meadows - One story that has been told many times was when she first auditioned for the part of Alice Kramden, Jackie Gleason turned her down because, he said, she was too pretty to be

believable as Ralph's wife. Determined to get the part, she hired a photographer to take pictures of her with frumpy clothes, no makeup and a generally world-weary attitude and sent them to Gleason. Gleason, not recognizing the woman in the photo as Audrey, told his producers that she was "Alice" and to find her. When he found out it was indeed Audrey, he said that any actress that determined to get the part deserved it and he hired her.

According to Gleason in an interview shortly before his death, he said, "With Audrey, all that stuff about how she went home and messed up her hair and I didn't recognize her and gave her the part is silly..... makes me sound stupid. She read for us and after a few lines I said, 'She's the one'. And she was sensational. The greatest stander and listener I've ever seen. The way I'd be gyrating and she'd just stare at me, then say the line and bring down the house. Sensational."

Although never thought of as a comedienne, Audrey appeared with many of Hollywood's top comics during her "Golden Age of TV" years, including Red Skelton, George Gobel, Jack Benny, Sid Caesar and Carol Burnett.

Audrey and Joyce Randolph knew each other before the classic television show. They once worked together in a summer stock production of *No, No, Nanette*.

Meadows was the live action model for the cartoon character Wilma Flintstone.

Joyce Randolph - got the role of "Trixie" as a result of appearing in a Clorets breath-mint commercial. Jackie Gleason saw the commercial, and was impressed by her. She was cast on *The Honeymooners* without having an agent.

On Broadway, she appeared in *Ladies Night In A Turkish Bath* in 1950. After she became identified with the Norton character, she rarely got other parts. "For years after that role," Randolph said, "directors would say: 'No, we can't use her. She's too well known as Trixie'".

Joyce Randolph turned 97 years old on October 21, 2021 and is the last surviving member of *The Honeymooners* cast.

Anne Seymour - (Mrs. Stevens) was the seventh generation of a theatrical family that could be traced back to Ireland in 1740. After touring throughout New England, she made her New York debut in *Mr. Moneybags* in 1928. Other Broadway shows followed including *At The Bottom* in 1930 and *A School For Scandal* in 1931.

Anne played one of radio's noblest heroines from 1934 through 1945 in the popular soap drama *The Story of Mary Martin*.

In the late 1940's Anne began working in film and made her debut as Lucy Stark in the Academy Award winning picture *All The King's Men* in 1949.

Her 40 year career in films and television concluded with an appearance as a local newspaper publisher in *Field Of Dreams* in 1989.

Calvin Thomas - (Uncle Leo) The episode 'Twas the Night Before Christmas was the first of Calvin's three appearances on *The Honeymooners*. His other television roles include *Kraft Theatre*, *Suspense* and *Pulitzer Prize Playhouse*.

For years, the end of the this program was cut from syndication viewings.

Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton were often referred to as the "Brooklyn Laurel and Hardy".

The four main characters became the prototypes for *The Flintstones* animated series.

In 1966, Gleason was now doing his weekly television show from Miami, Florida. Updated sketches of *The Honeymooners* were part of his show. Since both Meadows and Randolph did not want to relocate to Florida, the roles of Alice and Trixie were played by Shelia MacCrae and Jane Keane respectively. One memorable 1967 segment featured the return of Pert Kelton, but this time she played Alice's mother, Mrs. Gibson.

The Honeymooners Valentine Special with three of the four original cast members aired on February 13, 1978. This was the third of four Honeymooners specials for ABC.

Gleason and Carney reunited one last time for a made for television film titled *Izzy and Moe*. It is a fictional account of two actual Prohibition-era policemen, Izzy Einstein and Moe Smith, and their adventures in tracking down illegal bars and gangsters. It aired on CBS, September 23, 1985.

REFERENCES

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