

## Colgate Comedy Hour Notes

Aired from September 10, 1950 to December 25, 1955. There were 223 "LIVE" programs in this series.

The program came from NBC's first television variety showcase, *Four Star Revue* which was sponsored by Motorola. For the new Colgate show, the running gag sketches were eliminated in favor of performing acts. The weekly show was to be hosted by four comedians in a four-week rotation as competition for Ed Sullivan's *Toast Of The Town* on CBS. The new format was backed by its sponsor, Colgate-Palmolive in the first year. The 8:00PM Sunday evening show was a great success, especially for Eddie Cantor, Martin & Lewis, Jimmy Durante, Spike Jones and Abbott & Costello. Eddie Cantor hosted the first *Colgate Comedy Hour* on September 10, 1950.

Three production units were set up. One was in New York City, one in Chicago and one in Los Angeles. Jimmy Durante, Martin & Lewis and Abbott & Costello performed on the West Coast, broadcasting from the El Capitan Theater on Vine Street in Hollywood (today known as Avalon Hollywood. *The Hollywood Palace* also originated here include from this location. Eddie Cantor's programs aired from New York City at the NBC International Theatre on Columbus Circle. Spike Jones hosted his programs from Chicago at the Studebaker Theater. NBC used this theatre as a television studio from 1950 until 1955.

"Cocktails for Two" is a song from the Big Band era, written by Arthur Johnston and Sam Coslow. The song debuted in the movie *Murder at the Vanities* (1934), where it was introduced by the Danish singer and actor Carl Brisson. Duke Ellington's version of the song was recorded in 1934 and was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2007.

During the 1952–1953 season, Eddie Cantor suffered a heart attack immediately after a Colgate Comedy Hour broadcast on September 28, 1952. He recovered quickly and returned in January of 1953. However, he felt he could not continue with the show. His final *Colgate Comedy Hour* appearance was in May of 1954.

In June of 1955, the show changed its name to the *Colgate Variety Hour* as they moved away from straight comedy. Some of the earlier hosts had left by the end of the 1953–1954 season with the exception of Martin & Lewis. The show was now doing mini-musicals starring hosts including Ethel Merman and Frank Sinatra, who performed together in an abbreviated version of Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*.

One of the writers on this show who would go on to have a very successful career in television was Norman Lear. William Asher, who would become a well known television director on programs such as *I Love Lucy* and *Bewitched*, directed two episodes of this show in 1954. Bud Yorkin, director of *All in The Family* and *Sanford and Son*, directed nine episodes of this show from 1952 to 1954.

The episode broadcast on November 22, 1953, hosted by Donald O'Connor, made history as the first color television broadcast in the NTSC color system. In the 1954–1955 season, Donald O'Connor left the show and starred in his own musical situation comedy, *The Donald O'Connor Show*, which aired Saturday on NBC alternating with *The Jimmy Durante Show*. Unfortunately, ratings were not good as *The Ed Sullivan Show* got stronger. The final *Colgate Variety Hour*, emceed by the series' last continuing host Robert Paige, aired as a Christmas special on December 25, 1955.

## Some Guest Stars On The Colgate Comedy Hour

**Gale Robbins** - signed a contract with 20th Century Fox late in 1942. She made her film debut in *In The Meantime, Darling* in 1944. She appeared in several films, such as *Calamity Jane* and *My Dear Secretary* and briefly sang parts of two songs in *The Barkleys of Broadway*, playing Shirlene May, the potential understudy to Ginger Rogers' character. Robbins sang another song, "All Alone Monday," in another Fred Astaire vehicle, *Three Little Words* in 1950. In September 1957, Robbins signed with Vik Records and made her first recordings for that label. Robbins entertained at many military bases with a troupe led by Bob Hope. She later focused on television, including being a regular on *Pantomime Quiz* on KTTV in Los Angeles, California in 1949. She was hostess of Hollywood House from 1949 to 1950. She made three guest appearances on *The Bob Cummings Show*. Gale also appeared on *The Untouchables*, *Gunsmoke*, *Perry Mason*, *77 Sunset Strip* and *Mister Ed*. Robbins has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in the category of motion pictures. Her star is located at 6510 Hollywood Boulevard.

**Kitty Kallen** - At the age of 21, she joined the Jimmy Dorsey band, replacing Helen O'Connell. Most of her songs were in duets with Bob Eberly. When Eberly left to go into the service toward the end of 1943, she joined Harry James's band.

With the 1954 hit "Little Things Mean a Lot", she was voted the most popular female singer in Billboard and Variety polls. She followed up the song with "In the Chapel in the Moonlight", another million selling record. On February 8, 1960, Kallen received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame located at 7021 Hollywood Boulevard.

**Evelyn Knight** - During a seven-year span in the late 1940s and 1950, Knight had two No. 1 hit records and 13 that made the Top 40. She had other hits including "Buttons and Bows" in 1948. Knight was among the original 1,500 stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Her star, dedicated February 8, 1960, is at 6136 Hollywood Boulevard, in the "Recording" section. She abruptly retired from show business in her 30s, never to return to the spotlight. She and her family moved to Phoenix, Arizona in 1969 where she lived until 2007.

**Hal LeRoy** - was born John LeRoy Schotte in Cincinnati, Ohio. His dancing teacher, Ned Wayburn, got him his first job, in Hoboken Hoboes in 1928. He quickly worked his way into Broadway roles, where his dance style created a sensation in the 1931 Ziegfeld Follies. He also began doing a series of musical film shorts for Vitaphone and Warner Brothers Pictures. LeRoy was cast in the Pilot film for the BLONDIE television series produced by Hal Roach, Jr. While his appearance was similar to Arthur Lake, who starred in the long running Columbia movie series, LeRoy's characterization was uneven and awkward. The series was revised three years later and recast, recalling Lake to reprise his original role as Dagwood Bumsted. He appeared on television and summer stock, including Guy Lombardo's production of "Show Boat" in 1956 at Marine Stadium, Jones Beach, New York. In 1966 he directed the off-Broadway show *Summer's Here*. In 2021, Le Roy was inducted posthumously into the International Tap Dance Hall of Fame.

**Ray Malone** - was a tap dancer and choreographer who appeared in films and television programs. He was a regular on Broadway Open House and had major roles in the films *Slightly Terrific* and *Moonlight in Vermont*. He was also a guest on various shows including a handful of appearances on *Dagmar's Canteen* as well as on the *Garry Moore Show*. He performed in the *Colgate Comedy Hour* in a variety of roles. Jerry Lewis introduced Malone in a performance on the show with Eve Young, who sang "Hello, Young Lovers", followed by Malone in a dance and tap performance.

**Gene Sheldon** - His film debut was in the 1934 movie *Susie's Affairs*, as Slug the Banjoist. The next year, he had a small part in the early Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers musical *Roberta* as a banjo player in the film's band. In the musical number "Let's Begin", he had a short comedy scene tuning the banjo and he danced in a comedy dance number with Fred Astaire and Candy Candido.

Sheldon appeared in the Broadway revue *Priorities* of 1942, performing a comedy banjo act in which he did not speak, wearing an outfit resembling the costume of silent film comedian Harry Langdon and mimicking some of Langdon's distinctive gestures.

Some of his speaking roles were banjoist Sam Jordan in the 1951 musical *Golden Girl*, notorious alcoholic Puffo the Clown in Paramount's 1954 film *3 Ring Circus* and in Disney's 1960 film *Toby Tyler*. Sheldon's best remembered role was as Bernardo, Don Diego's mute man servant on *Zorro*.

**Paul Remos** and his "Boys" performed together in a revue called Wonderful World. The "little people" in the act were just over three feet tall and were not children. There was no love lost between Remos and the boys. Even though it was always Remos versus the boys privately, their on stage performances were very memorable and impressive.

### **A Few Extra Notes**

**Jack Benny's** cameo was an exchange with Martin and Lewis for appearing on his show on May 23, 1954.

Fans note that **Jimmy Durante** started using the "Mrs. Calabash" line about the time his first wife died in 1943. Other sources claim the real Mrs. Calabash was a woman in Meriden, Connecticut. Durante himself never offered a clue until 1966.

At a National Press Club meeting in 1966 (broadcast on NBC's Monitor program), Durante finally revealed that it was indeed a tribute to his wife, Jean "Jeanne" Olson. While driving across the country, they stopped in a town called Calabash, a name she had loved. "Mrs. Calabash" became his pet name for her and he signed off his radio program with "Good night, Mrs. Calabash." He added "wherever you are" after his wife's passing. The only known Calabash town in the United States is in North Carolina.

**Sammy Davis, Jr.** played trumpet, drums, guitar, vibraphone, stand up bass violin, saxophone and piano. In 1929 at the age of four, Davis Jr. joined the Will Mastin Trio. This was the beginning of his wonderful 60 year career in show business.

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