



Television first came to Canada in the fall of 1948. The newly opened Horseshoe Tavern, a country-and-western bar in downtown Toronto, installed a TV set as a means of attracting customers. CBS had begun regular broadcasting in the United States earlier that year; the CBC was still four years away from going on-air. The broadcast was of the World Series between the Cleveland Indians and the old Boston Braves from a

feed out of Buffalo, N.Y., WBEN-TV. The image that we have, then, of this momentous occasion in Canadian broadcasting history is of a group of men sitting around drinking beer in a bar watching the ball game on TV. It would seem that not much has changed in 50 years.

But, of course, virtually *everything* has changed. Geoff Pevere points out in his introductory piece to this special issue of *Take One* devoted to 50 years of television in Canada: "It all boils down to TV." Television changes everything. As Canadian media guru Marshall McLuhan so famously said "the medium is the message," and the medium knows no boundaries—it is stateless, it is global and it is all pervasive.

Television brought us man's first landing on the moon and was in a large part responsible for the end of the war in Vietnam as images of wounded and dying American soldiers became regular fare on the TV evening news in homes of millions. Television was there when Kennedy was shot; when the Chicago police beat up on the Yippies and the whole world was watching; when the Challenger blew apart; when the Soviet Empire collapsed like dominoes and the Berlin Wall came crashing down; when Nelson Mandela walked free from prison and brought an end to apartheid; and television allowed for and encouraged the world to wallow in collective grief over the death of Princess Diana. From Cuba to China to Iraq, television is arguably the most powerful instrument of change, feared by repressive regimes around the globe.

However, to paraphrase Al Jolson, "You ain't seen nothing yet!" Still in its infancy, television is set to explode in usage and influence in the new millennium as an integral component of a wider telecommunications industry, the largest growth industry in the later part of the 20th century.

Television now ranges from spy satellites that can read a book on earth from many miles in space to the smallest of wrist TVs. The commingling of television and computer technology has already begun. The so-called 500-channel universe, a concept that would have seemed ridiculous 20 years ago, will be a reality in the coming generation.

In Canada, we have been wired from the beginning. The CBC/SRC connected the longest microwave television network in the world in 1957, and in 1972 Canada launched Anik-1, the first satellite dedicated to the domestic broadcast of television. The early experimentation with cable as a superior means of delivering the television signal in the early 1950s (as opposed to the antennas needed for the microwave system) positioned Canada to take the lead in developing cable industry. Yet, despite Canada's advantages in broadcast technology, living next door to the most prolific producer of television products in the known universe means that we mostly watch American shows, or as Martin Short once said on *Late Night with David Letterman*, "Americans watch TV. Canadians watch American TV." In my former in-laws' family, *not* watching the CBC (that "shameful waste of the taxpayers money") was a badge of honour. However, the poverty of memorable shows from the early days (Wayne and Shuster and *This Hour Has Seven Days* stand out like beacons in a barren land) has been replaced by a tremendous growth in quantity and quality of Canadian television over the past 20 years, and Canada is now a major provider of TV product in McLuhan's global village.

To conclude on a quirk of our "distinctly Canadian" nature, it became very apparent to me while doing the research for this issue that there is a singular lack of sex in Canadian television. While Quebec might, on occasion, steam up the small screen with the likes of *Les Filles de Caleb*, sex or anything even remotely sensual is nowhere to be found in the history of English-Canadian television. God Almighty, we're an uptight people. — **WYNDHAM WISE**

