

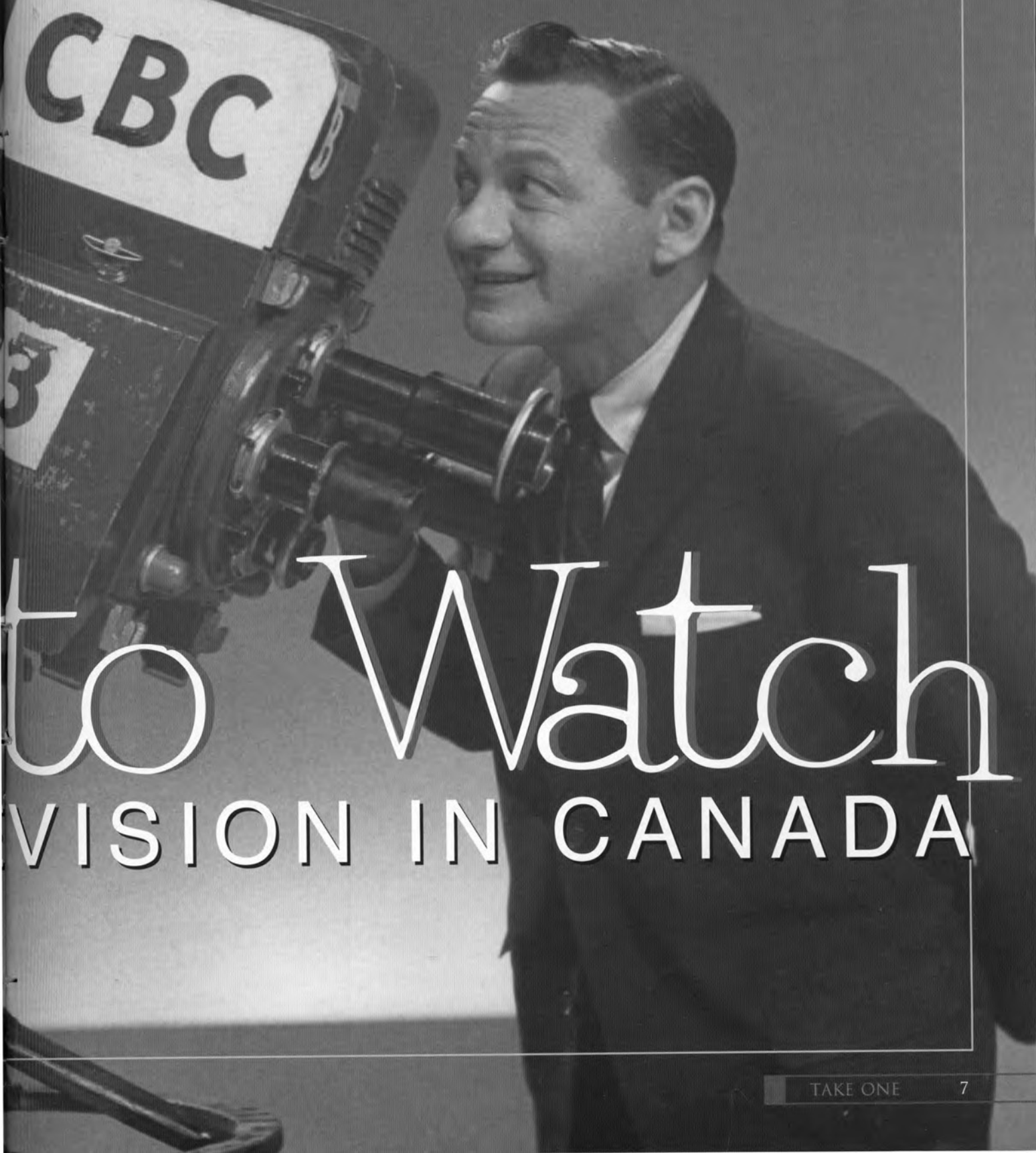
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We Like

50 YEARS OF TELE

by Geoff Pevere



to Watch

VISION IN CANADA

Needless to say, it all boils down to TV.

And I mean all: a finger-snap of a half-century after its first widespread incursion into North American living rooms, television rules just about every aspect of our lives. Indeed, to have been born before it arrived is to have passed from one experiential paradigm into a radically different one, like living in the pre- and post-Copernican universe. (Indeed, is it possible this had as much to do with the intergenerational warfare of the 1960s as anything else—kids who grew up with TV versus parents who didn't?) It shapes our leisure time and structures familial relations, it sells us goods and makes us laugh, it gives us a semblance of shared experience in an increasingly isolating environment, something to talk about with strangers from here to hell's half-acre. It defines our generational allegiances, and distinguishes those from the generational experiences of others: were you a *Captain Kangaroo* or a *Sesame Street* kid? A Carson or Leno person? Original *Star Trek* or *Next Generation*? Growing up in a family that moved a lot, TV was nothing short of succor, a well of familiarity in a unfamiliar world: no matter where we went, no matter how unfamiliar the kids or alienating the schools, there were always the same shows to watch on TV.

No matter where you travel it's there, promised on wind-chafed roadside motel marquees, a flickering altar of constancy even in the strangest of places. I mean, am I the only one who makes the on-off testing of the TV one of the first rituals of checking into a hotel room, as if doing so offers some kind of reassurance that all is well in this otherwise alienating environment? Try talking provincial politics with the gas-station attendant in Austin, TX, and just see how far it gets you. Then let him know you always really preferred *Larry Sanders* to *Seinfeld*. Now you're talking.

Among the things Marshall McLuhan—one of many Canadians who turned watching television into a way of talking about the world—said about TV was that it creates its own environment: we don't so much watch TV as enter or inhabit it, which means that, if we enter or inhabit it often enough, or if that environment is allowed to shape the environment at large, it will eventually become impossible to see it anymore. Which is where we're at with TV. Though no one would dispute the earlier claim that "TV rules just about every aspect of our lives," few of us have the luxury of time to sit back and think about what that really means—particularly when that time could be spent watching TV. But if you do think about it, the dimensions of the televisual domination of the world are truly, and literally, mind-boggling. Consider the following: the Academy Awards, an annual self-promotion ceremony for Hollywood movies, is watched by more than a billion people around the world. Our electoral processes, those systems by which we determine the quality of the society in which we live, have been completely transformed by TV, and politics is no longer the calling of any but those who can make it work in front of a camera. History itself has become hopelessly



TVTIMELINE

Early Beginnings

1901

*Guglielmo Marconi successfully transmits a message via radio signals across the Atlantic from Cornwall, U.K., to St. John's, Nfld. The truism that television is radio with pictures is rooted in the technology. When Marconi discovered how to convert radio waves into electrical signals, his ability to transmit sound over distance led the way to carrying pictures in a similar manner.

1907

**Scientific American* uses the word television for the first time to describe the transmission of pictures.

1926

*Scottish engineering genius John L. Baird gives the first public demonstration of a television system in the United Kingdom. Baird would also develop video recording on magnetic steel disks, colour TV, 3-D TV and transatlantic television.

*The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) is founded by 13 private radio broadcasters. It is one of Canada's longest running trade organizations and the leading lobby voice for the private broadcasting industry.

1929

*The Bell Telephone labs in the United States demonstrate colour television transmission.

*Sir John Aird, chairman of the Bank of Commerce, delivers his report to Parliament calling for public ownership of Canadian broadcasting. Graham Spry, founder of the Canadian Radio League (an organization that played a major role in the establishment of public broadcasting) issues his famous dictum, "the state or the States."



1959

Don Messer's Jubilee, one of the most beloved shows ever produced on the CBC.

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warped and condensed, like the famous *New Yorker* cover about the world viewed from downtown Manhattan where everything fades into nothingness beyond New Jersey, because of TV. These days, if it didn't happen in front of TV or motion picture cameras, most likely it didn't happen. (If a tree falls in the forest and no one catches it on video, does anybody care?) TV is the ultimate medium for the incalculably busy business of persuasion, which means it dominates everything from selling tampons to policy. The rise of corporate culture and globalization would be unthinkable without the tube. We're told that it has influenced the way we receive and process information, which is only another way of saying—as McLuhan once did—that it has altered the neurological processes of human thought itself. Apparently, it even brought Communism down, which makes perfect sense if you understand that capitalism has never had a better power tool than TV, the medium that makes a world driven by profit and consumption seem somehow inevitable and normal. If only Marx had picked another, earlier century to come along, his ideas might have had a little more staying power. For the 20th, thanks in no small part to television, belonged to profit.

Yet, while its influence is pervasive to the point of invisibility, it is not monolithic. If it moves across the planet, remaking it in its own image and interests, it does so less like the giant mothership in *Independence Day* than a virus that mutates and adapts to every new environment it's introduced to. In other words, while it changes those places it goes, it is also changed. This is why the act of watching TV, even if you're watching the Academy Awards with a billion other earthlings, is different depending on where it's watched. In the same way that TV rituals vary from home to home on the same street, they vary on an even grander scale from country to country. Many factors determine this. Some countries have strict forms of legislation governing the amount of foreign TV allowed to enter the market, others have well-established domestic industries of their own. Some countries have public-broadcasting systems which offer alternatives to the "global" product, others censor what is and is not permissible viewing for citizens. Some places see people going nuts for televised baseball, in others it's soccer. You might call it an electrochemical dynamic: the meaning of the experience of watching television will change according to the context in which it's watched.

Maybe that's why Martin Short, giving characteristically good talk-show on Letterman a few years back, explained the difference between Americans and Canadians to the late-night host thusly: Americans, he said, watch TV, while Canadians watch American TV. Therein may lie the key to understanding both the role and the influence of watching TV in Canada. The difference isn't in what we watch, it's the way we watch, and the way we watch is, well, different from the way others do.

Some examples, possible evidence in the argument that to watch TV in Canada is to participate in a rather perverse rite of cultural self-affirmation, follow:

Marshall McLuhan. While he needs further rehabilitation of his long-discredited media theories like I need more caffeine, we still can't ignore the fact that, with each day, he just seems righter than ever. (Or, as Lewis Lapham wrote recently on the occasion of the re-publication of McLuhan's most influential work: "*Understanding Media* describes the world I see and know.") More to the point, his understanding of television as an extension of the human nervous system is not only piercingly insightful, it begs the entire issue of the alleged passivity of watching TV. For McLuhan, one of the first intellectuals to use TV as a way of promoting his ideas about it, watching TV was an active process, a stimulus to thought depending on the exchange between the viewer and the viewed. With the likes of McLuhan and Harold Innis blazing the trail, Canada has produced a disproportionately solid tradition of media theorists, a tradition that supports the impression that, when Canadians watch, they watch critically.





TVTIMELINE

Early Beginnings

1932

*The Parliament of Canada passes the first Broadcasting Act, creating the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) with the power to engage in broadcasting and also regulate all broadcasting in Canada.

*J. Alphonse Ouimet of Montreal, one of a few Canadian television pioneers, builds a prototype television receiver.

1934

*Ouimet joins the CRBC as an engineer and moves up the ranks to president of the corporation in 1953.

1936

*The CRBC becomes the Canadian Broadcasting Corp./Société Radio-Canada (CBC/SRC).

*The BBC begins regular television programming in the United Kingdom.

1932

management, research, design

design

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1992

Left to right:
Bruce McCulloch, Kevin McDonald,
Mark McKinney, Scott Thompson and Dave Foley,
stars of *The Kids in the Hall*.

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Videodrome. A delirious melding of McLuhan, splatter and conspiratorial paranoia, David Cronenberg's 1983 movie has, like Marshall himself, only come into sharper focus with time. An often icky literalization of the implication of McLuhan's suggestion that the electronic media is an extension of our nervous systems—in this movie, the only thing separating flesh from fantasy is latex—*Videodrome* is, for a Hollywood studio release, an unabashedly nationalistic wake-up call to the apocalyptic evils of corporate penetration through electronic media. It sees TV as dangerous, relentless and inescapable, the ultimate vehicle for the gradual corporate takeover of our very souls, and it was more than likely the stimulus for the video-fixated spectacle of Atom Egoyan's first films. Long live the new flesh indeed.

Hockey Night in Canada. The most popular, totemic and enduring of Canadian televisual institutions, it's also possibly the closest thing the country has to a unifying bonding ritual next to hating Toronto or panel discussions on national identity. If you can't hum its rousing theme song, even if you couldn't give a beaver's butt about hockey, you're probably some kind of spy. *HNIC's* sheer status as national icon raises the question of whether it's our national sport because we play it so much or because we watch it so much. Moreover, its status as TV ritual makes one wonder if its transformation from the Canadian national sport to an international spectacle was therefore somehow inevitable, considering that globalization has proven to be of the medium's primary talents. Who needs cold wars when you've got beer commercials?

Wayne and Shuster. All Canadian comedic roads lead back to this duo, who pioneered the comedy of pop-culture sketch parody back before it occurred to anyone to call it so, and who appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* a record-breaking 67 times. Blending media parody with cornball classics satire ("Shakespearean Baseball" being typical), this Toronto comedy team planted the roots from which just about every high-profile Canadian comic—from Rich Little and Don Harron to Jim Carrey and Mike Myers—would eventually spring. Taking TV as one of the subjects of their comedy, Wayne and Shuster are another example of the Canadian tendency to watch TV critically, and to use the medium as a way of engaging with the world it creates. Sure, they were soft and more than a little goofy, but they were instrumental in making possible what is easily the most enduring and influential of Canadian comedy strains: pop culture that is about pop culture, that is just another way of saying that, if postmodernism hadn't come along anyway, someone would have had to invent it to describe Canadians. If you buy this theory that Wayne and Shuster are the well-spring of Canadian comedy, then you must be prepared to accept the proposal that none of the following would likely have existed without their pioneering form of one-step-removed pop-cult silliness: *Saturday Night Live*, *SCTV*, *The Royal Canadian Air Farce*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, Jim Carrey, Leslie Nielson. Okay, scratch Leslie Nielson, and it's still a pretty impressive list.

The CBC. If the distinctive nature of Canadian televiewing resides in the contradictions of the experience—foreign vs. homegrown, private vs. public, entertainment vs. information, French vs. English—then the CBC is the irregularly beating heart of that turmoil. A public network with a historical dependence on commercial revenue, the mere existence of the CBC may have done more to define and nurture the schizophrenic nature of Canadian couch potato-dom than we realize. For not only did the presence of the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. establish a public/private broadcasting dichotomy in the country that has structured the political and economic agenda for industry discussion for decades, the CBC itself has been nothing if not split: a proud standard-bearer for information and current-affairs programming that has also fed the national addiction to imported schlock; a key platform for the development of regional talent with an uncanny knack for killing its own; a constant and simultaneous reminder of the very best and very worst tendencies in domestic drama; a home to both our sharpest comedy and our most hair-raising sitcoms; a living laboratory in dubious management practice and yet a key element in our cultural independence. The CBC has bred in Canadians a state of split response directly proportionate to its own cracked nature—can't live with it, can't live without it, and



TVTIMELINE

Television Comes to Canada

1948

*The first television broadcast in Canada, a World Series game viewed by patrons of the Horseshoe Tavern in downtown Toronto from a feed provided by WBEN-TV out of Buffalo, N.Y.

1949

*The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the Massey Commission, named after its chairman, Vincent Massey) is appointed by Parliament.

1951

*The Massey Commission submits its report, calling for, among other things, the establishment of a television system based on the concept of public monopoly with a private component.

1952

*The public is able to see Canadian television for the first time in Montreal in early March when, for an entire week, television programs are transmitted from a TV studio in the Radio-Canada building to an exhibition of radio and TV receivers being held in the Merchandise Mart.

*Canadian Television goes on air in Montreal (CBFT) September 6 and two days later in Toronto (CBLT). Each station offers about 18 hours of programming a week. There are 146,000 households with television sets in Canada.

**The Big Revue*, the English network's flagship variety program, premieres in September. The first variety series is produced under the supervision of Mavor Moore and directed by Norman Jewison. *Sunshine Sketches*, based on Stephen Leacock's popular *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, is the first dramatic production.

Inset: *Sunshine Sketches*



1957

Front Page Challenge

Left to right: Gordon Sinclair, Fred Davis and Betty Kennedy (with Pierre Berton standing), the most popular and longest running panel show ever broadcast in North America.

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God knows it gives us all something to complain about. Still, no CBC and the televisual experience in this country would have been profoundly different. Imagine postwar Canada without *Hockey Night in Canada*, *Don Messer's Jubilee*, Wayne and Shuster, SCTV, *The Kids in the Hall*, *This Hour Has Seven Days*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *The Journal*, *Front Page Challenge*, *CODCO*, *Mr. Dressup*, *The Friendly Giant*, *Newsroom*, the fifth estate. At its best, in other words, it's essential. The problem is, same goes for its worst.

The Cable Guy. At the time of its box-office failure, industry wisdom suggested this 1996 movie, for which Canadian-born comic Jim Carrey was famously paid over 20 million dollars, flopped because it was too dark, but the truth may be more troubling. Maybe it failed because it's too Canadian. The story of a TV-fixated phony cable installer (Carrey) who makes his life's mission the sociopathic harassment of a bland yuppie played by Matthew Broderick, the movie can be read not just as a fascinating metaphor for the career of the star himself—like the guy he plays, the Canadian-born comic had a troubled childhood in which TV acted as therapist, friend, babysitter and general alternative to real life—but for Canada's incursion of American culture through TV comedy, kind of like *Videodrome* in reverse. His identity completely circumscribed by the TV shows he watched as a kid, the cable guy—who calls himself "Chip Douglas" after a character on *My Three Sons*—is like a walking casualty of televisual overload, an electroshock victim who's been shot through with TV signals instead of energy currents. Whether impersonating TV characters, singing theme songs or otherwise wielding pop culture like some kind of comedic chainsaw, the cable guy is contemporary Canadian comedy personified: first we sit at home and have our identity scrambled by too much TV from somewhere else, then we infiltrate the global entertainment business to take our revenge. No wonder it bombed: America simply wasn't ready to come to terms with Apocalypse Canuck. Which is of course why the military-industrial complex came up with that Iraq distraction.

Like the cable guy, Canada has had its identity both constructed and constricted by TV. On the one hand, it's the medium that is seen as the primary agent of our alleged lack of identity, the electronic vampire that punctures our souls and sucks out any sense of national distinction. Yet, on the other, it has been the vehicle of some of our most conspicuous global triumphs, from the massive exports in Canadian-made kids' shows and nature series, to the weirdly persistent tradition in exporting prominent newsreaders and game-show hosts. TV is the medium through which broadcasting mogul Moses Znaimer has taken the glib gospel of shakycam around the world, and it is the medium that gave Marshall McLuhan, our most famous intellectual export, something to talk about in the first place. Same goes for the rest of us, if in somewhat more prosaic terms: it gives us something to talk about all right, but more specifically it is the medium through which we talk most effectively about ourselves. It has become the locus of whatever sense of shared communal experience we may have, from the groove-tube Centennial celebrations and the rise of Trudeau, to the October Crisis and the '72 hockey series against the Soviets, to the coverage of everything from cliffhanger referenda to townhall debates on national unity. We phone-in obsessively to those inescapable talk shows, and we nearly rise in revolt when corporations dare dick with our cable bills. We take our TV seriously, and no wonder: it's who we are, what we know and, it would seem, one of the things we do best. That's right: we're good watchers.

It becomes us. ●



1952 continued

* *Hockey Night in Canada* / *La Soirée du hockey* goes on-air. The first game is broadcast October 11 on the French network (Montreal vs. Detroit), and November 1 is the first English broadcast (Toronto vs. Boston). A national tradition, *Hockey Night in Canada* is easily the longest running and the most popular show in the history of Canadian television.

1953

* The CBC/SRC is the first broadcasting system in North America to show complete coverage of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, four hours after the end of the ceremony in London.

* Roger Lemelin's *La Famille Plouffe*, a hit from radio, goes on-air in Montreal and immediately becomes the most popular show on the French network. At its peak, the Quebec's first téléroman would attract a weekly audience of four million. *Tabloïd*, with Percy Saltzman, goes on-air in Toronto, an early public-affairs program with interviews and weather forecasts.



1952



Hockey Night in Canada

*General Motors Theatre, also out of Toronto and produced by Sydney Newman, presents original Canadian drama, including Ted Allan's *Lies My Father Told Me* (which would later be adapted into a feature film) and Lister Sinclair's *The Blood is Strong*.
*CKSO Sudbury is the first private station to go on-air.

1954

*Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster, long-time favourites on CBC radio, appear on television for the first time. The duo also appeared regularly on the long-running *The Ed Sullivan Show* (appearing a record 67 times) and at the height of their fame top a North American critics poll as the best TV comic act. Their last appearance on the CBC is in October 1988.
*The British Empire Games are broadcast from Vancouver with live coverage of Roger Bannister's historic four-minute mile.

La Famille Plouffe



We Like to Watch

1955

*The first live broadcast of an opening of Parliament in Ottawa.
*The Royal Commission on Broadcasting is appointed with Robert Fowler as chair.

1956

*Allan King's ground-breaking piece of direct cinema filmmaking, *Skid Row*, and Roman Kroitor's *Paul Tomkowicz: Street-railway Switchman* are broadcast as part of the *Explorations* series.
**Anne of Green Gables*, a musical version written by Don Harron and Norman Campbell, is broadcast.

1957

*On July 1, a special program is televised to mark the opening of coast-to-coast microwave service. With links from Victoria to Sydney, Canada now has the longest television network in the world.
*In October, CBC/SRC television and radio covers Queen Elizabeth's address to the nation from Ottawa and the first opening of a Canadian Parliament by a reigning monarch.
**Front Page Challenge*, created by writer John Aylesworth and developed by producer Harvey Hart, goes on-air as a summer replacement and continues as the most popular and longest running panel show ever broadcast in North America, with Fred Davis as moderator.

Don Harron's and Norman Campbell's musical version of *Anne of Green Gables*



1956



Tabloid, with weatherman Percy Saltzman

1958

*The Fowler Report results in the Broadcasting Act, which establishes a Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG) to regulate all Canadian broadcasting and sets the stage for the licensing of private broadcasters. The BBG announces that all television broadcasters must show a minimum of 45 per cent Canadian content, but under pressure from private broadcasters and advertisers, the board softens its standards, defining Canadian content to include, for example, the World Series.

50 YEARS OF TELEVISION IN CANADA

TAKE ONE

SEVEN DAYS



This Hour Has Seven Days: Hosts Laurier LaPierre and Patrick Watson

Reach For the Top's Alex Trebek

1958 continued

**Candid Eye* is a series of 13 direct-cinema documentaries shown over two seasons. It is a rare example of films made directly for television by the NFB. Tom Daly is executive producer and films include Terence Macartney-Filgate's *The Back-breaking Leaf* and Wolf Koenig's and Roman Kroitor's *Glenn Gould: On (and) Off the Record*.

1959

*In co-production with the BBC, Crawley Films of Ottawa launches *The RCMP* series in both French and English.
**Don Messer's Jubilee* goes on-air from Halifax and becomes, over its 10-year lifespan, one of the most beloved programs the CBC has ever produced.
*The microwave network is extended to Newfoundland.

1960

*The BBG licenses private broadcasters to compete with the CBC/SRC: Télé-Métropole and CFCF in Montreal; CFTO in Toronto; and BCTV in Vancouver.
**The Nature of Things* premieres. The show, the flagship of the CBC's science unit, becomes one of the network's most successful productions in terms of its longevity, audience appeal and international sales.

1961

*The CTV Network goes on-air in October. Canada's largest private television network is an unmanageable cooperative of uneven partners. Each owner, no matter how many stations he or she owns, has only one vote on the executive board and a veto, making for a very unhappy partnership. After decades of corporate machinations, Toronto-based Baton Broadcasting System takes ownership and total control in 1997.

1962

*Brian Moore's *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* is shown on *Festival*. In 1964, the play would be made into a feature starring Robert Shaw.
*Crawley Films produces *The Tales of the Wizard of Oz*, the first animated series for North American television.

1964

**This Hour Has Seven Days* premieres. Produced by Douglas Leiterman and Patrick Watson, the one-hour weekly show becomes the most controversial and influential show ever run on the public network. Its original mixture of satirical music, investigative film reports and confrontational and aggressive interviews makes it hugely popular. At its peak in March 1966, *This Hour* is the second-highest Canadian program, next to *Hockey Night in Canada*.



Tommy Hunter

**This Hour Has Seven Days* shows Beryl Fox's *Summer in Mississippi* (produced by Douglas Leiterman and shot by brother Richard), an early direct-cinema documentary about the killing of three civil rights workers during the Southern voter drive.
*The establishment of the Committee on Broadcasting, chaired by Robert Fowler.

1965

**The Mills of the Gods: Viet Nam* is shown on the CBC at \$100,000 per episode, premieres. The show, developed by Abraham Polonsky, the American blacklisted writer/director (*Force of Evil, Body and Soul*), copied the popular *Route 66* model. Polonsky also wrote several of the episodes.
*The Committee on Broadcasting recommends a new authority to replace the BBG. By now over 90 per cent of Canadian households have television sets.
**Seaway*, the most costly Canadian drama to date on the CBC at \$100,000 per episode, premieres. The show, developed by Abraham Polonsky, the American blacklisted writer/director (*Force of Evil, Body and Soul*), copied the popular *Route 66* model. Polonsky also wrote several of the episodes.

1966

*The CBC brass cancels *This Hour Has Seven Days*. Patrick Watson is taken off-air and his co-host, Laurier LaPierre, is fired for crying over a story about the Stephen Truscott trial. The forerunner to *W5* and *60 Minutes* comes to an abrupt and controversial end.
*CTV launches *W5*. It is now the longest-running public-affairs program in North America.
**Reach For the Top* (known as *Genie en herbes* in Quebec) starts as a local show from Vancouver, then is picked up in Toronto. It goes on the English national network with Alex Trebek as host in 1966.

**Wojeck* with John Vernon as a crusading coroner runs on CBC for two seasons. Shot on the streets of Toronto using direct-cinema techniques, the series sets new standards for realistic drama.

*Radio-Canada consolidates its dramatic and musical spectaculars in one anthology, *Les Beaux dimanches*, the longest-running show of its kind on either network.

*September 1, the first regular colour TV programming.

1968

*The new Broadcasting Act creates the Canadian Radio-television Commission (CRTC), with Pierre Juneau as its first chairman. It would become the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. With all the authority of the judiciary, the CRTC exercises almost total control (although its decisions can be appealed to the Cabinet) over broadcasting regulations in Canada. Every broadcaster must renew their licence on a schedule determined by the Commission and, in addition, the CRTC has the authority to impose Canadian content regulations on the nation's airwaves.

1969

**Don Messer's Jubilee* is cancelled, provoking a strong and vocal outrage from loyal viewers across the country; however, despite an avalanche of mail in support of the show, the CBC doesn't relent.

1970

**Sesame Street* comes to the Canada. The CBC has carried this top-rated children's program from the beginning and in 1973 begins to insert its own segments (exchanging Spanish for French) and would eventually provide puppets and animation.

*The federally created Telesat Corp. awards a contract to construct the world's first satellite to be used for domestic communications.

*TVOntario, using the first UHF television channel for broadcasting in Canada, goes on-air.

1971

*The Nelvana Animation Studios open in Toronto. Founded by Michael Hirsh, Clive Smith and Patrick Loubert, it will grow to become one of Canada's most successful film and television animation companies.

*The Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists initiates the ACTRA Awards for the best in Canadian television.

1972

*Highlight of the year is "The Big Broadcast of 1972," the first Canada-Russia hockey series which draws a total audience of more than half the population of the country when Paul Henderson wins the last game and the series with a dramatic last-second goal.

**Anik-1*, taking its name from the Inuktitut word for "brother," is launched in November. Fixed in a position in space, the satellite can "see" and broadcast to the entire land surface of Canada, providing television and radio service from the 39th parallel to the Far North.

**The Beachcombers*, starring Bruno Gerussi and the first series to be shot entirely on the West Coast, premieres. One of the most successful continuing dramas ever produced by the CBC, sold around the world.

The Beachcombers

*Citytv goes on-air in Toronto. Founded by media gadfly Moses Znaimer, who did his television apprenticeship at the CBC, Citytv is a bargain-basement operation designed to kick the stuffing out of conventional TV. With the launch of *CityPulse News* in the mid-1970s, Citytv has influenced news operations across the country (and the world) with its portable video eye, hipper-than-you open-studio concept based on the simple notion that "TV is as much about the people bringing you the story as the story itself."

1974

**Izzy Asper*, Paul Morton and Allan Slaight rescue the near-bankrupt Global Television Network of Toronto. By 1977, CanWest Capital Corp. owns 40 per cent of Global.

**The National Dream*, the most ambitious CBC production to date, is an eight-part series based on Pierre Berton's two-volume best-seller, *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike*. It is a not entirely successful mixture of drama and documentary written by Timothy Findlay, directed by Eric Till, with Berton as the on-air presenter.

1975

**King of Kensington* starring Al Waxman and Fiona Reid, debuts for a five-season run as the English network's most successful conventional situation comedy.

*Bill C-58 is passed by Parliament. It disallows tax deductions for advertisers who advertise on American programs aimed at Canadian audiences.

1976

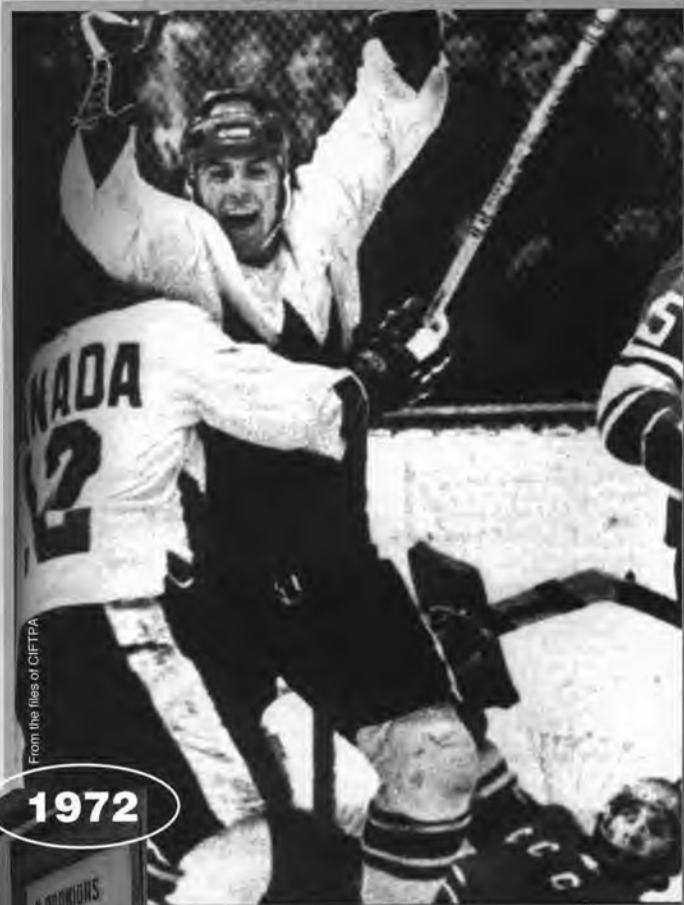
**For the Record* premieres. The most consistently high-quality journalistic dramas ever produced on the national network. Directors are drawn from the private sector and individual shows are intensely controversial. Peter Pearson's *The Tar Sands* (1977), starring Kenneth Welsh, results in a very public feud and lawsuit launched by the premier of Alberta. Other directors over the 10 seasons include Gilles Carle, Claude Jutra, Francis Mankiewicz, Allan King, Robin Spry, Paul Almond, Donald Brittain, Don Shebib and Anne Wheeler.

From the files of Clif IPA



King of Kensington

1975



1972

Henderson scores: "The Big Broadcast of 1972"

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From the files of CJPTPA

1977

SCTV

*SCTV goes on-air locally in Toronto on Global TV then moves to Edmonton for the 1979 season. It is picked up by NBC in 1981 for two seasons as a 90-minute version, a first for an independent Canadian-produced series. Its last season is 1983/84. The funniest parody of television ever made and one of the smartest comedy programs in TV history, with two brilliant minutes of Canadian content, "The Great White North," starring the MacKenzie brothers (Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas).

1978

*Michael MacMillan, Seaton McLean and Janice Platt form Atlantis Films in Toronto.

1979

*The Banff Television Foundation is formed and holds the first Banff Television Festival.

*TVO is the first North American broadcaster to use direct satellite technology, transmitting its signal to northern Ontario via the Anik B satellite.

*The CRTC orders an extra half-hour of Canadian drama a week from CTV. The network fights the CRTC all the way to the Supreme Court, but loses the case in 1982.

1981

*The CRTC calls for applications for the first pay-TV licenses, nine years after the first of many hearings into the matter.

*The Donovan brothers, Michael and Paul, open Salter Street Films in Halifax.

Barbara Frum



*In one of the most important and effective programming decisions in Canadian television, the CBC moves its national news to one hour earlier (to 10 p.m.) and introduces *The Journal*, a high-profile public-affairs program with former radio host Barbara Frum. By doing so, the network revitalizes Canadian TV news and gains five hours of prime-time Canadian programming for the network per week.

*The CRTC licenses six pay-television companies, including two national, First Choice Canadian (FCC) and C Channel, and four regional.

*Frédéric Back's *Craci*, made for Radio-Canada, wins an Oscar for best animated short, the first for the network.

1983

*C Channel goes on-air in February, and in a major embarrassment, goes off the air six months later. Inexperienced management and poor audience figures kill the first lively arts channel.

*FCC causes an immediate uproar by signing a deal with the Playboy Channel. Later in the year, First Choice is bought out by Harold Greenberg's Astral Bellevue Pathé with the backing of Bronfman money. Eventually FCC would become The Movie Network (TMN) and Astral Communications one of the largest fully integrated distribution and broadcasting companies in Canada.

Empire Inc.



**Empire, Inc.*, co-directed by Denys Arcand and Doug Jackson, is broadcast on CBC and Radio-Canada. This large-budget CBC/SRC/NFB coproduction, starring Kenneth Welsh, sets new standards for high-quality Canadian television drama.

*The CBC's *the fifth estate's* documentary special on the murder of a Canadian youth in the United States directed by John Zaritsky, *Just Another Missing Kid*, wins an Oscar for best feature documentary.

**The Wild Pony*, directed, written and produced by Kevin Sullivan, is the first feature film to be produced exclusively for Canadian pay TV.

1984

*Francis Fox, the Liberal federal minister of communications, issues his National Film and Video Policy. The Canadian Film Development Corp. is transformed into Telefilm Canada and a \$35-million Broadcast Fund is initiated.

*Brian Mulroney's newly elected Conservative government announces a \$75-million cut to the CBC/SRC. There are major layoffs in staff and some regional stations are closed. CBC/SRC president Pierre Juneau announces that Canadian programming will move to 75 per cent in prime time.

At left:
Anne of Green Gables



Road to Avonlea

Courtesy of Sullivan Films

*Atlantis Films wins an Oscar for *Boys and Girls*, part of a series of six half-hour dramas based on short stories from Canadian literature broadcast on the CBC. The win marks a turning point in Canadian television. It raises the bar considerably for quality in televised Canadian drama and announces the arrival of a major independent television producer.

*More pay-TV licenses are issued by the CRTC, including Citytv's MuchMusic and The Sports Network (TSN).

1985

*The CBC broadcasts *Anne of Green Gables* over two nights and draws a record audience of five million viewers. Produced and directed by Kevin Sullivan and starring Megan Fellows and Collen Dewhurst, the mini-series points the way to future Canadian television coproductions. Sullivan brought together Germany's ZDF, PBS in the United States, the CBC and Telefilm Canada in producing what is arguably the most popular drama ever shown on the public network.

*Robert Lantos and Stephen Roth of RSL Productions join forces with John Kemeny and Denis Héroux of ICC to form Alliance Entertainment Corp.

*The husband-and-wife team of Micheline Charest and Ron Weinberg form Cinar Films in Montreal.

1986

*The Caplan-Sauvageau task force report on broadcasting policy is released. It recommends a new Broadcasting Act, special status for Quebec broadcasting, a revitalized CBC and guaranteed access to the system for women, minorities and aboriginal people.

*The téléseries *Lance et compte* attracts an average audience of two million on Radio-Canada for the 13 one-hour episodes, its characters becoming public heroes in Quebec.

*The ACTRA Awards transfer to the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television and become known as the Gemini Awards/Prix Gémeaux.

1987

*The CBC broadcasts *The King Chronicles*, a CBC/NFB coproduction based on the William Lyon Mackenzie King diaries, directed by Donald Brittain.

*The CRTC approves new speciality channels, including CBC's Newsworld, The Family Channel and YTV.

1988

*J. Alphonse Quimet dies at 80. The early television pioneer was president of the CBC from 1953 to 1967. He headed a UNESCO conference on satellite technology in broadcasting and was president of Telestat Canada from 1969 to 1980.

*Frédéric Back wins his second Oscar for the Radio-Canada animated short, *L'Homme qui plantait des arbres*.

1989

*Newsworld, the first Canadian all-news station, is launched in July.
 *Patrick Watson, the former producer of *This Hour Has Seven Days*, is appointed chairman of the CBC board of directors.
 *After a lengthy court battle with his original partners, Izzy Asper takes control of the Global Network and announces his desire to build a third national network.
 *CAB initiates its Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, a self-appointed body to oversee a code of ethics, sex-role portrayal and violence, a first in North America.

1990

*Francis Mankiewicz's *Love and Hate: The Story of Colin and Joann Thatcher*, produced for the CBC by Bernie Zuckerman and starring Kenneth Welsh and Kate Nelligan, is the first Canadian drama to be shown on U.S. prime-time television.
 *Johnny Wayne dies at 72. A legend in Canadian comedy, Wayne and Shuster were masters of ironic, character-based comedy and the precursor to the sketch comedy of *Saturday Night Live*, *SCTV* and *The Kids in the Hall*.
 *In January, the CBC debuts Sullivan's *Road to Avonlea* series with an audience of 2.5 million for its first episode, the highest rating for an English-Canadian series launch. The téléseries *Les Filles de Caleb*, based on the novel by Arlette Cousture, sets an all-time record for the SRC with an average audience of 3.2 million.
 *CBC/SRC president Gérard Veilleux implements major cuts to the network to be made over the next three years. More regional stations are closed and all regional programming, except for local newscasts, is cancelled. Over 1,000 jobs are eliminated.

1991

*Bill C-40, the new Broadcasting Act, is proclaimed after being passed in the Senate.
 *Dr. Charles Allard dies at 71. The founder of the Edmonton-based broadcasting company Allarcom, he would eventually buy the western pay-TV broadcaster, Superchannel. A year before he died, Allard sold Allarcom to Vancouver-based WIC for \$160 million.

1992

*CBC replaces *The National* and *The Journal* with *Prime Time News* at 9:00 p.m. in a radical move that would last only two seasons.
 *Popular CBC journalist, and the original host of *The Journal*, Barbara Frum dies.
 *Brian and Terence McKenna's *The Valour and the Horror* airs in January. A coproduction between the CBC, the NFB and Galafilm of Montreal, the series becomes intensely controversial with veteran's groups, leading to an inquiry by the Senate subcommittee on veterans affairs.
 *After 27 years, *The Tommy Hunter Show* is cancelled in a move eerily similar to the CBC's treatment of Don Messer. An established musical program with a largely

Les Filles de Caleb



rural and working-class audience is taken off the air without much explanation, provoking an angry backlash at the public network.

**The Boys of St. Vincent*, a NFB/CBC coproduction directed by John N. Smith, is broadcast. A controversial mini-series based on the true events of the Christian Brothers in Newfoundland, the show is banned in Ontario by the Ontario Court of Appeals. The court judgment claims that the show would prejudice the trial of the Brothers, which is still in process.

**Les Filles de Caleb* is sold to the France 3 network and the 20-hour drama is shown on French prime-time TV.

*The first occupants move into CBC's new state-of-the-art Broadcast Centre in downtown Toronto.

**North of 60* is the first Canadian prime-time series to be shot in Alberta.

1993

*Robert Lantos takes Alliance public and creates Alliance Communications Inc. Alliance has become the largest producer and distributor in both television and film in Canada and a major player in the North American marketplace.

**This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, a successor to the original CODCO (which survived an erratic seven years on the national network from 1986-93) goes on-air. The best satirical show on television since *SCTV*.



Courtesy of Alliance Communications

Due South

1994

*Frank Griffiths, chairman and founder of the Vancouver-based WIC Western International Communications, dies at 71. An accountant by profession, Griffiths formed the Western Broadcasting Co. in 1966 and in 1983 it became WIC. With the purchase of Allarcom in 1990, WIC became the largest publicly traded broadcasting company in Canada.

**Due South* on goes on-air on prime time on the CBS network, a first for a Canadian produced series.

*The CRTC okays a new tier of speciality channels including Bravo!, The Discovery Channel and Showcase, which go on-air January 1, 1995. However, the use of the "negative option" by the cable companies (a billing practice by which the consumer has to cancel the new channels or be charged automatically) creates a customer backlash and public outrage over the practice.

*Patrick Watson steps down as chairman of the CBC.

1995

*CBC/SRC president Perrin Beatty announces further cuts and pledges to move the network to a full 100 per cent Canadian content in prime-time viewing. *Front Page Challenge* is cancelled after 38 years.

*A \$47-million Cable Production Fund is launched, supported by 39 cable companies nationally.

**Due South* is cancelled by CBS after one season but continues on the CTV network and is sold worldwide.

*Radio-Canada launches Le Réseau de l'information (RDI), the first French-language all-news network in North America.

*Coverage of the Quebec referendum is the most watched "special" of the year in English Canada, with an audience of three million. It attracts considerably less interest on the French network.

1996

*William MacGillivray's *Gullages*, the first national CBC series to be made in Newfoundland, premieres. *Emily of New Moon* is the first series to be shot on Prince Edward Island.

*Harold Greenberg dies July 1 at 66. Greenberg built Astral Communications from one photo shop in Montreal and was chairman of the board when he died. The Foundation to Underwrite New Drama, a fund he created in 1986 to foster the work of Canadian screenwriters, is renamed The Harold Greenberg Fund.

*The Cable Production Fund evolves into the Canadian Television and Cable Production Fund, made up of \$100 million directly from the federal government through the Ministry of Heritage, \$50 million from Telefilm Canada and \$50 million from the cable industry.

1997

*With the former programming chief at the CBC, Ivan Fecan, at the helm, Baton Broadcasting (Baton being an acronym of the two founding families, the Bassetts and the Eatons) finally takes control of the CTV network.

**Riverdale*, the first English-language prime-time soap, goes on air.

*The launch of a new set of speciality channels including Teletoon, The Comedy Network, Space and Home & Garden TV.

1998

*John Bassett, the original owner of CFTO-TV in Toronto and a cofounder of the CTV network, dies.

Courtesy of Salter Street Films



This Hour Has 22 Minutes

