



Television Variety Shows: Histories and Episode Guides to 57 Programs

David M. Inman

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For the few hundred television viewers in 1946, a special treat on the broadcast schedule was the variety show called *Hour Glass*. It was the first TV program to go beyond talking heads, cooking demonstrations, and sporting events, featuring instead dancers, comics, singers, and long commercials for its sponsor, Chase and Sanborn coffee. Within two years, another variety show, *Texaco Star Theatre*, became the first true television hit and would be credited with the sales of thousands of television sets. The variety show formula was a staple of television in its first 30 years, in part because it lent itself to a medium where everything had to be live and preferably inside a studio. Most of the early television stars—including Jackie Gleason, Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, Ed Sullivan, Red Skelton, Dinah Shore, and Arthur Godfrey—rose to prominence through weekly variety shows. In the 1960s, major stars such as Jerry Lewis, Dean Martin, Judy Garland and Danny Kaye were hosting variety shows. By the 1970s, the format was giving way to sitcoms and dramas, but pop music stars Sonny and Cher, Tony Orlando and Dawn, and Donny and Marie Osmond hosted some of the last of the species. This book details 57 variety shows from the 1940s through the 1990s. A history of each show is first provided, followed by a brief look at each episode. Air date, guest stars, sketches performed, and a listing of songs featured are included.

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