

PAPER MILL PLAYHOUSE

SEP 28-OCT 29

THE Honeymooners

A NEW MUSICAL COMEDY

THE HONEYMOONERS

Book by DUSTY KAY AND BILL NUSS, *Music by* STEPHEN WEINER, *Lyrics by* PETER MILLS

Choreographed by JOSHUA BERGASSE, *Directed by* JOHN RANDO

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Honeymooners was a television sitcom in the mid-1950s that to this day is one of the most memorable half hour situation comedies of all time. It started out as a six-minute sketch on comedian Jackie Gleason's 1951 variety show *Cavalcade of Stars*. He continued performing these skits when the *Cavalcade* was renamed as *The Jackie Gleason Show* in 1952. At the time, he got tired of creating an hour-long variety show and he went on to create two 30-minute shows simultaneously: *The Honeymooners* and *Stage Show*, a variety show dedicated to music.

The show followed an everyman bus driver named Ralph Kramden and his sarcastic wife Alice (Audrey Meadows) who often comes to his rescue. Ralph also has his best friend Ed Norton, portrayed by Art Carney and his wife Trixie, played by Joyce Randolph. It was one of the first comedies on television to portray a normal married couple that is struggling to get by. Most of the action takes place in the kitchen of their Brooklyn apartment.

There are many elements that made *The Honeymooners* unique in its time and remembered for over sixty years following its conclusion. One was that the show was filmed live in front of a 1,000-member audience at the former Adelphi Theatre in New York City and broadcast at a later date. Gleason hated to rehearse so for many episodes they would only run through a script one time before performing it in front of the live audience. The other cast members would rehearse diligently without him, as they were not comfortable with this arrangement. During its one season on the air, the show was ranked in 2nd place behind *I Love Lucy*. At the same time, CBS decided to move around their time slot and the show started to run out of ratings steam. Gleason stated at the time that his writers had exhausted all plot angles and wanted to end the show on a high. He decided to make more episodes in 1966, most of which are not remembered today.

Not knowing how valuable syndication rights for showing repeat episodes would be in the future, Gleason sold these rights to *The Honeymooners* to CBS for only \$1.5 million. As a basis of comparison, *The Big Bang Theory* sold their syndication rights for \$1.5 million PER EPISODE recently! You can still find *The Honeymooners* on television from time to time and for few years, its loyal fans formed an organization called RALPH (Royal Association for the Longevity and Preservation of the Honeymooners).

**"There's no way of knowin' but honey, you'll be goin'...
-bang, zoom! To the moon."**

**~ Ralph Kramden to Alice Kramden in "To the Moon" in
THE HONEYMOONERS ~**

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CREATIVE TEAM



Dusty Kay (Book) is a television writer and producer. As supervising producer of *Entourage*, he received Emmy and Writers Guild Award nominations. As supervising producer of *Roseanne*, he received a prescription for blood pressure medication. Dusty wrote and produced the television movie *Triplecross* (ABC), was supervising producer of *Early Edition*, and was creator and executive producer of the critically acclaimed *Once a Hero* (ABC).



Bill Nuss (Book) is a television show runner, writer, and producer. He has produced, written, or created over 300 hours of network prime-time series. In addition to *Hawaii Five-0* and *NCIS*, he worked with his mentor, the late Stephen J. Cannell, on Fox's first hit, *21 Jump Street* starring Johnny Depp, *Booker*, *The A-Team*, and the NBC television movie *The Return of Hunter: Everyone Walks in L.A.* starring Fred Dryer and Miguel Ferrer. Bill was the creator and executive producer of *Pacific Blue* starring Mario Lopez. The show was USA Network's highest-rated series during its

reign.



Stephen Weiner (Music). Winner of two Richard Rodgers Awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, American Theatre Wing's Jonathan Larson Grant, ASCAP Foundation's Richard Rodgers Award, and the Global Search for New Musicals; Drama Desk, Lortel, and Obie nominations. Off Broadway: *Iron Curtain* (lyrics by Peter Mills, book by Susan DiLallo); *Once Upon a Time in New Jersey* (book and lyrics by Susan DiLallo); *MTC's newyorkers*. Readings: *The Hudsucker Proxy* (book and lyrics by Glenn Slater); *Rocket Science* (book by Patricia Cotter, lyrics by Jason Rhyne); *Spittin' Image* (book by Karin Kasdin, lyrics by Laura Szabo Cohen); *The Rivals* (book and lyrics by Peter Kellogg). ASCAP and Dramatists Guild member.



Peter Mills (Lyrics) wrote the score, with Stephen Weiner, for Off Broadway's *Iron Curtain* (book by Susan DiLallo), also seen at NAMT, the O'Neill Center, and the Village Theatre. As a composer-lyricist, Peter's shows include *Illyria*, *The Taxi Cabaret*, and *Golden Boy of the Blue Ridge*. Peter has won the Kleban Prize, Fred Ebb Award, the ASCAP Foundation's Richard Rodgers Award and Cole Porter Award, and a Jonathan Larson Grant, and he received two Drama Desk Award nominations for *The Pursuit of Persephone* (outstanding music, outstanding orchestrations.) He is a founding member of Prospect Theater Company and a graduate of NYU's Musical Theatre Writing Program.

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John Rando (Director) Selected Broadway: *On the Town* (Tony nomination), *Penn & Teller on Broadway*, *A Christmas Story*, *The Wedding Singer*, *Urinetown* (Tony and Outer Critics Circle Awards), *A Thousand Clowns*, *The Dinner Party*. Off Broadway: *Lives of the Saints*, *The Heir Apparent* (SDCF Callaway Award), *All in the Timing* (Obie Award), *The Toxic Avenger*, among others. Recent regional: *Pirates of Penzance* (Barrington), *Big Sky* (Geffen Playhouse). City Center Encores!: *The New Yorkers*, *Annie Get Your*

Gun, *Little Me*, *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *On the Town*, *Damn Yankees*, *Face the Music*, *Strike Up the Band*, *Do Re Mi*, *The Pajama Game*, *Of Thee I Sing*. He also directed Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* for the New York Philharmonic.



Joshua Bergasse (Choreographer) won an Emmy Award for his choreography for *Smash* on NBC. Other television: *So You Think You Can Dance* (Fox), *Sinatra: Voice for a Century* (PBS), *Jessica Jones* (Netflix), *A Capitol Fourth* (PBS). On Broadway Bergasse choreographed *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *On the Town* (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle nominations; Astaire Award), and *Gigi*. Off Broadway: *Sweet Charity* (Lortel nomination), *Cagney* (Drama Desk, OCC, Astaire nominations; Callaway Award finalist), *Bomb-itty of Errors*, *Captain Louie*. City Center Encores!: *The Golden Apple*, *Little Me*, *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman!*. Bergasse teaches at Broadway Dance Center and Steps in New York City.

IMPORTANT EVENTS OF THE 1950S

1950 - President Harry Truman approves production of the hydrogen bomb and sends Air Force and Naval forces to Korea in June. →

1950 - Comic Strip *Peanuts* by Charles Schultz begins publication.

1951 - Transcontinental television begins with a speech by President Truman.

1951 - *I Love Lucy* premieres on CBS. →

1952 - The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 is signed, removing racial and ethnic barriers to becoming a U.S. citizen.

1953 - Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are electrocuted for their part in World War II spying.

1953 - Fighting ends in Korea.

1953 - Dwight D. Eisenhower becomes President of the United States and serves until 1961. →



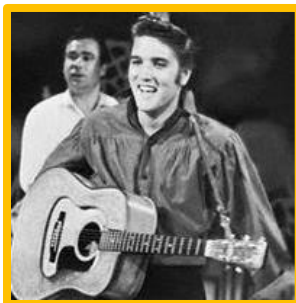
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1954 - U. S. Senator Joseph McCarthy begins televised hearings into alleged Communists in the army.

1954 - Racial segregation was ruled unconstitutional in public schools by the U.S. Supreme Court following the Brown vs Board Education case.

1955 - Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama. →

1955 - The American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations merge making the new AFL-CIO an organization with 15 million members.



1955 – Disneyland opens.

1956 - The Federal Highway Act is signed, marking the beginning of work on the interstate highway system.

1956 - Dr. Jonas Salk developed a vaccine for polio.

1956 – Elvis Presley first appears on The Ed Sullivan Show. ←

1958 - Explorer I, the first United States satellite, successfully orbits the earth.

1958 - National Airlines begin the first domestic jet-airline passenger service between New York City and Miami.

1959 - Alaska and Hawaii become the forty-ninth and fiftieth states. →



JACKIE GLEASON



Jackie Gleason was one of the biggest stars in entertainment during the 1950s and 1960s. Born in Brooklyn, NY in 1916, he was born into a poor Irish-Catholic family and sadly most of his family had either left or died by the time he turned 16 years old. He hustled throughout the tri state area and found work emceeing amateur shows and started performing comedy. He ended up in Newark where he was an emcee and bouncer at the Miami Club, before becoming a DJ. It was around this time in 1936 that he married his first wife Genevieve and had two daughters.

After booking some key Manhattan nightspots, he began getting roles on Broadway and in films as his loudmouth personality began to connect with audiences. By the time he was 25, he decided it was time to move to Hollywood. He had several roles during this Hollywood stint before decided he hated it and moved back to New York City. His career turned when Gleason hired a new manager, George "Bullets" Durgom, who got him Broadway roles and lead him to find a love in television.

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Gleason saw an opportunity in television given that comedy-variety was enormously popular at this point and caught his big break when he was hired to host the *Cavalcade of Stars*. Here his personality was projected into millions of living rooms, becoming one of the most memorable entertainment figures of his time. Following this success, he was paid handsomely to create his own variety show called *The Jackie Gleason Show*, which further cemented his legacy. It was at this point that *The Honeymooners* (see picture on right) came to life as a sketch. Following *The Honeymooners*, he went on to win a Tony Award for the Broadway musical *Take Me Along* and star alongside Paul Newman in *The Hustler*. Gleason also made a living as a composer of many songs, including his tv theme song "Melancholy Serenade".



During the mid-late 1960s, Gleason had many failed attempts to get back into the spotlight, going through two more marriages, as well as new TV shows and a *Honeymooners* reboot. It wasn't until the 1970s when he caught another break as Sheriff Justice in *Smokey and the Bandit*. He eventually passed away in Florida in 1987 at the age of 71.

TELEVISION IN THE 1950S

The most far-reaching change in culture and communications worldwide was the advancement in television broadcasting. During the 1950s when in the aftermath of World War II the American economy was booming, television became the dominant mass media as people brought television into their homes in greater numbers of hours per week than ever before. At the beginning of the decade, there were about \$3 million TV owners. By the end, there were \$55 million! For most of the 1950s, three channels (CBS, NBC, and ABC) dominated the programming.



In the early 1950s, young people watched TV more hours than they went to school. Normal life started to mirror how life was portrayed on television. Concepts like the ideal family, schools, neighborhoods, and our worldview were all shaped by television when in truth this portrayal had only partial basis in reality.

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People began to accept what was heard and seen on television because they were "eye witnesses" to events as never before thanks to live television. The effect on radio, print news media and entertainment media was felt in lower attendance at movies and greater reliance on TV news sources for information.

In 1954, black and white broadcasts became color broadcasts and once again the culture changed. Situation comedies (or sitcoms) like

"The Honeymooners", "Lassie", (*see picture on right*)

"Father Knows Best", "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet", and "I Love Lucy" featured popular characters and all dealt with family and home situations. Families

also enjoyed variety shows like "The Ed Sullivan Show" on Sunday evenings. Daytime programs, mostly soap operas, found ways to integrate products of their most popular advertisers, which helped advertisers sell many products to the homemakers of America. This became a huge revenue stream for television media companies.



News broadcasting changed from newsmen simply reading the news to shows, which included filmed pictures of events from across the world. We then saw more live broadcasts of events happening at the time of viewing. This was made possible in 1951 with the development of coaxial cable and microwave relays coast to coast. When Edward R. Murrow (*see picture on*

left) began offering his weekly radio program called "Hear It Now" on TV, the name was changed to "See It Now", and the world of news broadcasting was irrevocably changed.

THE 1950S

The 1950s were a decade that is looked back upon today as a simpler time. The nostalgia of the period made it seem as if the world was not as complicated as it is today and at the beginning few people had a television in their home, much less a computer. For many people, the center of their existence was home and family. Suburban living was on the rise and the roles for men and women were clearly defined. Men felt the societal pressure of bringing home a paycheck to support a wife and family. Women felt the pressure to stay at home and be a wife and mother. Divorce was not a common occurrence. Back then, people spent more of their lives married than they do today due to lower divorce rates and earlier ages of marriage. People just didn't live alone.

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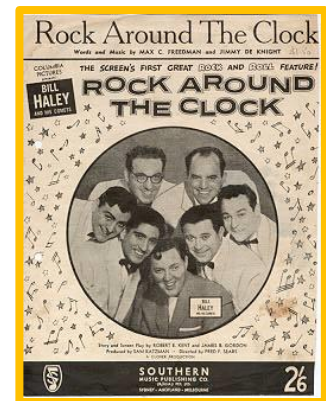
In fact, only 9.3% of homes had a single occupant in 1950. Today that number is over 27%. Women's prospects as single people were grim. Today a woman can get a decent paying job but back in the 1950s, a woman's best chance at employment was in traditionally accepted 'women's jobs' such as secretary, teacher, nurse, librarian and so forth. So, there was an economic incentive to get married and stay married. People also got married younger in the 1950s. The average age for a first marriage was 22.8 years old for men and 20.3 for women. In 2015, the median age for a first marriage was 29.2 for men and 27.1 for women.



Entire families sat down to eat together every day. The mother cooked because that was her 'job'. In 1950 there were 40 million employed males and only 15.5 million employed females. In a typical suburban 1950s household, the family would watch TV after dinner if they had one, which by the end of the decade was likely. The whole family watched the same show because there was only one TV.



Some children had a small record player or a transistor radio. (see picture on left) That little transistor radio helped to spread the popularity of rock and roll music. Popular artists such as Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, and Jerry Lee Lewis were promoted on radio by popular disc-jockeys (DJ's) like Alan Freed. The influence of these early rockers has been felt in popular music worldwide.



When songs like Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" became popular in the mid-1950s, the nation's view on music began to shift.

The song would later come to represent the entire decade when it was used as the theme for the 1970's television show "Happy Days". In addition to rock, singers like Pat Boone, Perry Como, Patti Page, and others added to the feel-good innocence of a lot of the 1950s music. This feeling reflected the post-World War II optimism in America. The young people of the time, an emerging force called teenagers, hadn't struggled through the war years. They were looking for something more exciting and found it in the vitality of rock and roll. During the 1950s both styles of music co-existed quite nicely.

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Perhaps one of the things that most characterized the 1950s was the strong element of conservatism and anti-communist feeling, which ran throughout much of society. One of the best indicators of the conservative frame of mind was the addition of the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. Religion was an indicator of anti-communism. Home and family were the most important things in most people's lives. Families worked together, played together, and vacationed together at family themed entertainment areas like national parks and the newly opened Disneyland. (see picture on right)



Cars were an indicator of prosperity and popularity.



Highways were built to take people quickly from one place to another, bypassing small towns and helping to create central marketing areas. Fashion successes were Bill Blass and his blue jeans, poodle skirts made of felt and decorated with sequins and poodle appliqués, ponytails for girls, and flat tops and crew cuts for guys. Teenagers were defined as a separate generation and were represented by James Dean who wore blue jeans in *Rebel Without a Cause* and created a fashion and attitude sensation.

The Honeymooners in its day became one of the first portrayals of the American family on television and was a direct contributor to the shifting culture in United States.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has culture and life changed since the 1950s? What are the differences in lifestyle and attitude? Are there any similarities?
2. How does *The Honeymooners* portray relationships between men and women? How does that differ between the way those relationships are portrayed on television today?
3. Can you think of other TV comedies that might have been inspired by this one? How do shows like *Roseanne*, *The King of Queens*, or even *The Flintstones* compare?
4. Does the comedy in the musical still hold up, considering it is based on a show that is more than half a century old? Which elements make it feel less relatable for modern audiences?

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Audience Guide content compiled and written by Andrew Lowy.