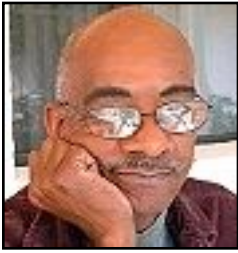


## “The History of the Emmy® Award”



*By Stanley Robinson*

The 57<sup>th</sup> Primetime “Emmy®” Awards, hosted by “Emmy®” Award winner Ellen DeGeneres, will be broadcast live from the Los Angeles Shrine Auditorium on Sunday, September 18th on CBS-TV.

As regular readers of my articles know, I have a fascination with history when it relates to the entertainment industry. My most prominent articles have been historically based: “The History of the “Oscar®”, “The History of Batman”, “The History of War of the Worlds”, “The History of the Tony® Award”, and now, “The History of the Emmy® Award”.



While in film school, a professor said (I’m paraphrasing as best I can remember) “One cannot move forward until one has examined, comprehended, and appreciate those items and those persons that have come before us”. As a film student starting out, all I wanted to do was make movies. As I moved forward in my education in film, the aesthetic value took an equal hold to match the physical process of making movies. I’ve often heard that said of the sports industry as well, with comments like, “when the younger generation appreciates those that have come before, they excel”. For me it’s quite simple, I’m fascinated by the history.

I had slight reservations about the history of the Emmy because I knew going in that there were much broader circumstances, associations, and organizations involved than there are for the Oscar’s or the Tony’s. I found that out back in the 70’s while working for NBC News in Chicago when a piece I worked on received an Emmy nomination. Was that an eye-opener! With that thought in mind, here’s a brief over view of, the Emmy® Awards...

By the mid 1940’s, the new invention called television had taken hold and was spreading throughout the US with almost a million TV sets in use. The original Academy of Television Arts and Sciences was founded in 1946 by Syd Cassyd, a reporter for a TV trade magazine in Los Angeles and a grip on Paramount's back lot.

In 1948 on the west coast, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (ATAS) was officially organized in Los Angeles. Its major purpose, "...To advance the arts and sciences of television and to foster creative leadership in the television industry for artistic, cultural, educational and technical progress..." To this day, the Academy uses many means to support this basic concept with scholarships, grants, fellowships, studies, and research, all supported by the Academy, as well as various publications. The Academy is also active in the international field of television. The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences is more publicly known for creating the Emmy Award.

The Emmy Award, created to recognize outstanding artistic, cultural, educational and technological achievement in the television industry, became a reality in 1949. The name, "Emmy" for the award, was suggested by Harry Lubcke, a pioneer in television engineering. The word Emmy was a variation on "Immy", which was the television shortened name for the "image orthicon tube" used in studio television cameras at the time.

The design of the Emmy statuette was created by Louis McManus. Dorothy McManus was the model for her husband, as he designed the winged "golden girl" holding up the universal symbol of the electron, which would become the Emmy Award statue. He received a plaque from the Academy at the first awards ceremony, January 25, 1949.

In 1949, the first Emmy Awards were held at the Hollywood Athletic Club on January 25, hosted by Walter O'Keefe. When the Emmys were first broadcast in 1949, there were 1 million TV sets in the United States. Other chapters sprung up and each had its own awards, relative to its productions and local recognitions. By the mid 1950's chapters had spread throughout the US, each with its own autonomy and consistencies relative to their audience and production accomplishments.

In 1956 a number of chapters across the country started talks which ended in the creation of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS) in 1957. Although there are numerous local chapters to this day, which hold their own local awards which recognize achievement in television relating to their area, the national awards brings the world the best of US television achievements with the national award ceremony.

Every aspect of television, from the various working crafts behind the scenes to the familiar faces we see on our screens, is covered by up to 50 categories. There are the Prime Time Emmy Awards on September 18<sup>th</sup>; there are the Daytime Emmy awards, regional Emmy awards, international Emmy awards, and the less visible categories that we see on television every day. The categories cover everything from national TV newscasts and documentaries, sports

programs and coverage, business and financial reporting, technology and engineering, public Service (for public service announcements and TV programs that "advance the common good"), as well as the actors and prominent production persons. The Emmy awards have come a long way since that day in 1948, in Los Angeles when the first chapter was formed.

Just as I ended the Oscar article with interesting "Oscar tidbits", here are a few Emmy facts, which I always find fascinating! One gets an added sense of history from memorable moments.

- The first six Emmys were awarded January 25, 1949, and the very first went to 20-year-old Shirley Dinsdale, a Los Angeles ventriloquist, for being the Most Outstanding Television Personality.
- During the 1980 actors' strike, actor Powers Booth was the only winner who showed up to receive his Emmy. He said: "This is either the most courageous moment of my career, or the stupidest."
- In 1964, Shelley Winters thanked "the whole Motion Picture Academy!"
- One month after he refused to accept his Oscar for "Patton" in 1971, George C. Scott accepted his Emmy for his role in Arthur Miller's "The Price" on "Hallmark Hall of Fame."
- After winning an Emmy in 1974, Lily Tomlin said: "This is not the greatest moment in my life because on Friday I had a really great baked potato at Niblick's on Wilshire."
- Dan Rowan and Dick Martin, of TV's "Laugh In", thanked "Laurel and Hardy and all the others we've stolen things from."
- "Saturday Night Live" producer Lorne Michaels thanked New York City "for providing the rejection and alienation that keeps the comedy spirit alive."
- In 1951, Red Skelton accepted the Best Comedian award by saying, "I think this should have gone to Lucille Ball."
- In 1950, when Groucho Marx accepted the honor of TV's Most Outstanding Personality, he picked up Miss Emmy, the former Miss America Rosemary LaPlanche, and carried her off the stage, leaving his statue behind.

- The Emmys originally were to be called "Ikes," a short form for the television iconoscope tube, but there was concern they would be linked to Dwight D. Eisenhower. So instead, Harry Lubcke of the Society of Television Engineers came up with "a feminization" of "Immy," a term used for the early image orthicon camera tube.
- When the Emmys were first broadcast in 1949, there were 1 million TV sets in the United States. By the national broadcast of 1955, there were 25 million.
- AT&T was nominated for an engineering Emmy -- but lost in 1951 -- to the transcontinental microwave relay system that made possible live coast-to-coast television broadcasts.
- The Emmys have been televised every year except 1954, but they were shown for the first time on a national broadcast in 1955. And the January 16, 1957, Emmy awards ceremony was the first to be telecast in color.
- Ed Sullivan and New York's TV elite forced the establishment of a separate bicoastal group, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 1957.
- From 1955 to 1971, the Emmys were "simulcast" from both New York and Los Angeles to quell jealousies between rival cities, which frequently resulted in screens going blank for up to a minute. It was a costly arrangement; NBC paid \$110,000 for the first transcontinental hookup.
- In 1977, after suits and counter suits, the bi-coastal academies finally agreed to work together. The NATAS, based in New York, manages the daytime, sports, news and documentary, international and local awards. The newer Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, located in California, handles the prime-time awards.
- The number of categories for Emmys has fluctuated wildly over the years, from six the first year to more than 40 in many seasons. Even the wording changes, fluctuating from "best" to "outstanding." Once there was a separate category for Westerns, but those "Gunsmoke"- "Maverick" days are gone -- at least for now.
- Cable TV programming was not allowed to participate in the prime-time competition until 1987.

- Jackie Gleason never won an Emmy, but his acting co-star Art Carney won five for "The Honeymooners."
- Deadpanner Ed Sullivan, who caused the bicoastal split in the academy in June 1955, smiled when his show received the Best Variety Series award that year. He never won a personal Emmy in voter competition, but was given a Trustees Award in 1971.
- Rod Serling won his third successive writing award in 1957 for "The Comedian," about the struggles of a burlesque king adjusting to TV. The award for the story, obviously based on Milton Berle's life, was presented by Berle.
- Robert Young received two awards for best acting for "Father Knows Best" in the 1950s and a third in 1970 for "Marcus Welby, M.D."
- The Emmy ceremony for the 1958-59 season is remembered for the notorious "Astaire Affair," when the dancer's first television special, "An Evening with Fred Astaire," won all nine of the awards for which it was nominated, thus establishing an Emmy record. Ed Sullivan asked that the ballots be impounded.
- "Huckleberry Hound" was the first syndicated program and the first cartoon series to take home an Emmy, which it did in the 1959-60 season.
- Hallmark Hall of Fame's "Macbeth," a \$750,000 production filmed on location in Scotland and broadcast as a two-hour color presentation, is considered by many television historians to be the first made-for-TV movie. It received five Emmys at the 1961 ceremony, including one in the rare category, Program of the Year.

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