

Radio & TV History

The format was almost always the same. At the beginning of the show, the talent's order of appearance was determined by spinning a wheel. After it was announced how many episodes the current one marked (the final broadcast on CBS being the 1,651st), the wheel was spun. As the wheel spun, the words "Round and round she goes, and where she stops nobody knows" were always intoned. (From the late 1950s forward, the wheel was gone: it was symbolized by flute arpeggios as Ted Mack invoked the traditional phrase.)

Various acts, sometimes singers or other musicians, quite often vaudeville fare such as jugglers, tap dancers, baton twirlers, and the like, would perform, with the audience being asked to vote for their favorites by postcard or telephone. The telephone number JUDson 6-7000 was on a banner at the bottom of the screen for viewers to call.

As the show gained markets outside New York, Mack would give the address ("Box 191 Radio City Station") where viewers could send their postcards; he did this after every act. The winners were invited to appear on the next week's show. Three-time winners were eligible for the annual championship, with the grand-prize winner receiving a \$2000 scholarship.

Ted Mack ensured that the show was very fast-paced. Despite the program's title, it was generally only a half-hour show, the only exception to this rule being from March 1956 to June 1957 on ABC, when it was expanded to an hour.

Some contestants became minor celebrities at the time, but few ever became really big show-business stars. The two greatest successes of the show's television era were Gladys Knight, then only a child, and Pat Boone. Boone's appearances on the show probably caused the closest thing that it ever had to a scandal. After he had appeared, and won, for several weeks, it was revealed that he had appeared on the rival CBS Television show Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts, meaning that he was technically not an "amateur" singer. He was removed from the program, but by then his fame was assured. At twenty-three, Boone was hosting his own variety show on ABC, The Pat Boone Chevy Showroom, which aired from 1957-1960.

Other future celebrities discovered on the show include Ann-Margret (in 1958), Irene Cara (in 1967) and Tanya Tucker (in 1969). Louis Farrakhan appeared in 1949 playing a violin, under his real name Louis Wolcott. The greatest fame attained by anyone appearing on the show was that achieved by Frank Sinatra, who appeared on the show during its radio days with "The Hoboken Four".

Facts

Things you never knew about "The Original Amateur Hour" TV show such as... More than a million acts ---- featuring more than three-and-a-half million performers ---- auditioned for "The Original Amateur Hour".

2010 marked the 75th Anniversary of the broadcast debut of "The Original Amateur Hour" on radio in 1935.

"The Original Amateur Hour" is an American Institution. The archives from this national treasure are now stored in Washington D.C. at the Library Of Congress.

» It was the longest-lived variety program in the history of broadcasting...airing from March, 1935 through September, 1970 and with a new series in 1992 for 1 season.

» On radio with Major Edward Bowes as host and on television with Ted Mack at the helm, "The Original Amateur Hour" was consistently one of the highest-rated programs on-the-air.

» "The Original Amateur Hour" introduced the famous "Wheel Of Fortune" and the phrase: "'round and 'round she goes...and where she stops...nobody knows"...as well as the infamous "gong".

» More than a million acts ----featuring more than three-and-a-half million performers ---- auditioned for "The Original Amateur Hour".

» More than 25,000 acts have appeared on "The Original Amateur Hour".

» More than 50 amateurs who first appeared on the show went on to become top international stars.

» "The Original Amateur Hour" originated from every major city in the United States as well as from Korea, Ireland, Israel, Austria, Guatemala, Mexico and Yugoslavia.

» The final program of "The Original Amateur Hour", with Ted Mack as host, aired on September 27, 1970. It was show number 1,651.

» 13 more episodes titled: "The New Original Amateur Hour" with Willard Scott as host in 1992 on The Family Channel. They were show #'s 1,652 through 1,665. On one of those shows, a new act discovered was Nick Carter, now of The Backstreet Boys.

Famous Graduates

- Some of the stars who first got their start on "The Original Amateur Hour" (and whose debut performances we have exclusive rights to) include:
JOEY BISHOP
- ROBERT BLAKE
- PAT BOONE
- THERESA BREWER
- MARIA CALLAS
- IRENE CARA
- JACK CARTER
- NICK CARTER (of the Backstreet Boys)
- JOEY DEE AND THE STARLIGHTERS

- REV. LOUIS FARRAKHAN
- JOSE FELICIANO
- FRANK FONTAINE
- CONNIE FRANCIS
- THE GENTRYS
- GEORGIA GIBBS
- RAUL JULIA
- STUBBY KAYE
- ALAN KING
- ROBERT KLEIN
- GLADYS KNIGHT
- PATTI LUPONE
- ANN-MARGRET
- PENNY MARSHALL
- ROBERT MERRILL
- PHYLLIS NEWMAN
- BERT PARKS
- FREDA PAYNE
- REGINA RESNIK
- JAMES SHIGETA
- BEVERLY SILLS
- FRANK SINATRA
- JIM STAFFORD
- LARRY STORCH
- JERRY VALE
- PAUL WINCHELL & JERRY MAHONEY
- VERA ELLEN

Radio Stars

Radio Stars Gallery

Bowes started the radio show on WHN in New York City in 1934. Bowes' field assistant was Ted Mack, who scouted and auditioned talent for the program. Mack brought the show back in 1948 on ABC Radio, where it ran until 1952. When Mack assumed the host duties, his position in the field was taken by Albert Fisher.

The official archives of The Original Amateur Hour and the rights to the original programs and related material are now owned by Fisher. Fisher has donated the radio recordings and television films and tapes to the Library of Congress.

TV Stars

The television debut came on January 18, 1948 on the DuMont Television Network with Mack as the host. The regular staff for the television show included Lou Goldberg (aka Lewis Graham); Lloyd Marx, musical director; accompanist Dotty Marx, his wife; Jack Hoins, writer/producer; and Marguerite (Dwyer) Scheid, talent scout. The show regularly traveled to other cities across the United States and made at least two trips to Europe for the USO. In the early 1950s, the show went to Washington, D.C. for a memorable benefit featuring contestants from Congress and the Truman administration.

The series is one of only six shows—the others were *The Arthur Murray Party*; *Down You Go*; *The Ernie Kovacs Show*; *Pantomime Quiz*; and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*—to appear on all four TV networks during the Golden Age of Television. The series was broadcast weekly, on early Sunday evenings, on DuMont until September 25, 1949, then moved to NBC Television in October 1949 where it remained until September 1952. NBC then hosted it from April 1953 to September 1954.

The show moved to ABC (October 1955 to June 1957), then returned to NBC (July 1957 to October 1958). It then ran from May 1959 to October 1959 on CBS, before returning to ABC for a last prime-time run from March 1960 to September 26, 1960. Even then the show wasn't finished—it ran for another decade as a late-Sunday-afternoon feature on CBS, beginning on October 2, 1960.

Many long-running CBS shows were canceled in 1970–71 because they attracted viewers of an advanced age. However, Ted Mack beat CBS to the punch and terminated the *Original Amateur Hour* of his own volition. The final show was broadcast on September 27, 1970.

The fact this exact format was truly timeless may have been proven in 1992. That year, Albert Fisher revived the program (as *The New Original Amateur Hour*) on cable television's Family Channel (now ABC Family), hosted by weatherman Willard Scott. This revival lasted one season, in spite of its popularity and high ratings, and also featured the debut of *Backstreet Boy* Nick Carter. The show also revived the practice of counting the number of episodes, with the first being show number 1,652 and the last, show number 1,664.