



LEFT: Costume play being televised in a New York studio—smaller productions such as this cost around 10,000 dollars a minute

Caesarean operations were filmed before one suitable for television presentation was found.

The second *Medic* was almost as powerful. It told the pathetic story of a child with a cleft palate. We heard and saw the distortion of his voice and face before treatment, saw the efforts made to correct his deformity, heard the cruel laughter of his school-fellows; and then, at the end, we heard the improvement which had come through the tremendous work of the therapists, and, above all, of the child himself, but which seemed to bring him such a little way along the road to intelligible speech.

These are but two brief outlines of the best programme series to come to our television screens. *Medic* is seriously important and, therefore, will not tempt the millions who consider television only as a medium of entertainment. It will take some, but not all, of the viewers who have been watching *I Love Lucy*. But the people who swing across to *Medic* are the thoughtful and, possibly, the influential audience and their appreciation of a fine programme could have an effect on the future of television.

Sponsors have long known that the youngsters of the United States are a powerful buying force. The appealing commercials on many programmes are designed to attract children with words and pictures directed unerringly at juvenile minds. Cowboys, who do so much to re-create the stirring days of the Old West, are good sellers of bread and breakfast cereals. My small son, for example, insists that we buy a brand of bread which supports a famous television cowboy show. On the wrapping of the loaf appears a picture of my son's horse-opera hero; but the bakery company has put this portrait only on the large loaf—not on the small—and therefore, we are forever burdened with an over-supply of pre-sliced but staling loaves.

The season will introduce the youngsters to a completely new line of television stars—the canine heroes, Rin Tin Tin (played by the original's great-grandson) and Lassie, played by herself and four of her sons. For the very young for whom the chewing of villainous men by sharp-toothed dogs has no appeal there is a series of puppets who perform with delicacy and charm on nearly invisible strings.

Seen much less frequently than the energetic puppets and money-making dogs are the programmes presenting the type of composition which is distinguished from light, popular works of the day by the designation of "good music." These shows confine themselves to the best-loved and more melodious operatic arias and orchestral pieces. In a resolute effort to satisfy as many millions as they can, the sponsors cram into 30 minutes (with time out for three commercials) up to six well-known operatic or serious fragments from the great masters. The items, therefore, are often condensed versions of the classics or near-classics, and they leave the viewer with an unsatisfied appetite for more.

Religion is not forgotten in American television. Indeed, more and more people of many faiths are enjoying the learned talks of their leaders. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and his programme *Life is Worth Living* brought something different to television a few years ago. He seriously lowered the viewer-rating of Mr. Television himself (Milton Berle), who was

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BIG YEAR FOR AMERICAN T.V.

AS the northern summer of 1954 gives way to autumn and then to winter, the soft glow of thirty million television sets will transform the American living-room into the largest theatre in the world; across the Cyclops-eye of the television screens will parade the most expensive array of talent ever assembled in the long history of show business.

The goal of the TV sponsor is to entice the viewer to switch his set to a certain channel at a certain time and to make him keep it there until the last commercial is over. To do this in an age which is impressed by celebrated names and big money, and to compete with similar ambitions by rival firms, the television networks and their supporting sponsors have planned a 1954-55 season which will go down in history as the most brilliant yet seen. In years to come '54-55 will be remembered as the season which introduced spectacular colour and extravagant production. For the first time a single show, to be seen but once, will cost a million dollars. Others will total 300,000 dollars and more; many will continue on smaller budgets of about 10,000 dollars a minute.

A quick look at this year's thespians and their productions reads like a theatrical *Who's Who* and a history of show business. In *The Royal Family*, for example, evergreen Helen Hayes stars with Fredric March, Claudette Colbert and Charles Coburn; Ginger Rogers will portray a trio of leading ladies in a single presentation of Noel Coward's *Tonight at 8.30*; Ethel Merman, the original Annie Oakley of the Broadway stage, will sing and bounce her noisy way through *Panama Hattie*; Humphrey Bogart will do *The Petrified Forest*; Ethel Barrymore, one of the royal family of the theatre, will grace *The Thirteenth Chair*; Robert Montgomery, now the dean of dramatic producers, will bring *The Hunchback of*

Notre Dame; and the deep voice and expressive face of Katherine Hepburn will star in *Philadelphia Story*.

In all, there will be no fewer than eight one-hour dramas each week of the season. This is more than is good for the viewer or for drama itself. Those who appreciate fine acting will have to select their programmes with care, because in drama, as in food, too much spoils the flavour.

Songs and their singers are combined on several fifteen-minute segments to bring the best from the unending parade of popular songs. Each of these is usually seen two or three times a week, others but once. Pretty Dinah Shore, one of the best of the lady pops songsters, retains her faithful following year after year; slim Perry Como sings with a deceptive ease of manner and voice and yet with a dignity unmatched by any of the others; Eddie Fisher looks and acts like any friendly boy in the neighbourhood and combines a pleasant voice with a disarming personality; Johnny Ray is still a favourite with the squealing short sox brigade; Tony Martin sometimes makes hard work of easy songs and over-acts his portrayals, but he returns, nevertheless, each new season; Jo Stafford has not yet gained the smoothness which comes from experience before the cameras and, at times, seems embarrassingly ill at ease.

Many of the old comics will be back, but age is catching up with some of them and their appearances are fewer and their acts shorter. There will be Eddie Cantor, Jimmy Durante, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, Abbott and Costello, Amos and Andy and Martha Raye. There will be the younger ones, too, including Donald O'Connor, whose sharp wit and fast dancing will almost certainly raise him to the revered ranks of the great comedians. Martin and Lewis and Jackie Gleason will appeal to the pie-throwing, slapstick enthusiasts. These artists will appear, not only with their own shows,

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but as "guests" on the shows of one another. This is an insincere, irritating habit which is unnecessary for good entertainment, and does nothing but detract from the main performer of the evening.

Most important of the new weekly programmes is *Medic*. It has taken the nine to nine-thirty spot on Monday nights. This places it exactly opposite top-rated *I Love Lucy*, a domestic situation comedy starring Lucille Ball. With a series of comedy programmes, some of which offered big money prizes, the network now featuring *Medic* failed to break down the audience hold on *Lucy*. By contrast, *Medic* is anything but funny, and for this very reason it may succeed in luring viewers from *Lucy*'s entangling enchantments. *Medic* is so heavy with real-life drama that it is not pleasurable entertainment. With it, the sponsors and the network hope to attract the more thoughtful millions of the Monday night TV audience. The first of the series told of the expected death from leukemia of a young married woman and the subsequent removal of her child by Caesarean section. The scenes in the operating theatre were solemnly authentic and gave us serious adult television at its best. For the first time millions of people saw an umbilical cord. No TV acting has yet had the impact of the tense, efficient work of the doctors who tried to breathe life into the tiny baby. Nearly every modern method known to medical science was used, until after seven minutes of almost unbearable suspense they used the oldest of all—alternate plunges into very hot water and into very cold. The sudden trembling of the child's lip, its first uncertain breath, and then its unexpectedly loud cry were stronger than any acting—because this was not acting. This was real. No fewer than six actual