

Private Detective) turns out to be a natural comedienne, her role is punched up. She's cast because Danny Thomas, who is part-owner of the series, remembers meeting a girl with three names and great legs who'd auditioned to play his daughter on *The Danny Thomas Show*. (She didn't get the role, Thomas later said, because no one would believe that a girl with a tiny button nose like hers could be the progeny of a guy with a nose like his.)



THE MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW

THE IDEA: CBS wants Mary Tyler Moore back on the air, and hires the best team in the business—James L. Brooks and Allan Burns—to create a show for her. Mary's only directive to them: no more suburban housewives.

BRAINSTORMING: Mary (*left*) is a widow raising three kids; Mary is a gal Friday for a gossip columnist; Mary is dating two guys at the same time; Mary is a nun working with a hippie priest.

THE FIRST DRAFT: Mary is a divorcée working in a newsroom. The network throws a fit. The public, it is suggested, may think she divorced Dick Van Dyke. When the producers refuse to make Mary a widow, CBS reluctantly agrees to let her be a single woman, although they spend the first season pressuring writers to give her a steady boyfriend or, better yet, a husband. The network also complains that the show is too serious and that Rhoda is too angry and too urban.

ALMOST STARRING: Anyone but Ed Asner, whose first reading comes off as "too intelligent." For a while, Gavin MacLeod is seriously considered for the part of Lou Grant. Even more frighteningly, network executives see the Ted Baxter character as a possible love interest.

FINE TUNING: Mary Richards' nervousness is written in to accommodate Mary Tyler Moore's own jitters about her return to television and the show's then-unusual taped-live format. As the star gains confidence and the originally lackluster ratings improve, Mary Richards becomes more assertive and scores a couple of nice promotions. During the third season, because people too often confuse him with the "laughingstock" he plays, Ted Knight approaches the producers "on the verge of tears." As a result, his character is given more dimension.



TAXI

THE IDEA: The creative team behind *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* is inspired by a *New York* magazine article about the night shift at the Dover Cab Company.

THE FIRST DRAFT: Characters inspired by the article, and by the producers' own discussions with cabbies, include an Irish boxer (who becomes Italian after Tony Danza auditions), and an Italian art-dealer wannabe (who turns Irish after Marilu Henner auditions). Another original role is Nell, "...a beautiful. She is overweight, black and sassy." Sound familiar? It is written for Nell Carter (later of *Gimme a Break!*), but since she is unavailable, the character is dropped.

ALMOST STARRING: Anyone but Danny DeVito and Judd Hirsch, both of whom have standing orders with their agents not to accept any TV roles, and anyone but Marilu Henner, who is simultaneously offered a role on *The Paper Chase*.

FINE TUNING: The first season's cast includes Randall Carver as John Burns, a naïve country boy. He is replaced after one year by Christopher Lloyd, whose Jim Ignatowski character is originally intended to be a one-shot guest appearance. Jeff Conaway, who plays Bobby, wants to leave after six weeks of shooting. He had expected to share star billing with Judd Hirsch.



THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY

THE IDEA: A writer for ScreenGems, contracted to create three pilots a year, is inspired by a real-life family pop group, the Cowsills.

THE FIRST DRAFT: The newly-widowed Connie (later Shirley) Partridge is either remarkably well-adjusted or in deep denial, because we never learn a thing about Mr. Partridge. Shirley Jones doesn't find out until the end of casting that her stepson, David Cassidy, will be playing her son on the show. At first, only Shirley's real voice is used for the songs; the rest of the family is dubbed. Badly. After the pilot is filmed, David Cassidy admits that he can sing, and foxy Keith is made the band's frontman. There is talk of casting a "leading-man type" as Reuben Kincaid, but producers decide they don't want even a hint of romance between Reuben and Shirley, so they cast Dave Madden. Even so, creator Bernard Slade doesn't find him mean or cranky enough.

ALMOST STARRING: The Cowsills. The executive producer initially approaches the family about starring in a sitcom based on their lives, but decides they are too old.

OTHER TITLES TOSSED AROUND: *Family Business*

FINE TUNING: Never really stops. The first season is a constant struggle to ensure that Danny is amusing but not annoying. The second season trades a brown-haired Christopher for a blond one—and only one viewer writes in about it. The fourth season desperately introduces an adorable younger child: a saccharine four-year-old neighbor named Ricky, who also sings.

THE CRITICS' FIRST REACTIONS TO

Bewitched,

Bothered

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It's no wonder TV critics get testy—you try "appraising" *Hee Haw* sometime. Still, critics are as prone to bouts of cluelessness as the rest of us. In 1966, for instance, one *New York Times* reviewer wrote of *Batman*, "Television's great and lasting gift has been to demonstrate that there is no bottom to its barrel." Today, of course, the series is considered one of the seminal works of television culture.

We decided to open the vaults and check the critics' initial reviews of some other cult favorites. Their record? Pretty hit and miss. When *Mork & Mindy* debuted in 1978, for example, the critics crowded onto the Robin Williams spacewagon ("Say nanoo-nanoo to a new hit," *Variety* squealed). But when Dick Van Dyke, another supernaturally talented guy, arrived in 1961, they were clueless ("...for those for whom yet another bland, harmless, 'happy show for happy people' is about as compelling as a popsicle at the North Pole, this new series could not exactly be regarded as an exciting experience to be awaited with impatience each week"). As for how other classics fared, see for yourself:

"THE STINKEROO OF ALL TIME!"

-*San Francisco News Call Bulletin*,
September 1964



Gilligan's Island A traumatic experience for most critics, the premiere left them gasping in pain. "It is difficult to believe that *Gilligan's Island* was written, directed and filmed by adults...I can only assume they were motivated by avarice alone," hypothesized the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "Strained pathetically for laughs," *Variety* sniffed. "I have a feeling the cannibals will get them soon," added the *San Francisco News Call Bulletin*. Clearly, the critics missed the boat. If not for the courage of the fearless audience—who nurtured it through three seasons and countless reunion movies—this sitcom would be lost today.

The Partridge Family The *Christian Science Monitor* found them "faintly funny," but the groovy velour troubadours had few other fans. "There are a number of negative things to say about *The Partridge Family*, if you want to jump up and down on a cripple," wrote *The New York Times*. *The Newark Evening News* was perplexed: "I felt like an eavesdropper at a teenage freak-out." And *Variety* scoffed: "Even the teenage girls who buy records [won't believe] the 'Partridge' kids could make it in today's record market." Wrong again: When Keith shook his shag and cooed, "I Think I Love You," the feeling was mutual. By December, the "cripple" had climbed into the Nielsen Top 10.

"SHOW'S CHANCES LOOK SLIM."

-*Variety*, September 30, 1970



The Bradys vs. The Critics

In the '60s, TV reviewers suffered at the hands of hillbillies and castaways, but they always kept their pride. Till the one day when the Bradys met the Critics. Nobody had a hunch that the bunch would survive, let alone defeat the brave reviewers. Here, the three stages of Total Critic Collapse, as documented in *Variety's* reviews of *The Brady Bunch* over three seasons.



BREEZY REJECTION:

"Sitcom concerns two losers with three sprats apiece hitching up again...[should soon be] extinct from Nielsen malnutrition."

-October 1969



4
May 1990
THE DONNA-THON
Our first week-long marathon. On the air, we discussed how watching such a large quantity of goodness, decency and common sense could foster self-improvement. Meanwhile, a group of thirty Donna Reed dress-alikes ran a marathon through the streets of Chicago (above).



5
Halloween Week 1990
THE DEAD-GIVE-A-WAY SWEEPSTAKES
We asked viewers to guess how many characters would kick the bucket during a week-long marathon of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Host Wink Martindale compared the contest to guessing how many jelly beans are in a jar, "but instead of jelly beans, it's cadavers." (Total count: 148 stiffs.)



6
July 1991
99 99's
To celebrate the addition of *Get Smart* to the lineup, 99 Agent 99s in white boots and mod dresses designed by Betsey Johnson marched on Times Square (right).



7
July 1993
"GET BACK ON THE BUS" TOUR
We sponsored an eight-city tour featuring David Cassidy, Danny Bonaduce and the *Partridge Family* bus (right). The highlight: David Cassidy performed in the middle of Times Square at noon, to the delighted shrieks of normally staid office workers. Much of the audience was shocked to discover that they still remembered the words to "I Think I Love You."

