

Flash Back

Mother superiors

Who is your favourite TV mum? **MARION McMULLEN** looks at some of the top Mother's Day contenders

LIFE was always "perlick" for Ma Larkin in *The Darling Buds Of May*. Pam Ferris played the mother-of-six in the 1990s ITV comedy drama based on the books by H E Bates with Sir David Jason as her common-law husband Pop Larkin.

They had a 22-acre smallholding and easy-going Ma liked nothing better than baking and cooking for her large family. David Jason described the relationship between the two characters as "loving, cheeky, generous, trusting" but said he did put on excess weight because of all the food on set. He had to scoff five breakfasts of bacon and eggs during the filming of one episode.

Catherine Zeta Jones played the couple's oldest daughter Mariette followed by Montgomery, Primrose, twins Zinnia and Petunia and Victoria. ITV is currently planning a TV comeback for *The Darling Buds Of May* - this time as *The Larkins* - with Bradley Walsh and Joanna Scanlan as Pop and Ma Larkin.

When it comes to playing telly mums Wendy Craig ticks all the boxes. She certainly has had plenty of practice. She played a mother-of-three in 1960s sitcom *Not In Front Of The Children*, followed it with *And Mother Makes Three* and then *And Mother Makes Five* in the 1970s before appearing as the mum of two strapping sons in the form of a young Nicholas Lydnhurst and Andrew Hall in BBC comedy *Butterflies*.

She played bored housewife Ria Parkinson who feared life was passing her by in the comedy from the pen of *Liver Birds* creator Carla Lane. Ria's dentist husband Ben (Geoffrey Palmer) was clueless that anything was wrong on the family front, but Ria was a rare character at the time - a woman who dared to question her lot and was a disaster when it came to cooking family meals.

Carla Lane also brought viewers the formidable Ma Boswell in popular BBC comedy *Bread*. Jean Boht brought Nellie Boswell to life in 1986, a matriach who remained



The Larkins were a loving family, well fed and cared for by Ma

fiercely protective of her five grown-up children over the years.

Bread pulled in 21 million viewers at its height and followed the life of Nellie and her kids Joey, Jack, Adrian, Aveline and Billy after husband Freddie walked out on them.

Jean said of Carla: "She changed my life. She had the greatest humanity and care and when she wrote about real people, she made you love them."

Things were a little more unconventional on the home front for mother-of-two Morticia Addams. *The Addams Family* began as a series of cartoons from American artist Charles Addams before mak-

ing the switch to television in 1964.

Carolyn Jones and John Astin played Morticia and Gomez Addams and named their two children Wednesday - after the rhyme Wednesday's child is full of woe - and Pugsley.

Carolyn had to spend two hours a day in the make-up chair to achieve Morticia's deathly pallor and a wig made of human hair completed the gothic look.

Morticia encouraged her children to play with guillotines, experiment with poison and perfect their torture skills on each other.

Carolyn said: "Morticia was the perfect role for me because my sense of humour is just slightly off centre."

American TV series *The Brady Bunch* offered a more wholesome family picture. It began in 1969 and followed the fortunes of a widow and widower who marry to create one large family of six children.

Florence Henderson played TV mother Carol Brady in more than 100 episodes and in TV movies and specials.

She once said: "Sometimes my kids would say to me 'How come you don't scream at those kids on television like you do us?' I said

'because they're not my real kids and you are and I want you turn out to be wonderful human beings.'

In feelgood 1970s show *The Partridge Family*, Shirley Jones played the mother of a talented five-strong brood of young performers led by her real-life step son David Cassidy as Keith Partridge.

She said at the time: "It's almost like playing myself. Shirley Partridge could just as easily be Shirley Cassidy. It's like going into my own home every day."

"The thing I don't like is getting up at 5.30am every day and getting home at seven."

Marge Simpson has had the longest stretch at TV motherhood. She has been bringing up Bart, Lisa and Maggie since *The Simpsons* began 33 years ago... and they still show no signs of leaving the nest.

Julie Kavner is the voice of Homer's blue-haired long-suffering wife and Marge is the glue that keeps the family together.

Marge once explained: "Stick it out, my mother said, even if you picked a loser. To the bitter end."



Rockin' it: Shirley Partridge



Well practised - Wendy Craig



Morticia Addams, not your average mother



Ma Boswell was fiercely protective of her brood

Marge Simpson



Carol Brady with her bunch

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