



This Was "Your Hit Parade"

"Your Hit Parade" had its start on July 20, 1935. The format at that time consisted of the fifteen top songs of the week as determined by a nationwide survey. They were played in an entirely random order. Several years were to pass before the well-remembered format building up to the top three tunes of the week was established. The original show was an hour in length and featured a variety of guest stars such as, for example, W. C. Fields whose contribution was quite remote from the musical context of the show. Starting on November 28, 1936, the format was reduced to the top seven songs. From that time on, the format varied between the top ten, top nine, and top seven. Towards the end of the program in February 1958, the format was reduced to the top five. Although commonly remembered as presenting the top ten tunes, the most common presentation over the years was seven. The length of the show varied from the original one hour to a half hour show. Both 45-minute and 30-minute shows were quite common at various times in the 1940's with the 30-minute show predominating.

On July 10, 1950, "Your Hit Parade" made its first television appearance. Altogether it made four appearances that summer and in October, 1950, it was on television on a regular basis until its demise in April of 1959. For several years the program operated as a "simulcast" with the television soundtrack going out simultaneously as the radio program. The program was almost exclusively a Saturday night program except for its last season (1958-1959) when it was presented on Friday nights. The program won a number of awards of which the most notable were the Peabody Award in 1952 for the best television program and the Emmy Award for the best musical show in 1956.

The survey was run predominately by an advertising agency — Batton, Barton, Durstine, and Osburn. They obtained their results by consulting various music shops about the country regarding their sales of records and sheet music. They also queried band leaders as to their most often requested songs. This information was combined to produce the song ratings.

During the earlier years of the show when radio and other communications media were still developing, "Your Hit Parade" was THE authority on what music was popular. The later emergence of the disc jockeys and their independent listings of the top 20, 40, 100 or what have you, was instrumental in the eventual demise of "Your Hit Parade." The survey itself ended in June 1958. The program was revived and continued until April 1959 but during this period played popular songs as determined by Billboard Magazine. The songs listed in this book include the survey era from April 20, 1935, to June 7, 1958.

A review of the listings show a number of songs that are well remembered that never scored very high in "Your Hit Parade" ratings, while others less well remembered did quite well. The shortest and brightest life of any song was represented by the tune "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus." This song appeared on the program only once on January 3, 1953, but was in first place! Another song in that category was "Peter Cottontail" which hit second place in its only appearance.

The all-time longevity record was held by "White Christmas" that kept reappearing around Christmastime every year and appeared on the air a total of 38 times altogether! The longest run for a one time appearing song was "People Will Say We're In Love." This tune appeared on "Your Hit Parade" a total of 30 times between June 1943 and January 1944. However, it only held first place three times. The first place record was held by the song "Too Young" in 1951. It managed to hold the first place position a total of twelve times.

Those songs that were popular very near the beginning of the program (April 1935) and very near the end (June 1958) naturally make a poorer endurance showing due to their timing. On the other hand, songs in the earlier years should tend to make a better endurance record due just to the number of songs aired each week (15). Conversely,

songs toward the end of the survey show less endurance since only five songs were aired each week.

The weekly listings as shown in this book much of the time include **all** songs listed in the survey. However, the first, second, and third place records listing is based only on the songs that were **actually aired**. Also the information in the alphabetical listing refers only to the times actually broadcast. Altogether a total of 1,278 different tunes appeared on "Your Hit Parade" during its life.

An interesting commentary on the times is the fact that the September 14, 1935 program was not broadcast since the cast was en route to California — a five-day trip by train at that time! Other programs were occasionally not broadcast. Although no reason is given in the information available, it is probable that they were merely pre-empted by a "Special Program." A large number of programs were recorded during World War II by the Armed Forces Radio Services (AFRS) for rebroadcast abroad to the Armed Forces at a later date. These programs had the commercials deleted. A number of these programs from this era have survived in remarkably good condition and are commercially available today. In addition, other recordings were made by others which included the commercials so that altogether a large number of the programs were preserved. At present, upwards of sixty or more of these programs are commercially available.

The cast list of "Your Hit Parade" includes a large number of well-known performers. However, the one name that is most associated with "Your Hit Parade" is Frank Sinatra. He first appeared on "Your Hit Parade" in February 1943 accompanied by his screaming "bobby-soxer" fans who monopolized the audience. The screams of ecstasy that punctuated his rendition of such songs as "Shoo Shoo Baby" were heard nationwide every Saturday night. He returned in 1947 for two more seasons but the "bobby-sox" mania had subsided somewhat in the interim.

Of the male vocalists, Snooky Lanson held the endurance record appearing on the program for almost seven years. Dorothy Collins held the same record for female vocalists, with Joan Edwards, Eileen Wilson, Bea Wain, and Giselle MacKenzie also serving for three years or more. The most enduring orchestra leader was Mark Warnow serving about ten years. Harry Sosnick served two hitches as orchestra leader, first in 1936 and some 22 years later in 1958. At one time the orchestra leaders were rotated every few weeks even though the orchestra remained the same.

A number of very well-known singers appeared on the show but whose names are not normally associated with it. People such as Dinah Shore, Doris Day, Johnny Mercer and Dick Haymes were featured on the program at various times.

The show was sponsored by Lucky Strike Cigarettes, a product of The American Tobacco Company. Head of this company was a merchandising genius named George Washington Hill. He had a reputation for paying his employees well but being quite strong-minded and consequently difficult to work for. No one said no to Mr. Hill! His word was **the** authority on the show.

The commercials on the show featured the chant of the tobacco auctioneers. Two of these gentlemen were L. A. (Speed) Riggs of Goldsboro, North Carolina, and F. E. Boone of Lexington, Kentucky. Mr. Boone had the slower, low-pitched voice. The use of the chant was Mr. Hill's idea. He felt that something was lacking in cigarette advertising and toured the South trying to capture some of the atmosphere of the tobacco country. He was fascinated by the chant of the auctioneers and set out to find the fastest of them. He was referred to a young man in Goldsboro, North Carolina, nicknamed "Speed" Riggs. His first words to Speed were to ask him how much he earned. When Speed responded Hill immediately offered him twice as much to chant on radio. Speed Riggs accepted and became famous nationwide for his chant. Later on Mr. Hill interviewed other auctioneers, looking for a lower pitched monotone type to contrast with Riggs. He settled on F. E.



Boone. These two gentlemen became famous for their tobacco chants over the years. In fact in the early fifties, a song was written about the auctioneer's chant. Although quite popular at the time it was basically a novelty song and never made the Hit Parade program.

Before the war Lucky Strike Cigarettes were packaged in a green colored box. The war restricted availability of the green dye for these packages. At the same time a survey showed that women smokers would prefer a white package. Mr. Hill solved his problem nicely by changing to a white package and adopting the slogan "Lucky Strike Greens Have Gone to War." This saved his male customers, made the cigarettes attractive to women smokers while at the same time solving his dye problem.

The show actually terminated in June of 1958. However, another network bought the show and tried to revive it. Hit Parade Cigarettes, another product of the American Tobacco Company sponsored it on alternate weeks. However, a sponsor for the other programs could not be found and the program was finally terminated in April 1959.

The question of what "killed" the Hit Parade might be begged by saying that it died of old age. Actually, there are probably several reasons for it. The advent of television and improved communications gave rise to radio "disc jockeys" who controlled to a large extent the popular music field. Whereas in earlier days "Your Hit Parade" was the only source of song popularity, it seemed that each DJ had his own pall of popular songs. Also the advent of the electric guitar signalled a change in popular music from orchestrated arrangements to small guitar-led groups with their amplifiers turned way up.

To those who are now "middle-aged" Your Hit Parade was a very real part of their youth. The information in this book has been compiled for your pleasure.

Happy browsing!



JRW
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from John R. Williams' book
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