

# '60 Minutes'—the best hour TV has to offer

A dial is turned until it clicks; a cathode ray tube hums to life; dull gray turns into all colors of the spectrum and figures solidify and move across the screen. Music, narrative or dialogue rises to match the motion.

And we see an image of ourselves, our society, customs, laws, fears, comedies and tragedies. That machine helps shape our aspirations, tells us what's old, what's new, what's fun and sad, frivolous and sober, what's in and what's

out.

It has become more than a reporter, more than an instrument of amusement, more than an electronic gadget. It is a part of the scene; so much so that it goes unnoticed and unquestioned as a major factor in our lives.

## TV and plumbing

In 25 years, television has become as much a part of the American home as indoor plumbing. Almost every dwelling, from a Park Avenue penthouse to a tarpaper shack

on the outskirts of El Paso, has a television. And the same image of what we are, the same offerings of the marketplace, the same morality sets and the same interpretations of crisis are cycled to rich and poor alike.

Questions abound: How accurate are TV's representations? And does it matter? When it is good, what is it that is good about television? And what is being featured right now that's good? Viewers have an

opportunity to catch television at its best every Sunday at 5 p.m. on CBS. It's a good bet that "60 Minutes" is exactly what TV pioneers like Lee De Forest and Gen. David Sarnoff had in mind before Lucille Ball, Jack Webb and Monty Hall crowded into the act.

## Wide-ranged experience

Presented as a magazine of the air, "60 Minutes" moves across the range of modern day experience. It can be serious, such as an interview with G.

Gordon Liddy or the plight of the elderly slowly starving on the Social Security system; or lighthearted, such as a study of the centenarian culture of the Russian steppes. The show strives to be informative, with reports on topics such as cities' handling their sludge problems; and it attempts public service programming as exemplified by a recent program and follow-up on Arizona land fraud.

"60 Minutes" offers weekend news headlines, airs letters from the viewing public and offers a weekly mini-debate on current issues.

And sometimes, just for fun, the program features something like their lighthearted look at the psyches of pro football players during an interview with the team psychiatrist for the San Diego Chargers.

Yes, there are commercials too, but they don't seem to distract from the format any more than do full page ads in magazines. And, inasmuch as the commercials are well done, they add to the program. At worst, they provide the viewer with time to go to the bathroom.

ron wylie  
eye of the  
beholder

To be sure, "60 Minutes" has come up short a time or two. A few years ago it was the unwitting tool of the U.S. Army in an on-screen destruction of the credibility of dissident Lt. Col. Anthony Herbert; the nicest piece of evidence falsification this side of 1984.

## Occasional fudge

And in last Sunday's broadcast, "60 Minutes" fudged on an otherwise timely and provocative piece on the Southeast Asian opium trade by ignoring the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in the business.

Still, week after week, CBS anchormen Mike Wallace and Morley Safer and their crews generally put together a complete, intelligent and imaginative magazine.

"60 Minutes" seems to assume that its viewers are intelligent, interested, even hungry for well-researched portraits of life, its pleasures, preoccupations and problems.

In its current time slot, the program is too often preempted for a Sunday sports program, and may therefore lack consistency in ratings.

## 'Hee Haw' won

When "60 Minutes" first appeared in 1968, CBS scheduled it for weeknight prime-time viewing. But the program lost in the ratings game to Hee Haw, which says a great deal about the American viewers' relationship with TV.

Most Americans, when they settle in front of the tube in the evening, seek an anesthetic for the cerebrum. They want motion and sound, but not thought. A musical kaleidoscope would probably serve, but network TV is not really hip enough to try something like that.

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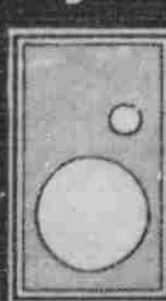
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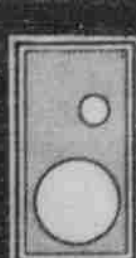
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