

This Day in History... September 28, 1901

Happy Birthday Ed Sullivan

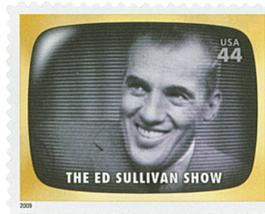
Legendary TV personality Ed Sullivan was born on September 28, 1901, in Harlem, New York City.

Sullivan grew up in a musical household, with someone always singing or playing the piano. Sullivan was a gifted athlete, playing football, basketball, baseball, and track.

While in high school, Sullivan wrote sports news for *The Port Chester Daily* and was hired full-time after graduation. Over the next decade, he continued to work as a sports writer and editor for a series of different newspapers. Then in 1929, he was made the Broadway columnist for *The Daily Mirror*. During this time he would also do show business broadcasts on the radio. In 1933, he wrote and starred in the film, *Mr. Broadway*.

Sullivan soon earned a reputation as a star-maker, while continuing to write, produce vaudeville shows, and organize benefit concerts. He was also made the host of the *Summer Silver Theater* variety program in 1941.

In June 1948, Sullivan was hired to host a weekly Sunday night variety TV show called *Toast of the Town* (it would be renamed *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1955). Initially, Sullivan and his show received poor reviews, with some complaining he had no personality and was awkward. Sullivan soon won over viewers, however, as the “average guy” bringing entertainment to their homes. Sullivan had an instinct about what people liked and managed to create an interesting balance for the show. An episode would usually include a vaudeville act, a comedian, a singer, a jukebox star, a theatre performer, an athlete, and a visit with Topo Gigio, the Italian mouse puppet.



From the *Early TV Memories* sheet



Sullivan once said Elvis was “unfit for a family audience,” but when he had the young performer on his show, he called him a “real decent, fine boy.”

Sullivan is often called a star-maker because many of the guests on his show became household names after their appearances. One of the most famed performances was that of Elvis Presley. In early 1956, Sullivan swore he’d never allow Presley on his show. However, after learning that Elvis’s performance on the *Steve Allen Show* drew higher audience ratings than his own, Sullivan had a change of heart. Presley was paid \$50,000 for three shows, more than any entertainer had ever been paid to perform on a network variety show.

Sullivan then wanted to be the first to debut the next big sensation, and he found it – The Beatles. They made their debut in February 1964, and it was the most-watched TV program in history up to that time.

Soon Sullivan became a star himself, with comedians earning laughs for their impressions of him. He also inspired a song in *Bye Bye Birdie* and appeared as himself in the film adaptation.

In all, *The Ed Sullivan Show* ran for 24 seasons, totaling 1,068 episodes. Among the most notable performances were the Jackson Five, The Rolling Stones, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, The Doors, and Ray Charles. *The Ed Sullivan Show* has been called “the last great TV show,” and “one of our fondest, dearest pop culture memories.”

Despite its long-time popularity, *The Ed Sullivan Show* began to drop in ratings and was canceled in 1971. Sullivan was so upset over the canceling, he refused to do the final show. In 1974, Sullivan’s family discovered he had esophageal cancer, but didn’t tell him. He died weeks later on October 13, 1974. 3,000 people attended his funeral.



The Beatles stamp from the *Celebrate the Century Series*



Ray Charles stamp from the *Music Icons Series*

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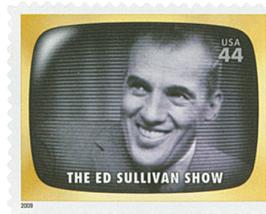
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