

BEST OF 1998 *television*

Decade later 'Simpsons' still No. 1, Comedy Central skyrockets shows to top 10

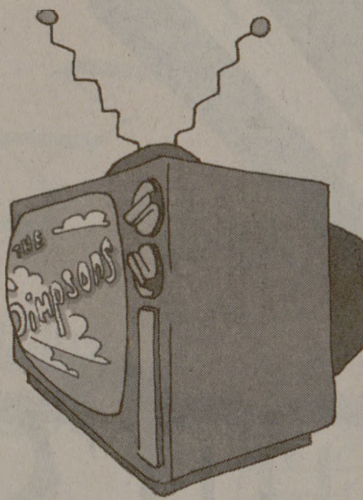
BY JACOB HUVAL AND SCOTT HARRIS
The Battalion

Nineteen ninety-eight was an important and altogether challenging year for television. Polls indicated that the majority of prime-time audiences were hitting the theaters more than yet.

Meanwhile, broadcasting company mergers were changing the face of programming. The tediously persistent (as well as generally irritating) presidential scandal update prevalent to most networks threatened television's appeal and consequently its quality. Yet, despite numerous setbacks and technicalities, there were still some notable programs to enjoy.

"The Simpsons" — Although "The Simpsons" is entering its 10th season, Matt Groening's cartoon-comedy concoction is still a major contender in the prime-time race. By far, the most highly acclaimed cartoon series of the '90s, "The Simpsons" remains a staple of the international entertainment diet. Why is it that after almost 10 years of "Aye, carumba!" and "D'oh!," viewers have not strayed from "The Simpsons?"

The variety and spontaneity of the humor is enough to entice a broad audience, while the satire of contemporary life maintains viewer loyalty. What has made "The Simpsons" unique to prime-time programming for the last 10 years is its



ROBERT HYNICK/THE BATTALION

guest appearances, musical scores and subject material. The 1998 season featured guest stars Janeane Garofalo, James Earl Jones, Alex Trebeck, U2 and Steve Martin, to name a few.

In its 10th season, "The Simpsons" is a timeless relic that reveals the comedy of human nature, a sort of warped, carnival mirror for all the ages, reflecting perhaps not-our-best face, but a face

that is nonetheless enjoyable.

"Homicide: Life on the Street" — An oasis in the desert of second-rate police and hospital dramas, "Homicide" has become a weekly blockbuster. Conceived by Hollywood director Barry Levinson and written by Tom Fontana, "Homicide"

has been touted as one of the few sincerely "smart" cop shows, more often resorting to crisp, psychological sparring between characters than overblown gunfights.

"The Daily Show" — Before this program news magazine, shows such as "Dateline" and "20/20" have been elusive to comic ridicule. "The Daily Show" offers a tremendously ironic and acclaimed brand of humor that helps everybody take themselves less seriously.

"Late Night with Conan O'Brien" — In just five years, Conan O'Brien has solidified his position as the king of late night. With the help of his sidekick Andy Richter and band leader Max Weinberg, O'Brien has taken the reigns of the late night chariot and left Leno and Letterman in the dust.

O'Brien uses his wry wit and offbeat sense of humor to keep the viewers watching. With chilling looks into the year 2000 where the movie "Spice World" is still the number one rated movie and recurring characters such as Pimpbot, how can he not be king?

Fox Specials — Perhaps volume is more important than quality. Throughout the 1998 season, Fox broadcasting touted

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