

VALLEY SCENE



Lucille Ball Convention

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Fifty Years of Loving Lucy

By Tysa Goodrich

The "I Love Lucy" show made its debut in October of 1951. At that time, little did anyone know -- including Lucille Ball -- that her character would transcend every female role of the 1950s. Unlike June Cleaver, Lucy became the gal who would try anything -- at least once -- and venture beyond the kitchen into parts unknown. "They just needed a good platform for creating comedic routines," says Thomas Watson, President of the International Lucille Ball Fan Club.

of New York. There was only one system of live broadcasting -- from East to West. But she wouldn't leave her beautiful, five-acre ranch in Northridge (yes, Lucy was a Valley Girl!). She told CBS, "No, No. You don't understand. I don't intend to leave California."

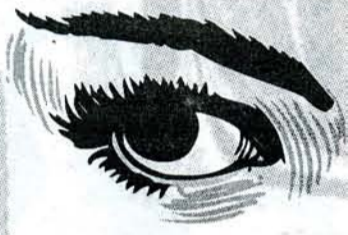
But to do the show in Los Angeles, and then ship it to New York to be broadcast from there, and have the kind of quality it needed, it would have to be recorded on film. There was no videotape in those days. No one had ever done a scripted entertainment show in front of a live audi-

Another added benefit was the resulting high-quality prints preserved for future generations.

When I asked Tom (fan club president) about his favorite episodes, he said there were so many, but two came to mind right away. "The Chocolate Factory," and who could ever forget the Vitameatavegamin commercial, in which Lucy schemes her way into doing a commercial on one of Ricky's TV shows, and doesn't realize the product has a high percentage of alcohol. During repeated rehearsals, Lucy progressively gets more and more inebriated.

Tom says, "It's wonderful

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watch, because we're not just voyeurs, we're experiencing it through her. I think that's one of the show's secrets. It's almost interactive, because you know exactly what she's going through."

Thomas Watson started the Lucille Ball Fan Club in 1977. He also created and maintains the



Lucy and Desi Pictured here/A symbol of romance

But behind the scenes, Lucy was also carving a path through the industry that would change it forever. Not unlike the Internet today, the future of television was a mystery; nobody really knew for sure where it was going, except that the movie industry was rightly predicting it as competition. Lucy's fellow actors, and her former bosses at the studios, were shaking their collective fingers at her saying, "If you do this, you'll never work in this town again." Embracing an industry that was potentially threatening to the movie business could end her career.

The "I Love Lucy" show was groundbreaking. Lucille Ball had come to realize that -- unlike the flatness of her movie characters -- when she was able to perform in front of a live audience, she sprang to life. During her live broadcast radio shows in the 40s, she discovered her ability to milk a laugh, and just how subtly or broadly she could run with it. Needless to say, at the conception of her television show, she insisted on a live audience.

At that time, CBS expected the show to be aired out

ence using film before.

This created an entire system that is still being used today in all the top sitcoms -- such as "Will and Grace" and "Frasier." It has been refined over the years with the new technology, but the basic system of using three cameras in front of an audience, recording the laugh, and so on, is the exact system set up 50 years ago by the "I Love Lucy" show.

watching the actress at work, as slowly her tongue gets thicker, and her words start to slur. You can just see her transform. Because her face is so expressive, we in the audience experience whatever she's experiencing, and I think that's true of every scene in every episode, because her face registers what is going on inside her. We're let in on it, and we become a part of it. It's so fun to



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Thomas Watson started the Lucille Ball Fan Club in 1977. He also created and maintains the

club's website. The sixth annual "Loving Lucy 2001" convention, celebrating the 50th anniversary of "I Love Lucy," begins August 16th for four days, headquartered at the Hilton Burbank Airport Convention Center. Festivities begin with a special ceremony and official dedication of Stage #2 at Hollywood Center Studios as the original home of the "I Love Lucy" show.

There aren't very many of us who haven't been tickled and touched by Lucy's innocence, and her driving need to succeed at whatever she chooses to do, even though inevitable "doom" encroaches as each episode unfolds. Her character takes us on a roller coaster ride, keeping us on the edge of our seats, and in front of (what were once) those little black-and-white screens. We can't believe the tangled web she weaves, and we laugh till we cry.

For more information on "Loving Lucy 2001: Celebrating 50 Wonderful Years of I Love Lucy!" visit www.lucyfan.com.

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