

Philco Television Playhouse

Encyclopedia Article

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One of the most distinguished of the live anthology series, NBC's *Philco Television Playhouse* is best remembered for nurturing talent to create original television productions. Producer Fred Coe assembled one of television's most illustrious writing teams, including Paddy Chayefsky, Horton Foote, Tad Mosel, and Gore Vidal. When Philco debuted on October 3, 1948, the series was produced in conjunction with the Actors' Equity Association and specialized in Broadway adaptations, including *Dinner at Eight* with Peggy Wood, *Cyrano de Bergerac* starring Jose Ferrer, and *Counsellor-at-Law*, Paul Muni's TV debut. A year later, Philco worked with the Book-of-the-Month Club to present dramatizations of noteworthy novels, including *Sense and Sensibility* with Cloris Leachman. Beginning in the early 1950s, Coe instructed his writers to create intimate dramas for the small screen. What resulted were such acclaimed teleplays as Chayefsky's *Marty* with Rod Steiger (1953); Foote's *A Trip to Bountiful* with Lillian Gish (1955); and Vidal's *The Death of Billy the Kid* with Paul Newman (1955), all of which were later made into films. Goodyear became an alternating sponsor of Coe's *Playhouse* in 1951, and, in all, more than 350 live dramas were produced over eight seasons.

Further Reading:

Considine, Shaun. *Mad as Hell: The Life and Work of Paddy Chayefsky*. New York, Random House, 1994.

George Cukor (left) directing Cary Grant (right), Katharine Hepburn, and John Howard during the filming of *The Philadelphia Story*.

Krampner, Jon. *The Man in the Shadows: Fred Coe and the Golden Age of Television*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1997.