

THE SEARCH FOR CANADA'S GAME SHOWS

12 Half Hour Documentary Episodes

Canada was once a breeding ground for beloved game shows. Now, game shows produced in Canada are few and far between. So, what happened to Canada's game shows? And will Canada one day return to being a creator of original and popular game shows in the numbers they once were?

Search for Canada's Game Shows is a journey across Canada to learn more about these shows and their impact and features interviews with the producers, hosts and broadcasters who pioneered them.

EPISODE 1: How It All Started

This episode explores the history of game shows and how the demise of the US game show industry presented a massive opportunity for Canadian producers and talent. "Behind every Canadian game show, there's a story," teases game show director and creator Sidney M. Cohen. One of the country's early hits, "Front Page Challenge," a news-based show, aired on CBC from 1957 to 1995. The show featured a panel of experts who would try and figure out who the mystery guest was. Famous guests included everyone from Gordie Howe and Malcolm X to a tipsy Sarah Churchill.

EPISODE 2: Hosts Who Reached the Top

This episode dives into Canada's vast talent of exceptionally successful game show hosts. We examine two of history's most prominent, Monty Hall, who paved the way for modern decision-making game shows with "Let's Make a Deal" and Alex Trebek's journey to becoming one of Canada's most beloved game show hosts long before "Jeopardy."

EPISODE 3: Peaks and Pitfalls

Episode three examines the highs and lows of Canada's game show history, and why much of the early video footage no longer exists. One of these shows having very little footage remaining is "Definition," which ran from 1974 to 1989 had contestants competing to solve a series of puzzles— hosted by one of Canada's most iconic hosts, Jim Perry.

EPISODE 4: Major 80's Hits

This installment of the series dives into what makes a great game show and how Canada innovated in the game show space. The 70s ended with "The Mad Dash," created by Sidney M. Cohen. The show featured a life-size game board that became a hit at home and internationally. The episode also looks at "Talk About" in the late 80s with Wayne Cox as its host and "Bumper Stumpers," with gregarious host Al Dubois.

EPISODE 5: Blair Murdoch and the West Coast

This episode explores some of the most fondly remembered shows from the 80s and 90s and the man responsible for bringing many of them to life - Blair Murdoch. Murdoch set his sights on a younger audience after working on the Canadian adaptation of "Let's Make a Deal" and "Pitfall." "Kidstreet" tested siblings on how well they knew each other while competing against two different teams. Murdoch also produced "Love Handles," a twist on "The Newlywed Game," which featured couples in all stages of their relationships and also broke ground for featuring same-sex couples.

EPISODE 6: Game Shows Go YTV

Episode six explores the dawning of YTV and two of its most popular game shows. For kids growing up in the early 90s without the Internet, video games were life, making "Video & Arcade Top 10" such an after-school must-see for 17 years.

"Uh Oh!" aired from 1997 to 2003 and secured its iconic status by being one of the strangest game shows of all time. As host Wink Yahoo, Scott Yaphe brought the show to life, known for his wacky jackets and sky-high hair. But kids being doused with green slime made the show ... slimy.



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EPISODE 7: Stars Born on Game Shows

It's no secret that Canadian comedic icon Howie Mandell is a prominent figure in the Game Show genre, having been host and guest on many successful multi-season hits. This episode tells Howie's story, not only how he got started and why he loves this genre so much, but also his great pride for being a big part of Canadian talent success. Believe it or not, Stephen Page of the Bare Naked Ladies got his start on the game show scene. And finally, in this episode, we explore the wild success of the wacky Test Pattern.

EPISODE 8: The Evolution of Game Shows

In this episode, we focus on "Just Like Mom" and its modern counterpart, "Just Like Mom & Dad," and see how modernizing the series is a way to keep their spirit alive while being current for new audiences. New formats are now competing with prime-time TV, meaning huge ratings. We breakdown how "Canada's Smartest Person" had pushed the boundaries of game shows at a time when new formats were rare in Canada. Our resident TV pop culture expert Theresa Kowall-Shipp says, "At the turn of the millennium, reality TV was born. Suddenly singing, cooking, and simply existing became worthy of competition." We take you on a whirlwind ride featuring complex challenges and fierce competitiveness, leading to huge rewards.

EPISODE 9: The Focus on Food

A game show's theme can be spinning a wheel to running around a giant daisy searching for love. But it seems that one theme is at the top of everyone's menu - food. We look at serious cooking competitions: how they started, why they're successful, and talk with some of their producers and the celebrity chefs they've created, such as Top Chef Nicole Gomes. But all are serious with big stakes, with some focusing on having a little more fun. "Supermarket Sweep" is a cherished classic game where looting a grocery store is the objective, and not crashing into people is the goal. Kid cooking shows such as "Surprise! It's Edible Incredible!" amp up the fun! and entertain audiences with gross antics while educating them about nutritional facts.

EPISODE 10: Comedy in Game Shows

Canada has long been known as a significant exporter of comedy. From Colin Mochrie and Howie Mandell to Catherine O'Hara and Russell Peters, some of the biggest names in comedy are homegrown talent. We'll explore how reality competition shows cater their international formats to be funnier here in Canada and how comedy and game shows go hand in hand.

Some of the most fabulous hosts are comedians, and mastering the art of improv can make a host stand out in the unpredictable world of games where contestants can be unruly, nervous, or just plain dull. Darrin Rose, the host of "Match Game" in Canada, explains how they successfully made the show modern while keeping its nostalgic 60's roots.

EPISODE 11: PRIZES

Why do people compete on game shows? Is it to snag the prize, or is it for the thrill of the game? In this episode, we look at formats that offer not just money but opportunities that can jumpstart the contestant's careers, such as the beloved "Dragons' Den." And then there are shows such as "Are you Smarter than a 5th Grader" that not only offer substantial cash prizes but legit bragging rights. We meet with Andrew Oster, Canada's most significant money winner, on "Are you Smarter than a 5th Grader," and he explains that while the money was excellent, his ability to brag to his kids that he must be more intelligent than them was worth its weight in gold.

EPISODE 12: THE FUTURE OF GAME SHOWS

The final episode in the series looks at the current trends in game shows such as "Car-Car-Truck" and "Big Time Live," where audience interaction at home can influence the game being played on new platforms such as Twitch.

Despite all the new bells and whistles of online interactivity, we look at how everything old is new again with a fresh take for the 21st century. We ask our guests to speculate on the future of games, where one day soon, we may be playing game shows on the moon! It sounds strange, but who knows?