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Make a date with "Peanuts"

■ Good grief! Hallowed era passes as holiday specials fade

By David Bianculli
New York Daily News

(KRT) When the animated TV special "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown" is repeated Thursday night at 8 ET, it will not be shown by CBS, the network that presented the "Peanuts" Halloween cartoon for the first time in 1966 and has aired it annually since. It will be televised by ABC.

Between now and the end of the year, "A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving" and the animated holiday genre's ultimate classic, "A Charlie Brown Christmas," will be on ABC, too.

CBS, after restoring them a few years ago, let Charles Schulz's most famous TV specials defect to ABC, whose Disney owners know the value of cherished, family-based animation.

It's not quite the end of an era, but it is another sign that we are taking some of our cultural television treasures for granted and certainly are doing nothing to replace them.

As late as the mid-1970s, before the advent of home VCRs, television was the only way to enjoy certain TV treats, and their annual broadcasts were major events.

For example, in the '70s, reruns of "The Wizard of Oz" routinely ranked among the top movie telecasts each year. And live and taped broadcasts of Mary Martin in "Peter Pan," though not annual events, were eagerly anticipated specials.

Around the holidays, so were "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," "Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol" and other family fare — repeated over enough years to make them TV institutions. The classic movie "It's a Wonderful Life" — first an exclusive, then ubiquitous, now exclusive again — continues to draw loyal audiences.

But when it comes to television specials that still qualify as appointment television, there are fewer of them all the time.

Home-video availability, cable-universe competition and multi-set TV households explain part of it. The rest of the dip in the appeal of holiday TV specials is explained by a familiar yet pertinent phrase: They just don't make 'em like they used to.

Watching "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown" today is a warming, almost foreign, experience. The animation is crude, even in the set-piece action sequence in which Snoopy, atop his doghouse, imagines himself as a World War I flying ace in a dogfight (so to speak) with Germany's

Red Baron.

Vince Guaraldi's musical score, some of it lifted and slightly rearranged from "A Charlie Brown Christmas," is jazzy and mature.

And the plot, such as it is, has a bunch of preschoolers interacting on Halloween night — making costumes, hunting for candy and, in the case of Linus, waiting loyally for an appearance by the Great Pumpkin.

"On Halloween night," Linus explains, "the Great Pumpkin rises out of his pumpkin patch and flies through the air with his bag of toys for all the children."

He rises each year, Linus adds, from the pumpkin patch "he feels is the most sincere," prompting the sole true believer Linus to forgo the collection of Halloween candy in lieu of his eventually lonely vigil.

Is Linus rewarded for his unshaken faith? Not this year — but that doesn't shake him either, which makes this special so sensitive and impressive.

Has anything made for children for the holidays in the last decade been as resonant as these Halloween and Christmas "Peanuts" specials? Not even close. Don't take them for granted, even if some of the networks do.

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Agate Hall

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but said she's "kind of a ham." Davidson said her music has "tinges of hippiness." Hazard saved his best musical praise for Mirah.

"I like her because she captures a lot of awkwardness," he said.

Mirah said she writes "self-help" songs for herself simply because she enjoys doing it. She said most of her songs are metaphors for life and the immediate things she experiences. She doesn't think much about the future, and when asked where she was going, she replied, "I'm going to Salt Lake City right now."

Dear Nora and Mirah have been touring together around the West Coast since Oct. 16, and Mirah said all the shows have been good. A personal highlight for her was getting to

play inside a volcano crater near Flagstaff, Ariz., for a family friend's wedding.

Mirah said she usually plays smaller venues or house shows instead of large shows such as the one on Friday. Mirah's last visit to Eugene, in the spring, was a small house show.

"It was, like, the best house show I've ever done," she said.

Mirah appreciates venue variety. "It is good," she said, "to play in volcanoes, basements and colleges."

Mirah recently released a five-song LP, "Small Sale," though not all the tunes on it are new. Some of the songs were previously recorded on a cassette, "parts of human desire," which is now out of print. Some of the songs on that recording were included in her CD "you think it's like this but really it's like this,"

(she said the title came to her while swimming in a lake), but Mirah said she wanted the other songs to be made available.

"Small Sale" is an interlude before the release of Mirah's new album in March. She said most of the songs she has been performing have been from those two recordings.

On her recordings, Mirah pairs up with other friends and artists to add additional elements to her songs beyond guitar and vocals. But when she performs, she usually plays solo.

"I write the songs by myself, so when I play them live in that fashion, it's the truest form they can be," she said.

The show starts at 9 p.m. and tickets are \$6 for general admission and \$5 with student identification.

Mason West is the senior Pulse reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald. He can be reached at masonwest@dailyemerald.com.

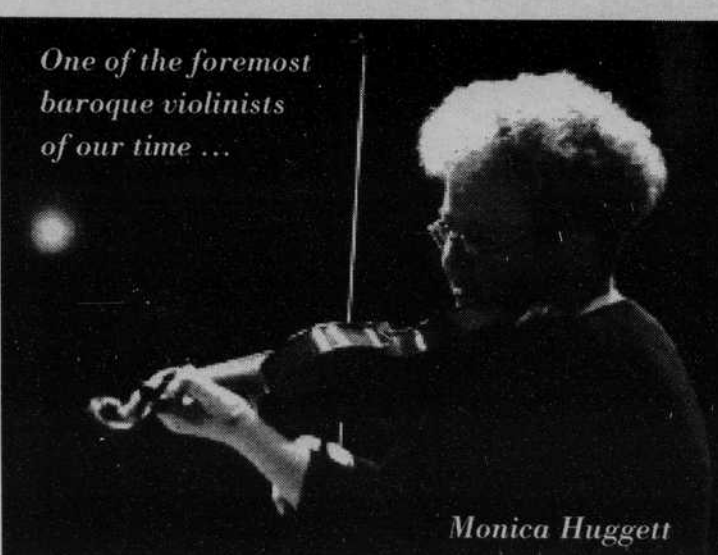
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