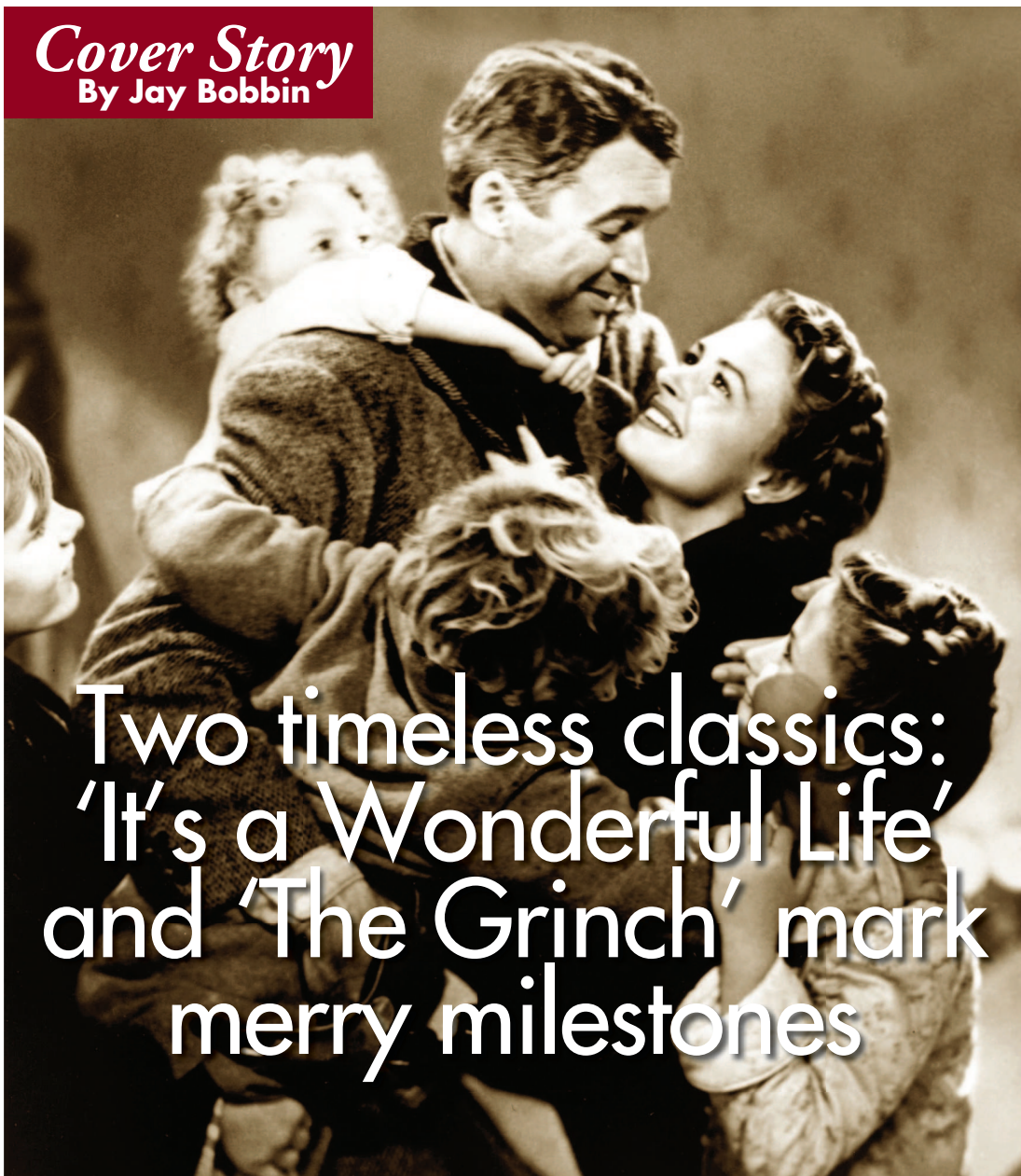


Cover Story

By Jay Bobbin



Two timeless classics: 'It's a Wonderful Life' and 'The Grinch' mark merry milestones

OTHER AIRINGS: USA NETWORK - DEC. 10 AT 8 P.M.; DEC. 11 AT 9 A.M.; DEC. 16 AT 8 P.M.

This holiday season is offering its television traditions, and two of them are marking milestones.

The movie classic "It's a Wonderful Life" will get its two traditional NBC airings – the first on Saturday, Dec. 3, and the other in its long-familiar slot on Christmas Eve, Dec. 24 (both at 8 p.m. ET) – and this year marks the 70th anniversary of its theatrical release. The animated "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" falls a few years short of that, but its still-very-significant 50th "birthday" will continue to be celebrated when NBC (its current network, though it's moved around) shows it again Friday, Dec. 23 (8 p.m. ET).

Countless people cite director Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life" as their favorite Christmas movie ever, but a major irony is that Capra reportedly was disappointed by the initial response from critics and audiences at the end of 1946 into 1947. Many reviewers seemed to sneer at its sentimentality, and though its box-office gross was reasonable for the time (\$3.3 million), original distributor RKO ended up taking a loss on it. And though it received six Oscar nominations, it won only one of the awards, for its technical simulation of falling snow; however, Capra did receive a Golden Globe for it as best director.

Television would play a huge role in cementing the legend of ne'er-do-well George Bailey (played, of course, by James Stewart) and the assist he gets from novice angel Clarence (Henry Travers) in seeing how life would have been for his loved ones and neighbors in Bedford Falls if he'd never existed. The picture fell out of copyright in the mid-1970s, and for the ensuing 20 years, any TV outlet could show it without having to pay for the rights to do so. Thus, virtually every hour on the hour from Christmas Eve into Christmas Day, "It's a Wonderful Life" was starting somewhere on the dial.

That changed in 1993, when Republic Pictures proved it had the screen rights to "The Greatest Gift," the Philip Van Doren Stern short story on which the movie was based. Through that, the studio got ownership of "It's a Wonderful Life" and struck a deal with NBC for yearly airings, which sometimes have involved testimonials by current network stars about the film, though it often is allowed to speak for itself by being aired without any embellishment.

The show must go on

While filming, a crew member dropped a giant piece of equipment but the cameras kept rolling and the actors carried on. The resulting scene is where a drunk Uncle Billy yells, "I'm all right, I'm alllll right!" after supposedly clambering into some garbage cans off-screen. Now that's some great impromptu acting!



Who said that?



"Look, Daddy. Teacher says, 'Every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings.'"

– Zuzu Bailey



"What is it you want, Mary? What do you want? You want the moon? Just say the word and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down. Hey. That's a pretty good idea. I'll give you the moon, Mary."

– George Bailey

As seen on ...

Commercials are constantly flashing in front of us and are one of the top advertising vehicles used today but product placement was even popular in 1946. Vaseline, Coca-Cola, Sweet Caporal, Bayer Aspirin and various cigarette brands were all prominently placed in Mr. Gower's drugstore to catch the eye of the viewers.

