

The Top 10 Christmas TV Episodes Of All Time

BY DIANE WERTS
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Christmas TV episodes are a living thing, or a moving target, depending on your point of view. New ones are always airing, and your own perspective on the holiday changes, too.

So a personal Top 10 feels ephemeral. Recently revisiting those I chose a few years back for my book "Christmas on Television," I found myself less enchanted with several, more enamored of others, and wondering whether newer shows were ready to join the best-ever list.

Or whether a best-ever list made sense at all, considering how some folks love sentiment while others prefer seasonal sub-version, and those preferences don't always intersect.

In other words, here's my Top 10 Christmas episodes list, as of today, starting with subversion and moving into sentiment. Unless, of course, my mood shifts while I'm writing. (All are available on DVD, with other viewing options noted below.)

1. "The Jack Benny Program" (1960, CBS) This one has topped my list since the first time I saw it. The legendary penny-pincher goes Christmas shopping in a department store and slowly, inevitably drives a counter clerk (played by cartoon voice king Mel Blanc) quite palpably insane. The ending is so shocking (but hilarious!), sitcom today couldn't get away with it.

2. "Married... With Children" (1987/1989, Fox) It's a tie! The first holiday episode of this anti-"Cosby Show" had Santa land (hard) in the Bundys' back yard, prompting a Christmas coroner's visit. In the next one, scream-bloody-murder comic Sam Kinison played Al's guardian angel, "It's a Wonderful Life"-style, showing what the family's life would like without their sad-sack husband/dad — happy! ("It's a Bundayful Life" airs Sunday 5-6 a.m. on TBS, also Dec. 24 at 10 p.m. on Antenna TV.)

3. "Green Acres" (1966, CBS) Eddie Albert's exiled city guy seeks an old-fashioned Christmas, while his rustic neighbors all want modern gear like fake trees with sap squirters — Arnold the Pig loves them. Mindbendingly surreal. (Watch on Hulu.com.)

4. "Becker" (2000, CBS) Ted Danson's holiday hater throws out his back while shopping and lives his worst nightmare laid out in a syrupy store display. (Check Reelz channel listings for "Dr. Angry Head.")

5. "Seinfeld" (1997, NBC) Festivus! The anti-holiday alternative of George's dad (Jerry Stiller) involves aluminum poles and airings of grievances.

6. "Northern Exposure" (1991, CBS) The Alaska town's raven pageant brings together Christians, Jews and animists. Emmy winner for drama writing.

7. "My So-Called Life" (1997, ABC) Claire Danes' angst teen tries to help her kicked-out gay pal and a mysterious homeless girl. Gritty yet angelic. (Watch on Hulu, Netflix.)

8. "The West Wing" (1999, NBC) Richard Schiff's Toby is moved to action when he learns a homeless Vietnam vet died wearing a coat he'd donated to Goodwill. Emmy winner for drama writing.

9. "Little House on the Prairie" (1974, NBC) Ingalls family members make "Gift of the Magi" sacrifices to buy each other frontier Christmas gifts. (Watch Dec. 17 at 2 p.m. on hard-to-find channel INSP.)

10. "All in the Family" (1977, CBS) Christmas on this landmark controversy-com took on topical issues like job loss, draft dodging, divorce and even losing touch with God. That last one may have been the best, with atheist Mike helping despondent Edith find her faith again. (Eight episodes air Dec. 24-25 on Antenna TV with "Edith's Crisis of Faith" Christmas night at 8-9 p.m.)

MONDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT																DECEMBER 10, 2012								
	3:00	3:30	4:00	4:30	5:00	5:30	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30	12:00	12:30	1:00	1:30		
BROADCAST STATIONS	PBS KUSD 2 (8 2)	Arthur (DVS) WordGirl (DVS)	Wild Kratts 5	The Electric Company	Martha Speaks	Nightly Business Report	PBS NewsHour (N) (In Stereo)	Antiques Roadshow (Orlando, Florida) Rare photo. 8	Market Warriors	Flea market in Pasadena, Calif. 9	Independent Lens Community recycles trash. (Subtitled) 10	New Red Green	BBC World News	Charlie Rose (N) (In Stereo) 11	Tavis Smiley (N) 12	Chefs on Duty	Antiques Roadshow (Orlando, Florida) Rare photo. 13							
KTIV 4 (4 4)	Jeff Probst Sh.	Ellen DeGeneres	News 4	News	News 4	Ent	The Voice (N) 8	Take It All 9	Michael Bublé: Home for the Holidays (N) 10	KDOL News (N) 11	Jay Leno	Jimmy Fallon	Daily	News 4	Extra									
NBC KDOL 5 (5 5)	The Doctors (In Stereo) 8	Judge Judy (N) 9	The Dr. Oz Show	News	ABC News	Inside	The Voice 4 artists perform; Michael Bublé (N) 8	Take It All Contestants vie for prizes. (In Stereo) 9	Michael Bublé: Home for the Holidays (N) 10	KDOL News (N) 11	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno (N) (In Stereo) 12	Late Night With Jimmy Fallon (N) (In Stereo) 13	Last Call With Carson Daly	ABC World News	(Off Air)									
KCAU 9 (6 9)	Dr. Phil 8	The Dr. Oz Show	News	ABC News	Inside	Extreme Makeover	Extreme Makeover	Castle 9	Castle 10	Castle Investigating a weathercaster's death. 11	Newsnight	Jimmy Kimmel Live 12	Best Gift	Inside	ABC World News									
CBS KELO 11 (3 11)	Dr. Phil (In Stereo) 8	The Dr. Oz Show (In Stereo) 9	News	CBS Evening News	News	Entertainment Tonight (N) 8	How I Met Your Mother	The Big Bang Theory	2 Broke Girls (N) 9	2 Broke Girls (N) 10	Hawaii Five-0 McGarrett and a girl are taken hostage. 11	Late Show With David Letterman (N) (In Stereo) 12	The Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson (N) (In Stereo) 13	The Insider (N) 14	Up to the Minute (N) 15									
ABC KSFY 13 (7 13)	Jeopardy! 8	Be a Millionaire	The Ellen DeGeneres Show (N) (In Stereo) 9	KSFY News at 5 (N) 10	ABC World News	KSFY News at 6 (N) 11	Wheel of Fortune (N) 12	Jeopardy! Mother 13	Extreme Makeover: Home Edition "Friday Family Part 1" 14	Extreme Makeover: Home Edition "Friday Family Part 2" 15	Castle Investigating a weathercaster's death. 16	Nightline (N) 17	Jimmy Kimmel Live (N) (In Stereo) 18	Paid Program 19	Extra (N) 20	Best Gift Ever! 21	DermaWand 22							
KMEG 13 (13 6)	The Doctors 8	Jdg Judy Jdg Judy	KMEG 14	CBS	Jeopardy	Wheel	Mother	Big Bang Theory	Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (N) 8	Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (N) 9	Castle Investigating a weathercaster's death. 10	Nightline (N) 11	Jimmy Kimmel Live (N) (In Stereo) 12	Paid Program 13	Extra (N) 14	Best Gift Ever! 15	DermaWand 16							
FOX KTTW 21 (9 7)	Steve Harvey (In Stereo) 8	Anderson Live (N) (In Stereo) 9	America's Funniest Home Videos (In Stereo) 10	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	America's Funniest Home Videos (In Stereo) 8	America's Funniest Home Videos (In Stereo) 9	The Office "The Surplus" 10	Dish Nation (N) 11	Friends 12	Friends 13	Baggage 14	Mauzy Results of pater- nity tests. 15	Excused 16	Excused 17						
KLKN 97	The Dr. Oz Show	Dr. Phil 8	News	ABC News	Ent	Extreme Makeover	Extreme Makeover	Castle 9	Castle 10	Castle Investigating a weathercaster's death. 11	Newsnight	Jimmy Kimmel Live 12	Katie 13	ABC World News										
KPHN 99 (12 8)	Ellen DeGeneres	First Four	Jeopardy	10/11	CBS News	Wheel	American "Big Bang Theory"	Broke	Hawaii Five-0 (N) 8	Hawaii Five-0 (N) 9	News Office	Office	30 Rock	Mother	Mother	Life To J. Meyer	Celebration	Joni L.	Reflec					
KSCB 97	Arthur	Winston	Duplantis	Gary	Salvation	Creflo P. Stone	J. Hagee	Parsley	Jon L. Celebration	Duplantis	Alive	Van Impe	Copeland	Anita	Christmas Served?	(Off Air)								
KSNL 99 (12 8)	Arthur	Martha	Wild	WordGirl	Curious	PBS NewsHour (N)	Mystery	Electric	PBS NewsHour (N)	Antiques Roadshow	Market Warriors	Keep Up	Keep Up	Ballykissangel 8	Globe Trekker (Off Air)									
KXNE 8	Curious	Super	Arthur	WordGirl	Wild	Electric	PBS NewsHour (N)	Antiques Roadshow	Market Warriors	Keep Up	Keep Up	Ballykissangel 8	Globe Trekker (Off Air)											
PAY CHANNELS	HBO 17 (46)	*** "The Art of Getting By" (2011) 8	*** "Tower Heist" (2011, Comedy) Ben Stiller, Eddie Murphy (In Stereo) 9	*** "William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet" 10	*** "Love & Other Drugs" (2010) Matt 11	*** "Hop" (2011) Voices of James Marsden, (In Stereo) 12	*** "Parenthood" (1989) Steve Martin. 13	*** "Wanderlust" (2012) 14	*** "Busty Housewives" (2009) 15	*** "The Pool Boys" (2009) 16	*** "The Mechanic" (2011) Bruno 17	*** "Drive Angry" (2011) Nicolas Cage. 18	*** "LAFMOBB" 19	*** "Pirates II: Stagnetti's" 20	Dead 21									
HBO2	*** "The Terminal" (2004) (In Stereo) 8	*** "The Adjustment Bureau" (2011) Matt Damon, Emily Blunt. (In Stereo) 9	*** "The Crossing Guard" (1995) 10	*** "The Other Woman" (2009) 11	*** "The School of Rock" (2003) 12	*** "Loosies" (2011) 13	*** "Cocktail" (1988) 14	*** "50/50" (2011) (In Stereo) 15	*** "Red Tails" (2012) Cuba Gooding Jr. The U.S. military forms the first all-black aerial-combat unit. 16	*** "Answers to Nothing" 17	*** "Dream House" (2011) Daniel Craig. 18	*** "Lake Placid" (1999) 19												
MAX 420	*** "Rising Sun" (1993) Sean Connery. 8	*** "The Crossing Guard" (1995) 9	*** "The Other Woman" (2009) 10	*** "The School of Rock" (2003) 11	*** "Loosies" (2011) 12	*** "Cocktail" (1988) 13	*** "50/50" (2011) (In Stereo) 14	*** "Red Tails" (2012) Cuba Gooding Jr. The U.S. military forms the first all-black aerial-combat unit. 15	*** "Answers to Nothing" 16	*** "Dream House" (2011) Daniel Craig. 17	*** "Lake Placid" (1999) 18													
MAX2	Breakin' 8	*** "Rising Sun" (1993) Sean Connery. 9	*** "The Crossing Guard" (1995) 10	*** "The Other Woman" (2009) 11	*** "The School of Rock" (2003) 12	*** "Loosies" (2011) 13	*** "Cocktail" (1988) 14	*** "50/50" (2011) (In Stereo) 15	*** "Red Tails" (2012) Cuba Gooding Jr. The U.S. military forms the first all-black aerial-combat unit. 16	*** "Answers to Nothing" 17	*** "Dream House" (2011) Daniel Craig. 18	*** "Lake Placid" (1999) 19												
SHOW 18 (435)	Wisegirls 8	*** "Panic" (2000) 9	*** "The Crossing Guard" (1995) 10	*** "The Other Woman" (2009) 11	*** "The School of Rock" (2003) 12	*** "Loosies" (2011) 13	*** "Cocktail" (1988) 14	*** "50/50" (2011) (In Stereo) 15	*** "Red Tails" (2012) Cuba Gooding Jr. The U.S. military forms the first all-black aerial-combat unit. 16	*** "Answers to Nothing" 17	*** "Dream House" (2011) Daniel Craig. 18	*** "Lake Placid" (1999) 19												
SHOW2	*** "Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten" 8	*** "The Crossing Guard" (1995) 9	*** "The Other Woman" (2009) 10	*** "The School of Rock" (2003) 11	*** "Loosies" (2011) 12	*** "Cocktail" (1988) 13	*** "50/50" (2011) (In Stereo) 14	*** "Red Tails" (2012) Cuba Gooding Jr. The U.S. military forms the first all-black aerial-combat unit. 15	*** "Answers to Nothing" 16	*** "Dream House" (2011) Daniel Craig. 17	*** "Lake Placid" (1999) 18													
TMC	*** "Bodyguards and Assassins" (2009) 8	*** "The Crossing Guard" (1995) 9	*** "The Other Woman" (2009) 10	*** "The School of Rock" (2003) 11	*** "Loosies" (2011) 12	*** "Cocktail" (1988) 13	*** "50/50" (2011) (In Stereo) 14	*** "Red Tails" (2012) Cuba Gooding Jr. The U.S. military forms the first all-black aerial-combat unit. 15	*** "Answers to Nothing" 16	*** "Dream House" (2011) Daniel Craig. 17	*** "Lake Placid" (1999) 18													
CABLE STATIONS	A&E 57 (41)	The First 48 8	The First 48 9	The First 48 10	Hoarders 11	Hoarders 12	Hoarders (N) 13	Intervention (N) 14	Intervention "Kelly" 15	Hoarders 16	Hoarders 17	Hoarders 18	Hoarders 19	Intervention 20										
AMC 41 (54)	"Color of Money" 8	*** "Miracle" (2004) Kurt Russell, Patricia Clarkson. 9	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 10	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 11	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 12	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 13	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 14	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 15	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 16	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 17	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 18	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 19	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 20	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 21	*** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) 22									
ANPL 19 (43)	Pit Bulls-Parole	The Haunted 8	Monsters Inside Me	Life: Reborn (N)	Frontier Earth	Blue Planet: Seas	Blue Planet: Seas	Frontier Earth	Blue Planet: Seas	Blue Planet: Seas	Life: Reborn	Life: Reborn	Life: Reborn	Life: Reborn	Life: Reborn									
BRAVO 25 (55)	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.	Real Housewives/Atl.									
CMTV 38 (77)	Rose. 8	Rose. 9	Rose. 10	Rose. 11	Rose. 12	Rose. 13	Rose. 14	Rose. 15	Rose. 16	Rose. 17	Rose. 18	Rose. 19	Rose. 20	Rose. 21	Rose. 22									
CNBC 53 (52)	Closing Bell	Fast Money (N)	Mad Money (N)	The Kudlow Report	Anderson Cooper	Piers Morgan	Anderson Cooper	Piers Morgan	Anderson Cooper	Piers Morgan	Anderson Cooper	Piers Morgan	Anderson Cooper	Piers Morgan	Anderson Cooper									
CNN 33 (49)	The Situation Room (N)	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs									
COM 45 (61)	Comedy Futurama	Futurama	Sunny	Sunny	Tosh.0	Colbert	Daily	Work. 8	Key 9	Tosh.0 10	Tosh.0 11	Tosh.0 12	Tosh.0 13	Tosh.0 14	Tosh.0 15									
CSPAN 49 (17)	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs	Public Affairs									
DISC 34 (44)	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper	American Chopper									
DISN 64 (36)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good									
DISXD 65 (68)	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats	Lab Rats									
EITV 51 (62)	True Hollywood	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi	Nicki Mi									
ENC 480	"Ace Ventura: Nature Calls" 8	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 9	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 10	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 11	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 12	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 13	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 14	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 15	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 16	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 17	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 18	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 19	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 20	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 21	*** "The Bridges of Madison County" (1995) 22									
ESPN 28 (24)	NFL Live (N) 8	Around	Pardon	SportsCenter	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 9	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 10	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 11	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 12	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 13	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 14	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 15	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 16	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 17	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 18	NBA Basketball New York Knicks at Brooklyn Nets. 19									
ESPN2 29 (25)	EPL Soccer	NFL Live (N) 8	NFL Live (N) 9	NFL Live (N) 10	NFL Live (N) 11	NFL Live (N) 12	NFL Live (N) 13	NFL Live (N) 14	NFL Live (N) 15	NFL Live (N) 16	NFL Live (N) 17	NFL Live (N) 18	NFL Live (N) 19	NFL Live (N) 20	NFL Live (N) 21									
EWNT 74 (65)	Rosary	The Friar	Tru3 (In	Portraits	At Last	SportCtr	Pardon	SportsNation	College Football Bowl Mania Special (N) 8	S														