The Ideology of Liveness, Theatricality, and the Star Persona: Vincent Price on Television, 1950s-1960s

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FTV 298A: Researching the UCLA Film and Television Archive

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March 24th, 2024

In 1935, a twenty-four-year-old man from St. Louis, Missouri appeared opposite Helen Hayes in a production of *Victoria Regina* at Broadhurst Theatre in New York City. The critical success garnered from this performance would launch Vincent Leonard Price, Jr. on an extensive and celebrated acting career on stage, screen, and television. For over sixty years, Price could be found in every corner of the creative arts, regardless of genre, scope, or scale. In 1938, he made his screen debut as a leading man in Universal's *Service De Luxe*. Early fan magazines proclaimed he was destined for stardom and could be a valuable screen asset.[1] His foray into the horror genre trickled in throughout his career starting with his role in *The Invisible Man Returns* (1940). Over the course of the decade, he would play an eclectic group of characters on film with an increasing number of antagonists in the mix. By 1946, he was asked in an interview if he would be settling down into playing villains in movies, to which he denied.[2] Yet, he would find himself playing the "heavy" more and more in film noir, thriller, and horror.[3] With the latter, Price latched on to the often fantastical elements of the genre, attracted to the chance to make the unbelievable believable. The association with horror truly stuck with his collaboration with director William Castle throughout the 1950s and the series of Roger Corman-directed films Price starred in for American International Pictures (AIP) beginning in 1960. His beloved horror films would transition his star persona from a variable character actor into that of a leading genre icon.

Today, Vincent Price's legacy is defined by monikers such as "The King of Horror" or "The Master of the Macabre." While these titles are rightfully earned, Price purposely composed

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[1] "Hollywood (1939)," Lantern Media History Digital Library, Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Fawcett Publications, Inc., January 1939, https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/hollywood28fawc_0041; "Screenland (Nov 1938-Apr 1939)," Lantern Media History Digital Library, Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, [New York, Affiliated Magazines, etc.], https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/screenland38unse_0284.

[2] Anne Seymour Papers, f.15, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[3] A "heavy" refers to the colloquial term derived from the theater to describe a tragic, serious, or villainous role character that drives the plot.

his career to be as expansive as possible, joyously working in every means of expression that kept him busy and engaged. He told gossip columnist Hedda Hopper in 1956, "that is the key to happiness–if you keep active in theater, TV, pictures–move around in different media. I want this to be my whole life–I don't want to quit ever."[4] Nevertheless, his world was bigger than acting. To him, life was an art.[5] He filled his time off-screen being an art collector, lecturer, and author, writing and significantly contributing to the fields of art history and culinary arts. These external aspects of his personal interests worked in cohesion with his acting career and were often most visible in his multitude of television appearances. The medium gave him a platform to express his interests and challenge his star persona during both a transitional time for the industry and for his multifaceted career. TV was not simply a fleeting moment in Price's profession, but an aspect of performance deeply ingrained and reflexive of his life. With great frequency, he was a repeat performer on countless programs, sometimes starring in shows three to five times. He appeared on a sleuth of anthology, variety, panel, and quiz shows playing varied characters or a derivative of himself. Much of this content exists in a low-quality state or is not easily accessible or unavailable to view as a result of being solely within archival institutions or all together lost. Due not only to the ephemerality of television, but the inaccessibility of it as well, Price's TV appearances are largely left out of his career canon and, as a result, are only traces within the legacy he holds today. As an understudied site, foregrounding Vincent Price on television allows for tracking, expanding, and redefining this star persona. Further, by curating a collection profile with titles from the 1950s and 1960s, his career trajectory can be mapped across mediums, industrial shifts, and personal events and other pursuits. The purpose here is not to reject his widely accepted horror legacy, but to add depth to his work as performer, consider the nuances of

[4] Hedda Hopper papers, f. 2667, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
[5] David Levecke, "Bert Newton Interviews Vincent Price," YouTube video, 32:47, January 31, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxH5uMbfldI.

his personal life within his professional life, and conduct an examination of his performance style as a fundamental aspect of his career and personality.

Key to examining the importance of Price's television career during this time requires contextualizing the Golden Age of Television and the classic network era through their programming and advertising practices constructed by industrial ideologies and driven by star power. Television history often defines the late 1940s through the 1960s as an industry built on conventions and standardization. Further scholarship examinations highlight the paradoxical tensions and struggles in the nature and purpose of the new medium in relation to national discourse.[6] The classic network era is characterized by the power and control of three vertically-integrated nationwide networks–CBS, NBC, and ABC–with their standardized, sponsor-driven programming flow.[7] The Big Three's command of televisual production and distribution shaped the landscape of the postwar nation, establishing television as a cultural institution that could communicate ideas to a wide-reaching audience. The malleable form of programming emboldened an industry attempting to create a "shared speculative reality" with "a broader set of commercial or cultural trends that [were] being drawn upon, commented upon, or manipulated."[8] Television programming functioned on a system of organization, but it was ever-changing. This was in part for economic maximization–for the purpose of profit–which could be further achieved through the asset of star power.

While there is overlap between the Golden Age of Television and the classic network era, one of the definitive differences is the presence of live versus filmed programming. During the Golden Age of Television, roughly 1947 to 1958, the industry leaned into the ideology of

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[6] Victoria E. Johnson, "The Classic Network Era in Television, " in *A Companion to the History of American Broadcasting*, ed. Aniko Bodroghkozy, (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 94.

[7] Johnson, "The Classic Network Era in Television, " 93.

[8] Michael Saenz, "Programming," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, ed. Horace Newcomb, (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 1301-1302.

"liveness." Television's live ability connected it to theater, lending it an air of prestige that set it apart from cinema. Similarly, leading up to the mid-1950s, a majority of television production took place in New York City and sourced Broadway-quality scripts from prestigious writers, further ingraining the connection between television's status and the theater. It was believed that live television, borrowing from the conventions of theatrical naturalism, would idealize higher artistic traditions that would classify the medium as legitimate.[9] Attributed to its unique technological innovation, television combined "the space-conquering powers of radio and the visual strategies of the motion picture" with "the immediacy of the live theatrical performance."[10] The live versus filmed discourse between critics, the networks, and Hollywood continued on throughout the first few decades of television history, yet filmed programs, such as *Fireside Theate*r, proved to be successful and economically viable, aiding arguments in favor. The debut of two-inch quadruplex videotape in 1956 further complicated the aesthetics and modes of television production. Many prestigious live anthology shows switched from live to filming on tape. Also stimulating the transition to the classic network era, the completion of Television City studios in Hollywood moved production westward, providing a greater opportunity for Hollywood and its actors to become involved.

Early on, television was viewed as devolution for a Hollywood film star that marked a career in decline, one marred by aging or waning relevance. As performers with "rarity and economic value," stars feared overexposure would also affect their star status. Until 1953, studios would restrict their contract players from appearing on television, assuming audiences would not show up to movie theaters if they could see stars regularly on TV at home for free.[11]

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[9] Michael Z. Newman, "Video as Television," in *Video Revolutions: On the History of a Medium* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2014), 13.

[10] William Boddy, "Live Television, Program Formats and Critical Hierarchies," in *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 80.

[11] Christine Becker, "Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 46, no. 2 (2005): 6, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41552434.

Coinciding with the 1948 Paramount Decrees effectively dismantling the studio system, many contract players were forced into freelancing. Stars could leverage their freedom to craft their careers and public images as they chose. Vincent Price remarked on freelancing in 1956 saying, "[m]ost people prefer freelancing now. It's better because you don't have to fight with anyone…It's impossible for an actor to say, "sorry, but I don't feel I can do this," even if he's genuine, he's accused of being temperamental."[12] Still, the tension between the traditional hierarchy of film stardom and the supposed downgrade of television work had to be mediated. The early television industry worked to build authenticity into its image. Live productions were capitalized upon as spaces where stars with exceptional performance skills would flourish, and as such, perpetuated the authenticity of a performer as "a marker of the medium's superiority to cinema–and thereby as a counter to its culturally derided commercial identity."[13] Though many stars were concerned with this level of immediacy or authenticity exposing the veneer of their star identity, many actors viewed television work as a welcomed challenge. Constant production cycles meant there was always work available, but that it would require the ability to work within a quick turnaround time due to "limited preparation time and only a day or two generally available for camera rehearsals."[14] The whole of the television industry worked at a rapid pace regardless of the production in order to function–as many shows did–on a weekly schedule. While the short-term commitment of TV programs was an attractive selling point for stars, it also required a sense of intention and willingness to perform within a new structure. As an example, when Vincent Price was invited to appear on the game show, *$64,000 Challenge*, he was given a one week notice.[15] For a role on *General Electric Theater,* Price commented that "[w]e did it live

[12] Hedda Hopper papers, f. 2667, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[13] Christine Becker, "The Production of New Careers: Hollywood Film Actors Move to Television," in *It's the Pictures That Got Small*, (United Kingdom: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 31.

[14] Becker, "The Production of New Careers," 31.

[15] Victoria Price, *Vincent Price: A Daughter's Biography* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2018), 198.

and I never worked so hard–from 7am to 7pm." About being the emcee for the TV show *Hollywood's Best* with Lew Ayres, he called it "a tough job" that you have to do without a script, but that "it just worked perfectly and since then I've done it again."[16]

As a part of television's commercial foundation, the preoccupation with the ideology of liveness meant not only shaping the persona of the star as natural or authentic, but the ability to improve the theater experience through the reproduction and simulation of live performance from the comfort of home. Television gave its entire audience front row seats to not just the view, but the perfect view.[17] As such, it would make sense that Vincent Price, an actor with roots in theater, would find solace in a medium that attempted to replicate the liveness of the stage and its inherent theatricality. In 1941, Price helped bring the play *Gas Light* to the Broadway stage. Retitled as *Angel Street*, he played Mr. Manningham for a year. In its final season, *NBC Matinee Theater* (1955-1958) would bring *Angel Street* to television. As another example of the pace and workload of television production, the live color show was blocked and rehearsed for six days in a rehearsal hall at 1559 North Vine Street and at Burbank Studio 2. The day of the show kicked off at 5:30am with the final airing starting at 12pm.[18] Production documents describe Mr. Manningham as "tall, good-looking, about forty-five…heavily moustached and bearded and perhaps a little too well dressed. His manner is suave and authoritative, with a touch of mystery and bitterness."[19] Price, fitting his character description nearly perfectly, reprised his top-billed role on May 9th, 1958. It was his second time appearing on *Matinee Theater*, after starring previously in "Whom Death Hath Joined Together" on April 23rd, 1956.

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[16] Hedda Hopper papers, f. 2667, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[17] Lynn Spigel, "Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourse on Television and Domestic Spaces, 1948-1955," *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992), 23.

[18] *Angel Street* Rehearsal Schedule, Collection of Scripts and Production Material for the Television Series NBC Matinee Theater (Collection 1038, Box 11). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

[19] *Angel Street* Cast List & Description of Characters, Collection of Scripts and Production Material for the Television Series NBC Matinee Theater.

The interconnectedness of theater and television would not only dominate dramatic anthologies, but also construct the success of variety comedy shows. Driven by "their kinetic acts," with the presence of a studio audience, they "produced a sense of live spontaneous action" to support the importance of authenticity.[20] Such programs could also generate a greater sense of intimacy that transcended what film could achieve. Establishing this connection between a star and their audience was accomplished through using recognizable aspects of a star's persona. These features were then used in a self-reflexive comedic manner to position performers as accessible while simultaneously still retaining a level of theatrical representation. As Christine Becker writes, "[t]his level of reflexivity has existed in television since its earliest days as a way to engender audience trust in the medium," and further trust in the performers themselves.[21] For the role as himself that Vincent Price plays in "Jack Appears on a Panel Show" of *The Jack Benny Program* (April 2nd, 1965), the episode foregrounds his art history knowledge–a factual aspect of his personal life–and conflates it with a higher level of intellectualism–contrary to Price's view that art was for everyone. However, by focusing on his interest in art rather than pulling threads from his rapidly growing horror icon status, he is rendered as a more gentle and inviting person. Stars performing as fictionalized versions of themselves drove greater audience fascination with their personas which turned out to be successful indirect advertising for the film industry. Price admits in an interview that with experiences like being the first actor on the show *What in the World?* (December 4th, 1954), he had "built up the most fantastic public from these things and [it] paid off moviewise."[22]

Vincent Price recognized the potential of television from the beginning. The medium allowed him to work frequently, creating a consistent visibility as a versatile performer and

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[20] Lynn Spigel, "Installing the Television Set," 20.
[21] Becker, "The Production of New Careers," 35.
[22] Hedda Hopper papers, f. 2667, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

personality. Supplemented by being a touring art lecturer and writer, television not only filled the gaps left by inconsistent film schedules, but contributed to changing that inconsistency. Price had roles in many of the most celebrated and notable Golden Age of Television programs. His first recorded television appearance was in 1949 as the narrator of a live broadcast adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic story, *A Christmas Carol.*[23] That same year he appeared for the first time on KTLA-originated charade game show, *Pantomime Quiz* (later known as *Stump the Stars*), after it was picked up by CBS, where he would become a regular panelist and go on to appear in ninety-four episodes between 1949 and 1963. In 1951, he performed in an episode of NBC's *Fireside Theater* titled "Torture." *Fireside Theater*'s notoriety was not only as one of the first popular filmed shows, but that it challenged the characteristics of what constituted "good television." The show was filmed on Hollywood's B-movie lots with relatively unknown actors performing stories pulled from the public domain or by unestablished writers.[24] In Summer of 1953, Vincent Price found himself getting less and less roles in film and on television. As an outspoken liberal, he got word that he had been greylisted due to being named on Senator Joseph McCarthy's list of Pre-War Anti-Nazi Sympathizers .[25] For almost a year, he got virtually no work, though he appeared on television a handful of times including in "Dream Job" of the *Hollywood Theater: Summer Theatre* (July 17, 1953), "Bullet for a Stranger" of *The Philip Morris Playhouse* (November 5th, 1953), and "Irene Dunne Show" of *The Jack Benny Program* (December 6th, 1953). Stricken by the anxiety of losing the acting career that was the center of his life, Price received advice from former assistant United States Attorney General, Mabel Walker Hildebrandt, to contact the FBI and submit to a voluntary clearance interview. In a

[23] Victoria Price writes in her biography of her father that by 1950 he had appeared in over two hundred television programs, but only a few shows (including *A Christmas Carol* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GFn2qRArls) pre-1950 are listed in his filmography on IMDb.

[24] William Lafferty, "'No Attempt at Artiness, Profundity, or Significance': 'Fireside Theater' and the Rise of Filmed Television Programming," *Cinema Journal* 27, no. 1 (1987): 23, https://doi.org/10.2307/1225322.

[25] Price, *Vincent Price: A Daughter's Biography*, 172-173.

five-page FBI document dated March 6th, 1954, Vincent Price described all his political activity and denied any connections to Communism. On September 30th, 1955, he sent a copy of the FBI document to the head of CBS in an attempt to clear himself to work for the network again.[26] That year, he appeared in the religiously themed *Crossroads* (1955-1957) and mystery anthology series *Climax!* (1954-1958). By the following year, he was cleared and back on track with his acting career. On October 4th, 1956, Price appeared in the first episode of CBS's *Playhouse 90*, the first hour-and-a-half dramatic TV series. The episode, titled "Forbidden Area," was directed by John Frankenheimer and written by Rod Serling. The show would win the 1956 Emmy for "Best New Program Series," quickly gathering critical acclaim within a few years as a prestigious television show.[27]

Also in 1956, Price would embark on a television journey that would shape the public's perception of his star persona and present him with another significant challenge involving the U.S. government. He was invited to appear on the spin-off game show *$64,000 Challenge* as a celebrity contestant on "great art & artists." Appearing in thirteen episodes of the program, Price first went up against jockey Billy Pearson and then actor Edward G. Robinson on the topic of all things art history. He tied with his competitors both times and agreed to split the $64,000 as well. The publicity from the show was monumental, capturing the public's attention nationwide in a way that inextricably linked the name of Vincent Price to art.[28] Columnist Aline Saarinen wrote in the *New York Times* that through "communicat[ing] to millions an infectious enthusiasm and an adventure-someness into modern art," Price "took art off its pedestal and showed it to be alive

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[26] Price, *Vincent Price: A Daughter's Biography*, 173-174.

[27] "Yearbook of radio and television (1957)," Lantern Media History Digital Library, Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, New York: Radio Daily Corp., 1957, https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/radioann00radi_0773.; "Motion Picture Daily," Lantern Media History Digital Library, Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Motion Picture Daily, Inc., January 10, 1958, https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/motionpicturedai83unse_0043.

[28] Price, *Vincent Price: A Daughter's Biography*, 199.

and pertinent."[29] While the show turned him into a significant force as a spokesperson for the visual arts, the integrity of quiz shows came into question. The quiz show scandals of the late 1950s revealed producers of these programs rigging the outcome in favor of some of the contestants. With their audiences around the nation feeling shocked and betrayed and with the Congressional amendment to the Communications Act of 1934, the Big Three quickly canceled their quiz shows. Amongst them was *$64,000 Challenge*. Price's winning stretch meant he was implicated in the scandals and was called up to make a statement in which he defended that he was not coached or received any answers and only wanted to educate the public on the beauty and joy of the visual arts. He further stated that he had "received letters from museum directors across the United States attesting to the fact that museum attendance had increased, as had the sales of art books and the study of art in colleges and universities."[30] Ultimately, Price emerged from the scandal hearings clean, retaining his advantageous association with the arts.

Stuck between the notable programs that helped define Vincent Price's television career are a record of appearances in unsold and unaired pilots. In 1958, prior to the three horror films they would do together in the 1960s, he co-starred with Peter Lorre in an unsold pilot of a show called *Collector's Item*. The two play art appraisers caught up in the dangerous mystery of a stolen art piece called "The Left Fist of David." Intended for CBS, it was never picked up, but represents how intertwined art as subject and artist or art collector as a character had become with Price's acting career. He harnessed the authenticity around his newly shaped star persona created by his real art knowledge and experience to continue to connect with the public who would associate him with such. The following year, he hosted the unaired pilot of a game show called *Key Witness*. The premise of the show was to test the power of observation. In the

[29] Aline B. Saarinen, "TV ART CONTEST WINS A PUBLIC: CONTRASTED ATTITUDES FLOOD OF LETTERS," *New York Times (1923-),* November 4, 1956, https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/tv-art-contest-wins-public/docview/113702597/se-2.

[30] Price, *Vincent Price: A Daughter's Biography*, 201.

program, a dramatic mystery play–featuring Price in one of the roles–is shown. Between each act, Price asks members of the audience questions about what they saw, heard, or experienced. He's jovial in his approach as host. Having played numerous roles in film noirs throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Price is also easily recognizable in his fictionalized character. His dual role as both host and performer allows him to decentralize or complicate the star persona by presenting oppositional images. He makes an appearance in a show that was possibly both unsold and unaired called *The Talk of Hollywood* from March 21st, 1968. Preserved by the UCLA Film and Television Archive, the program is hosted by Hollywood columnist Army Archerd and takes place on a soundstage restaurant set with actors having lunch. Archerd goes from table to table talking with the stars and their guests.[31] In "Pilot #1," he speaks to Vincent Price, who reflects coming back from a Broadway play that flopped and gets him to review the work of an artist who is also at the table. Once again, the program presents Vincent Price as not only an actor, but a spokesperson for the arts. Other than the UCLA Film and Television Archive's holding, no other information can be found about *The Talk of Hollywood*. It exists as a nearly invisible fragment within Price's television career, but serves as a vital example of Price's star image by the late 1960s, and further, is representative of the ephemerality of television contributing to what roles and appearances can be used to construct or deconstruct such an image.

Representative of the cultural and industrial structure of 1950s and 1960s star-driven network television and as understudied roles of Vincent Price's career canon, the following collection profile uses titles unique to the UCLA Film and Television Archive's catalog. The curated programs display importance not within threads of commonality, but within the representation of Price's fluid performance adaptation throughout the variety of programming structure, length, and genre. For character type, he can be seen bouncing between and combining

[31] Archive Research and Study Center, UCLA Film & Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.

the archetypes of the villain, the artist, the comic, and the intellectual, employing the theatricality that television supported and pulling from the traits inherent in himself. Additionally, each program holds an internal history that reflects across Price's career timeline, placing him in a moment where the televisual landscape was in flux. Videotape was relatively new, and many shows were switching from being live to being filmed. Here, we see a combination of these aspects of industry and performance, with some captured on tape and others on film. The programs selected are post-1956 (i.e. after his *$64,000 Challenge* appearances) with the latest program airing in 1965–right after his string of popular films of the AIP Corman-Poe cycle. All programs were accessed and viewed via the Archive Research and Study Center located on the campus of University of California, Los Angeles.

In “High Barrier” from CBS’s *Schlitz Playhouse* (October 10th, 1957), Vincent Price plays a meek artist controlled by his wealthy and domineering wife (Carolyn Jones), who tries to plot his death on a trip to Hawaii. The couple enlist the help of a tour guide (Jeff Richards) with whom the wife flirts openly. Price’s character becomes fascinated by a flower called the “silver sword.” Determined to draw it, he undertakes the treacherous hike, with the assistance of the guide, but fails to make it the first time. Bullied by his wife for being weak and not enough of a man, the artist runs off to prove himself on the ledge to the silver sword. At 6 '4”, Price’s imposing height has always been one of the main features in bringing a menacing presence to his roles, but here he plays a man so beaten down emotionally that the audience forgets he towers over everyone on screen. Though Price had played quite a few actors leading up to his role in this show, this is one of the first times the audience sees him play a traditional artist, and also one who is undoubtedly gentle and sensitive. It is one of the few roles in Price’s filmography that

allows him to be sympathetic and overcome the adversity his character faces, rendering it a notable entry in contrasting his legacy.

In “The Clouded Image” of CBS’s *Playhouse 90* (November 7th, 1957), a young man named Brat Farrar shows up claiming to be the presumed dead twin brother of Peter Ashby, who is set to inherit the entire fortune the twins were to split. Farley Granger plays both brothers with Judith Anderson in a guest starring role as their Aunt Bee. Price plays Alex, a struggling theater actor and longtime family friend, who shows up to question this new stranger on memories from his childhood. The young man passes the grilling with ease and Alex assures the family that this stranger is indeed the missing Ashby brother, and they accept him with open arms. Price has minimum screen time during the hour-and-a-half program, yet his character is integral to the mystery. Not a performance unfamiliar to him, the reflexivity of an actor playing an actor, and a failed one at that, foregrounds theatricality in a way that comments upon itself. When someone asks why Alex chose to be an actor, Bee responds “I suppose he thinks it’s a profession that doesn’t take a lot of work.” The reality of it becomes clear that it is indeed a lot of work and failure comes from neglecting to expend the time and energy into improving the craft. “Live from Television City in Hollywood,” this episode is the second of three appearances on *Playhouse 90* for Price. Lauded for “bringing you the works of distinguished authors brought to life by a star-studded cast,” participation in the ambitious program places him amongst those who upheld television’s higher cultural status through liveness and the immediacy of theatrical performance. *Playhouse 90*’s award-winning prestige immortalizes a pinnacle moment in the Golden Age of Television, one in which Price lent his talent to from the beginning.

In “Tennessee Ernie Meets King Arthur” of NBC’s *Ford Startime* (May 10th, 1960), Price shifts into comedic villainy as the bully Sir Bors, a Knight of King Arthur’s Round Table.

Based on Mark Twain's satirical *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Tennessee Ernie Ford is sent back in time as a part of an experiment by a group of scientists. Ford ends up in Camelot, excited to see the gallantry of the knights in person. Witnessing instead the drunken debauchery of the Round Table, he quickly finds out the stories he has heard are false. Price plays the main antagonist out to get rid of Ford permanently. Described in the script as having "coarse, overbearing features," Price leans not only into the physical exaggerated appearance of Sir Bors through his costuming and makeup, but the playful, campy theatricality of the episode's genre, production design, and cinematography.[32] Sir Bors' uncouth manners are the antithesis of Price's star persona, and further, his actual personality. In a letter written to Price after the show's taping, Ernie Ford "can't thank [him] enough for [his] spirit and cooperativeness."[33] Of all of the programs in this collection, it stands as the most straightforward depiction of the conventions of theater applied to the medium of television and the role stage acting played in Vincent Price's performance style.

In the "Run Around" of NBC's *The Chevy Mystery Show* (August 14th, 1960), Francis Rushmore, an actor, whose career is in decline (Everett Sloane), rushes to warn sleazy, loathed Hollywood agent Michael Semmes (Vincent Price) that he is going to be murdered by two hitmen. Semmes continually gives Rushmore the "run around," in an effort to not have to deal with him begging for work. As the hitmen get closer to carrying out their job, Rushmore gets more and more frantic in his attempts to see Semmes, annoying him to the point that Semmes cannot ignore him. In this live show, Vincent Price brings his specialty for villainy to a truly contemptible character. As another interesting contrast to the roles he played, scrawled between

[32] A special thanks to Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Reference Librarian Loretta Deaver for working with me and providing scans of these materials even though nothing in the Vincent Price Papers was digitized. "Ford Startime Series: Tennessee Ernie Meets King Arthur" [script], Box 188, Vincent Price Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[33] Box 188, Vincent Price Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

the margins of his script are sketches of flowers, dogs, faces, and stars–right next to his annotations of Semmes' vile lines.[34] The distinction is an almost comical reminder of the separation between the roles an actor plays and their actual personality. As it does from time to time, Hollywood draws attention to its construction by self-reflexively underscoring a plot involving aging and washed-up actors up against ruthless agents. Considering television was thought to be a space of sanctuary for actors in the margins of film stardom, the presentation is especially ironic. There is a sense the story sides with the plight of actors through Price's Michael Semmes who asks, "what does an agent need with a conscience?"[35] *The Chevy Mystery Show* is yet another program that provided Price with the opportunity of multiple appearances. A month later, he returned to host the last four episodes of the series.

In "Jack Appears on a Panel Show" of CBS's (and later NBC's) *The Jack Benny Program* (April 2nd, 1965), a spot opens up on an unscripted panel show called *Impromptu* and Jack Benny asks to fill the spot. Warned that this is a show for "intellectuals" with "brilliant conversationalists," he joins the panel composed of Dr. Joyce Brothers, Angie Dickerson, and Vincent Price, who play dramaticized versions of themselves. Benny sits in silence unable to keep up with the "intellectuals." As a character, Price leans heavily into sarcasm to poke fun at Benny and his lack of refined insight. He also lends his extensive art knowledge to the episode, talking about El Greco and the resurgence of art in society due to more cultural facilities. There is a self-referential metatextuality to his role as himself, where Vincent Price the person and the actor also constitute a character within a fictional narrative. By this point in his career, Price had finished eight horror films with Roger Corman which garnered adoration from the public internationally.[36] Yet, here he is not required to portray the horror actor, but instead the art expert.

[34] "Chevy Mystery Show, 1960" [script], Box 185, Vincent Price Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[35] Box 185, Vincent Price Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[36] Hedda Hopper papers, f. 2667, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Naturally, holding up the extension of his star identity as someone connected to the arts meant calling attention to an exaggerated sense of intellectualism that is associated with the field. Mostly, this is done to position Benny as the joke, but it also clearly marks the depiction as a theatrical representation.[37]

The preservation of television materials constitutes a history of economically driven industry modes of production and uneven, representative archival collecting practices. The television industry, with its ideology of liveness and then its adoption of reusable videotape, constructed the medium of television to have inherent ephemerality. What has been saved exists by happenstance–what was recorded, what private collectors or fans held onto–with no real distinction of choice.[38] For pre-videotape live television, the record relies on the existence of a kinescope. For shows recorded on tape, the survival of a program's content depends on the chance that it was the last show recorded on the tape before it stopped being used. Even with material that did survive the modes of industry, the ideology and aesthetics of liveness that defined the Golden Age of Television also permeated decisions of what material was deemed desirable or culturally valuable. Many archival collection practices "treated television as excess material, with the televisual medium understood as essentially another performance stage."[39] This meant that TV programs that drew on elevated theatrical traditions were more likely to be preserved. As noted, Vincent Price's television career was quite extensive. What is documented and confirmed is impressive, but the real total has proven to be countless. Many shows were lost in the ephemerality of television with some, like the episode of *The Talk of Hollywood*, only existing as a trace in an archival collection record, not listed anywhere else. While the Price

[37] Becker, "The Production of New Careers," 35.

[38] Lynn Spigel, "Our TV Heritage: Television, the Archive, and the Reasons for Preservation," in *A Companion to Television*, ed. Janet Wasko, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 92.

[39] Lauren Bratslavsky, "The Archival Value of Television in the "Golden Age" of Media Collecting," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 47, no. 2 (2017): 15, https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.2017.0037.

estate has made available a selection of his television appearances via their YouTube page, many roles are unable to be viewed.[40] Much could be garnered from the gaps in Price's television career these missing programs create, especially what types of programs were deemed to uphold elevated theatrically derived modes of production. What could be additionally pertinent is what, within the deviated and neglected programs, could reveal further about his performance style and star image.

Ironically enough, Vincent Price refused to own a TV set. It wasn't until his wife Mary bought one that television would infiltrate the domain of the TV performer's home. Television in many ways shaped Price's career, achieving what the medium set out to do with its stars: posit them as authentic people with interests and knowledge outside of the glamor of their images. While the anxiety of this vulnerability would keep the biggest names in film stardom away, it succeeded with Vincent Price because he understood the mechanisms of the television industry and approached them through the skillset of a genuine performer and person. His theatrical foundation allowed him the perfect opportunity to utilize liveness and the stage within a stage to benefit his star persona and build a more expansive career. To study Price on television is to also see the discourse early in the industry's modes of production between the Golden Age of Television and the classic network era. As a performer, Price can be found at many major points in broadcast television's history and development, extending as far as the 1980s and the multi-channel transition into the post network era. Although culturally important and encompassing a majority of his acting career, these appearances are rendered as second rate in the shadow of his horror films. This is in part because of the ephemerality of television and the taste hierarchy of early archival collection practices for TV material, but also due to the

[40] "VINTAGE TV DRAMA," The Vincent Price Legacy, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQnn3QbnUmCxjnc9Mty5-Bqp2ojSGAHa8

economic and cultural status of cinema. In order to avoid generalizing his legacy down to what is a fraction of his entire career, the researcher must consider what roles and events went into the evolution of his star persona in conjunction and outside of the film industry. In a "Sunday News" article from October 27th, 1963, it begins by mentioning his title of "The King of the Horror Movies," but goes on to say that he's really a "kindly family man," who is more interested in his hobby: art. Price is quoted saying "horror movies give me the time and money to indulge my hobby. Besides, they are loads of fun to do and loads of fun to watch."[41] His association with the horror genre may provide an accessible point into Price's career for a contemporary audience, but much can be learned about the history of the medium of television and Vincent Price by including his televisual endeavors in the canon of his legacy.

[41] Anne Seymour Papers, f.15, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

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