



What's My Line?: The Inside History of TV's Most Famous Panel Show

Gil Fates

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"Will the Mystery Guest enter and sign in please!" With these nearly-Immortal words, America's most popular, most prestigious, longest running, and most successful television game show, WHAT'S MY LINE?, ushered in the famous, near-famous, and sometimes, infamous. Movie stars, senators, film makers, generals, opera singers, governors, writers, comedians, Supreme Court justices, composers, athletes-all gathered to chitchat, exchange compliments and play games with peer notables on Sunday evenings. Now Gil Fates, the show's longtime producer, goes behind the scenes to provide an entertaining, chatty, insider's view of just what it was that made WHAT'S MY LINE? a smash success and set the precedent for all TV game shows. And in so doing, he highlights over two decades of glittering personalities. More celebrity party than game show, WHAT'S MY LINE? was truly a phenomenon. Begun in a loft above Grand Central Station with pigeons looking on from the rafters, it outlasted and outclassed all other game shows. Broadcast "live" at the same time every week, 52 weeks a year, it ran for seventeen years on the same network with no repeat broadcasts. It was slotted into Sunday nights at 10:30, an hour that audience researchers had solemnly proclaimed too late for the nation's television watchers ...but thirty million Sunday night viewers promptly proved them wrong. The program changed a nation's habits, and the accepted way to finish the weekend soon became watching WHAT'S MY LINE. Bishop Fulton Sheen, Chief Justice Earl Warren, Carol Channing, Jimmy Durante, Dorothy Kilgallen, Bennett Cerf, Arlene Francis, Steve Allen and John Daly- a veritable celebrities' Who's Who of the fifties and sixties. Filled with show-biz gossip and told with verve, style, and humor, WHAT'S MY LINE? is a unique, nostalgic, inside view of the television classic that not only paralleled the development of television, but paved the way for the current game show craze.

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