

= The Simpsons Spin @-@ Off Showcase =

" The Simpsons Spin @-@ Off Showcase " is the twenty @-@ fourth episode of the eighth season of The Simpsons . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on May 11 , 1997 . The episode centers on fictional pilot episodes of non @-@ existent television series derived from The Simpsons , and is a parody of the tendency of networks to spin off characters from a hit series . As such it includes references to many different TV series . The first fictional spin @-@ off is Chief Wiggum P.I. , a cop @-@ drama featuring Chief Wiggum and Seymour Skinner . The second is The Love @-@ matic Grampa , a sitcom featuring Moe Szyslak who receives dating advice from Abraham Simpson , whose ghost is possessing a love testing machine . The final segment is The Simpson Family Smile @-@ Time Variety Hour , a variety show featuring the Simpson family except for Lisa , who has been replaced .

The episode was written by David S. Cohen , Dan Greaney and Steve Tompkins , with Ken Keeler coming up with the story and the general idea of intentionally bad writing . It was directed by Neil Affleck , and Tim Conway , Gailard Sartain and Phil Hartman guest @-@ starred . The producers were initially uneasy about the episode , as they feared that the purposely bad writing would pass off as actual bad writing . The episode , however , now figures on several lists of the most popular Simpsons episodes .

= = Plot = =

Troy McClure hosts a television special from the museum of TV and television introducing three spin @-@ off productions , created using characters from The Simpsons . The Fox network only has three filled slots for the next season and so commissions the producers of The Simpsons to create thirty @-@ five new shows . The producers instead decided to create just three new shows .

Chief Wiggum , P.I. is a cop @-@ drama spin @-@ off and a parody of Magnum , P.I. , which follows Chief Wiggum , Ralph and Seymour Skinner . Chief Wiggum and his son Ralph move to New Orleans with Seymour Skinner as Wiggum 's sidekick . Wiggum has proclaimed that he will " clean up the city " of New Orleans , but it does not take long before he meets his nemesis , Big Daddy , who warns Wiggum to stay out of his business . Soon after , Ralph disappears and Wiggum finds Big Daddy 's calling card left behind . Wiggum manages to track Big Daddy 's ransom call to the Mardi Gras , where he briefly runs into the Simpson family , and the two chase each other to Big Daddy 's mansion in the New Orleans bayou (in reality the Louisiana governor 's mansion which Big Daddy has managed to steal) . Chief Wiggum then threatens Big Daddy with a gun , but Big Daddy counters by tossing Ralph at his father , then jumping out the window and swimming away (at an extremely slow speed , due to his weight) . Wiggum ultimately lets the villain escape , feeling that he will meet him again " each and every week , always in more sexy and exciting ways " .

The Love @-@ matic Grampa is a sitcom @-@ style television series about Moe 's love life . He receives advice from the ghost of Abraham Simpson , who was crushed by a store shelf containing cans of figs that toppled on him and subsequently " while travelling up toward Heaven ... got lost along the way " and now possesses Moe 's love tester machine . Moe ends up getting a date he meets at the bar . On Grampa 's advice he takes his date out to a French restaurant and hides the Love Tester in the bathroom so he can get advice while at the restaurant . After Kearney , Dolph and Jimbo whack the machine because it said they were gay , it malfunctions and advises Moe to tell his date that " her rump 's as big as the Queen 's , and twice as fragrant " . Moe returns with a bowl of snails dumped on his head and his dependence on the machine is revealed , so he confesses to receiving advice . His date is actually happy when she hears this , flattered that Moe would go to all that trouble for her . Grampa asks to be introduced to an attractive payphone in front of the restaurant , much to the mirth of Moe and his date .

The Simpson Family Smile @-@ Time Variety Hour is a comedy show featuring various songs and sketches in a parody of The Brady Bunch Hour . It features Homer , Marge , Bart , and Maggie . Lisa refuses to participate , but is replaced by an attractive blonde bombshell (voiced by Pamela Hayden) . After the introduction there is a sketch , where the family are portrayed as beavers living in a dam

with Tim Conway as a skunk and Homer 's boss . The show ends with a medley of songs sung by the family , Jasper Beardley and Waylon Smithers .

Troy ends the special with a look at the upcoming season of The Simpsons , filled with ridiculous plot twists , such as Homer turning Lisa into a frog using magic powers , the discovery of Bart 's two long lost identical brothers (one African American , the other a cowboy) , Selma marrying Lenny , Bumblebee Man , and Itchy (in succession) , and Homer meeting an alien named Ozmodiar whom only he can see .

= = Production = =

Ken Keeler came up with the idea for the episode from the one sentence statement : " Let 's do spin @-@ offs " . His idea was to use intentionally bad writing and " crazy plots " , which underlines their critique of spin @-@ offs in general . After he had pitched the idea it was decided that " it was an idea that ought to work pretty well " and production went ahead . Creator Matt Groening was uneasy about the idea , feeling that it could be mistranslated as actually bad sitcom writing . He also did not like the idea of breaking the fourth wall and the concept of saying that the Simpsons were just actors in a television show . The idea was later explored in the season 11 episode " Behind the Laughter " . One of the " crazy " ideas was the inclusion of the character of Ozmodiar , who was originally included in the script for an earlier episode but was considered too ridiculous for the time . When this episode came along the character seemed to fit with the story and was included . Even though Keeler came up with the story , David S. Cohen , Dan Greaney and Steve Tompkins wrote the scripts for the three segments . Cohen wrote Chief Wiggum P.I. , Greaney wrote Love @-@ matic Grampa and Tompkins wrote The Simpson Family Smile @-@ Time Variety Hour .

The episode demanded a different approach to directing than a usual The Simpsons episode . Director Neil Affleck had to animate each segment so that it fit the style of the show it parodied . The Love @-@ matic Grampa segment for instance emulates a three camera setup , as is normally used in sitcoms .

Three guest stars appear in the episode ; Phil Hartman as Troy McClure , Tim Conway as himself and Gailard Sartain as Big Daddy . McClure is used as a host of the episode , something he had previously done in the episode " The Simpsons 138th Episode Spectacular " . Conway appears as himself . Conway , a comic veteran , is known for his work on The Carol Burnett Show , which has a similar format to The Simpson Family Smile @-@ Time Variety Hour . Due to Lisa being substituted for an older teenager in the third segment , Yeardley Smith only has one line in the entire episode .

= = = Proposed real spin @-@ offs = = =

Over the course of the show , the staff have considered producing several spin @-@ off television series and films , based on The Simpsons . In 1994 , Matt Groening pitched a live action spin @-@ off from The Simpsons that centered on Krusty and would star Dan Castellaneta . He and Michael Weithorn wrote a pilot script where Krusty moved to Los Angeles and got his own talk show . A recurring joke throughout the script was that Krusty lived in a house on wooden stilts which were continuously being gnawed by beavers . Eventually , the contract negotiations fell apart and Groening decided to stop work on the project .

" 22 Short Films About Springfield " sparked the idea amongst the staff for a spin @-@ off series entitled Tales from Springfield . The proposed show would focus on the town in general , rather than the Simpson family . Every week would be a different scenario : three short stories , an adventure with young Homer or a story about a background character that was not tied in to the Simpson family at all . The idea never came to anything , as Groening realized that the staff did not have the manpower to produce another show as well as The Simpsons . The staff believe it is something that they would still be interested in doing , and that " could happen someday . "

Groening also expressed a wish to make Simpstasia , a parody of Fantasia ; it was never produced , partly because it would have been too difficult to write a feature @-@ length script . Before his death , Phil Hartman had said he had wished to make a live action Troy McClure film , and several

of the show 's staff had expressed a desire to help create it . Matt Groening later told Empire that the idea never " got further than enthusiasm " , but " would have been really fun " .

= = Cultural references = =

The whole episode is a satire of unoriginal , poor television writing and references and parodies many television series . When Troy McClure mentions that Fox can only fill up three slots for the next season , the three series are Melrose Place , The X @-@ Files and The Simpsons itself . On the museum of television Troy walks by posters of spin @-@ offs , such as The Ropers (spun off from Three 's Company) , Laverne & Shirley (spun off from Happy Days) , Rhoda , a show that Julie Kavner , the voice of Marge , once starred in , (spun off from The Mary Tyler Moore Show) and Fish (spun off from Barney Miller) , to demonstrate the power of spin @-@ offs . Troy walks by a poster of The Jeffersons (a spin @-@ off of All in the Family) twice , because the writers could not think of any more spin @-@ offs .

Chief Wiggum , P.I. is a parody of police @-@ dramas , such as Miami Vice , Magnum , P.I. and Starsky and Hutch . Skinner emulates Don Johnson from Miami Vice in order to look scruffier . The character of Big Daddy is based on Dr. John , who comes from New Orleans . The chef in the restaurant resembles Paul Prudhomme .

The Love @-@ matic Grampa is a parody of fantasy sitcoms such as Mister Ed , I Dream of Jeannie and Bewitched as well as having similarities to My Mother the Car . The Love @-@ matic Grampa machine singing " Daisy Bell " in a distorted manner when its electrical circuits are failing is a reference to HAL from the 1968 film 2001 : A Space Odyssey . Grampa also references All Quiet on the Western Front , when Moe says he " wrote the book on love " . Moe 's date , Betty , looks somewhat like Tress MacNeille , the actress who voiced her .

The Simpson Family Smile @-@ Time Variety Hour is a parody of the 1960s and 1970s live variety shows . Mainly it is a parody of The Brady Bunch Hour , a short @-@ lived spin @-@ off of the 1970s sitcom The Brady Bunch . The replacement of Lisa in the third segment with another girl reflects the recasting of Jan Brady in the Brady Bunch Hour when Eve Plumb refused to participate . The Simpson family is made to look like The Partridge Family . Also , the segment holds numerous references to Laugh @-@ In . Kent Brockman introduces the show from inside a broadcast booth in a style similar to Laugh @-@ In , there is a joke wall similar to the one in Laugh @-@ In where The Sea Captain opens a porthole . There is also a Laugh @-@ In @-@ like montage wherein other characters comment on the skit itself . When Hans Moleman reads a poem , it is based on Henry Gibson reading a poem on Laugh @-@ In . Other shows parodied during the variety show include The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour , and The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour .

The songs parodied during the third segment are :

" I Want Candy " by The Strangeloves , performed by the Simpson family .

" Peppermint Twist " by Joey Dee and the Starlites , performed by Bart , Lisa and Maggie .

" Lollipop " by Ronald & Ruby , performed by Jasper Beardley .

" Whip It " by Devo , performed by Waylon Smithers .

In the planned future for the show , Homer meets a green space alien named Ozmodiar that only he can see . This is a reference to The Great Gazoo , a character added into some of the final episodes of The Flintstones .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " The Simpsons Spin @-@ Off Showcase " finished 61st place in the weekly ratings for the week of May 5 ? May 11 , 1997 with a Nielsen rating of 7 @. @ 3 . It was the seventh @-@ highest @-@ rated show on the Fox Network that week . Even though Troy mentions that The Simpsons , Melrose Place , and The X @-@ Files are the only shows worth a slot in the next season 's lineup , three other Fox shows actually did better than The Simpsons that week . These were Beverly Hills , 90210 , King of the Hill , and Married ? with Children .

The writers later noted that the episode divided fans . Essentially , those who loved it were those

who realised that the writing was deliberately bad as a way of parodying bad writing , while others who did not appreciate this distinction were less enthusiastic . Matt Groening feared that the fans would interpret the episode in a negative light and was uneasy about the episode when it was in production . He later went on to say that the episode " turned out great " . The writers of the book *I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide* Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood called it , " A very clever spin on the alternates offered by the Treehouse of Horrors run . Each of the spin @-@ offs is very clever in its own way . " It has also figured as one of the favorite episodes on a number of " best of " lists . Entertainment Weekly placed the episode 19th in their top 25 Simpsons episode list . In an interview for *Star @-@ News* , The Simpsons writer Don Payne revealed that the episode was in his personal top six of the best The Simpsons episodes . Additionally , Gary Mullinax , a staff writer for *The News Journal* , picked the episode as part of his top @-@ ten list .