

= History of The Simpsons =

The Simpsons is an American animated television sitcom starring the animated Simpson family , which was created by Matt Groening . He conceived of the characters in the lobby of James L. Brooks 's office and named them after his own family members , substituting " Bart " for his own name . The family debuted as shorts on The Tracey Ullman Show on April 19 , 1987 . After a three @-@ season run , the sketch was developed into a half @-@ hour prime time show called The Simpsons , which debuted on December 17 , 1989 . The show was an early hit for Fox , becoming the first Fox series to land in the top 30 ratings in a season ( 1990 ) .

The show was controversial from its beginning and has made the news several times . In the early seasons , some parents and conservatives characterized Bart as a poor role model for children and several United States public schools even banned The Simpsons merchandise and t @-@ shirts . In January 1992 , then @-@ President George H. W. Bush made a speech during his re @-@ election campaign in which he said : " We are going to keep on trying to strengthen the American family , to make American families a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons . " In 2002 , the show was nearly sued by the Rio de Janeiro tourist board for creating an unreal image of the city on the show .

The Simpsons Movie , a feature @-@ length film , was released in theaters worldwide on July 26 and July 27 , 2007 . Previous attempts to create a film version of The Simpsons failed due to the lack of a script of appropriate length and production crew members . Eventually , producers Brooks , Groening , Al Jean , Mike Scully , and Richard Sakai began development of the film in 2001 . They conceived numerous plot ideas , with Groening 's being the one developed into a film . The script was re @-@ written over a hundred times , and this creativity continued after animation had begun in 2006 . The film was a box office success , and received overwhelmingly positive reviews .

The Simpsons eventually became the longest @-@ running American sitcom , the longest @-@ running American animated program , and in 2009 it surpassed Gunsmoke as the longest @-@ running American primetime , scripted television series . Since its debut on December 17 , 1989 , the show has broadcast 596 episodes and its 27th season started airing on September 27 , 2015 .

= = The Tracey Ullman shorts ( 1987 ? 1989 ) = =

When producer James L. Brooks was working on the television variety show The Tracey Ullman Show for the fledging Fox network , he decided that he wanted to include small animated sketches before and after the commercial breaks . Having seen one of cartoonist Matt Groening 's Life in Hell comic strips , Brooks asked Groening to pitch an idea for a series of animated shorts , which Groening initially intended to present as his Life in Hell series . Groening later realized that animating Life in Hell would require the rescinding of publication rights for his life 's work , and passed on the offer . Richard Sakai contacted Groening to see if he had any other characters he would be willing to let Fox merchandise , and , in short , Groening developed a dysfunctional family that became the Simpsons . Garth Ancier contends that Groening created the characters at home and brought them the next day , while Phil Roman claims Groening sketched out the characters on the drive to Fox . Groening 's account states he hurriedly formulated The Simpsons while waiting in the lobby of Brooks 's office for the pitch meeting , which is the most common and famous story . He named the characters after his own family members , substituting " Bart " for his own name , adapting an anagram of the word " brat " .

Fox negotiated a deal which would prove extremely lucrative for Groening , in which he retained a large portion of revenue from merchandising . To animate the short segments , Brooks and company settled on Klasky Csupo , a small animation house who offered to produce the cartoons for cheap . Brooks initially just wanted to animate the shorts through the basic line drawings , and Klasky @-@ Csupo offered color for the same cost . The studio only employed three young animators ? CalArts graduates Bill Kopp , Wes Archer , and David Silverman ? who adapted Groening 's scripts for animation in one week , doing layouts , animation and inbetweening by hand in the very short amount of time . Groening submitted only basic sketches to the three , and

assumed that the figures would be cleaned @-@ up in production . However , the animators merely re @-@ traced his drawings , which led to the crude appearance of the characters in the initial short episodes . Colorist Gyorgyi Peluce was the person who decided to make the characters yellow .

Appearing initially alongside cartoons by M. K. Brown , The Simpson family first appeared in short subjects in The Tracey Ullman Show on April 19 , 1987 and were featured the first three seasons . The actors who voiced the characters would later reprise their roles in The Simpsons . Dan Castellaneta performed the voices of Homer Simpson , Abraham Simpson , and Krusty the Clown . Homer 's voice in the shorts is a loose impression of Walter Matthau , whereas it became more robust and humorous on the half @-@ hour show , allowing Homer to cover a fuller range of emotions . Julie Kavner , Nancy Cartwright , and Yeardley Smith performed the voices of Marge Simpson , Bart Simpson , and Lisa Simpson respectively . The crew began to string the clips together on tape to play for the show 's live audience , and The Simpsons generated " the biggest laughs of the show " according to John Ortved , author of The Simpsons : An Uncensored , Unauthorized History . The writing staff of Ullman soon began to view The Simpsons as poor relations due to the popularity , and Brooks began to consider adapting the shorts for its own half @-@ hour series . Brooks ' decision was partly inspired by the cheerleading of David Silverman , who drunkenly approached him at a Christmas party and suggested the idea , passionately emphasizing what a primetime series would mean for the animation industry .

= = The Groening , Brooks , and Simon years ( 1989 ? 1991 ) = =

In 1989 , a team of production companies adapted The Simpsons into a half @-@ hour series for the Fox Broadcasting Company . The team included what is now the Klasky Csupo animation house . Due to the increased workload of the full @-@ length episodes , production was subcontracted to South Korean animation studio AKOM . While character and background layout is done by the domestic studio , tweening , coloring and filming is done by the overseas studio .

The Simpsons was co @-@ developed by Groening , Brooks , and Sam Simon , a writer @-@ producer with whom Brooks had worked on previous projects . Groening said his goal was to offer the audience an alternative to what he called " the mainstream trash " . Brooks negotiated a provision in the contract with the Fox network that prevented Fox from interfering with the show 's content . Fox network was unsure if the show could sustain the audience 's attention for the duration of the episode . They proposed doing three seven @-@ minute shorts per episode and four specials until the audience adjusted , but in the end , the producers gambled by asking Fox for 13 full @-@ length episodes .

Simon assembled and led the initial team of writers , and has been credited as " developing [ the show 's ] sensibility " . Writer Ken Levine says he " brought a level of honesty to the characters " and made them " three @-@ dimensional " , adding that Simon 's " comedy is all about character , not just a string of gags " . Simon saw The Simpsons as a chance to solve what he did not like about Saturday @-@ morning cartoon shows . He wanted all the actors in a room together , instead of reading their lines separated from each other . In addition to Castellaneta , Kavner , Cartwright and Smith , actors Harry Shearer and Hank Azaria were added to the show 's cast .

Groening developed a lengthy opening sequence in order to cut down on the animation necessary for each episode , but devised the two gags as compensation for the repeated material each week . In the first gag , the camera zooms in on Springfield Elementary School , where Bart can be seen writing a message on the chalkboard . This message , which changes from episode to episode , has become known as the " chalkboard gag " . The other gag is known as a " couch gag " , in which a twist of events occur when the family meets to sit on their couch and watch television . Groening , who had not paid much attention to television since his own childhood , was unaware that title sequences of such length were uncommon by that time . The theme , which plays over the sequence , was composed by Danny Elfman in 1989 , after Groening approached him requesting a retro @-@ style theme . The piece , which took two days to create , has been noted by Elfman as the most popular of his career .

The half @-@ hour series premiered on December 17 , 1989 with " Simpsons Roasting on an Open

Fire ". The series was originally set to debut in the fall of 1989 with the episode " Some Enchanted Evening ", but the producers discovered that the animation was so appalling that 70 percent of the episode needed to be redone . At the time there were only a few choices for animation style . Usually , they would either follow the style of Disney , Warner Bros. , or Hanna @-@ Barbera . The producers wanted a realistic environment in which the characters and objects could not do anything that was not possible in the real world . They considered aborting the series if the next episode " Bart the Genius " turned out as bad , but it only suffered from easily fixable problems . The debut was moved to December , and " Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire " became the first episode of the series . In some of the episodes of the first season , the characters act completely differently from in later seasons ; Lisa , for example , is undisciplined and short @-@ tempered , while Homer is the voice of reason ; these roles are reversed in later episodes .

During the second season , The Simpsons aired the first Halloween special called " Treehouse of Horror " . The annual series typically consist of four parts : an opening and Halloween @-@ themed version of the credits , followed by three segments . These segments usually have a horror , science fiction or supernatural theme and quite often are parodies of films , novels , plays , television shows , Twilight Zone episodes , or old issues of EC Comics . Part of the attraction for the writers is that they are able to break the rules and include violence that would not make a regular episode . In some cases , the writers will have an idea that is too violent and far @-@ fetched or too short for a normal episode , but can be used as a segment in the seasonal special . The first " Treehouse of Horror " episode was the first time that an alternate version of the theme airs over the end credits .

= = = Bartmania and criticism from conservatives = = =

The show was controversial from its beginning . The rebellious lead character at the time , Bart , frequently received no punishment for his misbehavior , which led some parents and conservatives to characterize him as a poor role model for children . Several US public schools even banned The Simpsons merchandise and t @-@ shirts , such as one featuring Bart and the caption " Underachiever ( ' And proud of it , man ! ' ) " . In the season two opening episode " Bart Gets an F " , Bart fails four consecutive history exams and the school psychiatrist recommends that Bart repeat the fourth grade . Several critics thought that the episode " Bart Gets an F " was a response to these controversies . However , Brooks denied that it was a response and added , " we 're mindful of it . I do think it 's important for us that Bart does badly in school . There are students like that . Besides , I 'm very wary of television where everybody is supposed to be a role model . You don 't run across that many role models in real life . Why should television be full of them ? "

In the October 1 , 1990 edition of People , First Lady Barbara Bush called The Simpsons " the dumbest thing [ she ] had ever seen " which led to the writers sending a letter to Bush where they posed as Marge Simpson . Bush immediately sent a reply in which she apologized . A few years later , on January 27 , 1992 then @-@ President of the United States George H. W. Bush made a speech during his re @-@ election campaign where he said , " We are going to keep on trying to strengthen the American family , to make American families a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons . " The writers decided that they wanted to respond by adding a response to the next broadcast of The Simpsons , which was a rerun of " Stark Raving Dad " on January 30 . The broadcast included a new tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek opening where they watch Bush 's speech . Bart replies , " Hey , we 're just like the Waltons . We 're praying for an end to the Depression , too " . The criticism eventually led to the idea for the episode " Two Bad Neighbors " , which has George and Barbara move into the house across the street from the Simpsons .

= = = Competing with The Cosby Show = = =

The Simpsons first season was the Fox network 's first TV series to rank among a season 's top 30 highest @-@ rated shows . Due to its success , the Fox network decided to switch The Simpsons timeslots in hopes that it would result in higher ratings for the lead out shows . It would move from 8 : 00 PM on Sunday night to the same time on Thursday where it would compete with The Cosby

Show , the number one show at the time . Many of the producers were against the move , as The Simpsons had been in the top 10 while airing on Sunday and they felt the move would destroy its ratings .

" Bart Gets an F " was the first episode to air against The Cosby Show and averaged an 18 @. @ 4 Nielsen rating and 29 % of the audience . In the weeks ratings , it finished tied for eighth behind The Cosby Show which had an 18 @. @ 5 rating . However , an estimated 33 @. @ 6 million viewers watched the episode , making it the number one show in terms of actual viewers that week . At the time , it was the most watched episode in the history of the Fox Network . Ratings wise , new episodes of The Cosby Show beat The Simpsons every time during the second season and The Simpsons eventually fell out of the top 10 . At the end of the season Cosby averaged as the fifth highest rated show on television while The Simpsons ranked 38th . It would not be until the third season episode " Homer at the Bat " that The Simpsons would beat The Cosby Show in the ratings . The show remained in its Thursday timeslot until the sixth season , when it moved back to its original timeslot on Sundays .

= = = Music release and " Do the Bartman " = = =

David Geffen , founder of Geffen Records , had the idea to record the album The Simpsons Sing the Blues based on The Simpsons , to be released in time for Christmas 1990 . The writers wrote humorous lyrics for the actors to perform over blues and hip hop . The album faced great publicity before its release . One particular element that was highly publicized was Michael Jackson 's involvement , which was denied around the time of the album 's release . Early published reports attributed Jackson as the composer of " Do the Bartman " , which Groening denied in a press release . However , Groening revealed in 1998 that " Do the Bartman " was actually co @-@ written and co @-@ produced by Jackson , but he could not receive credit for it because he was under contract to another record label . Jackson was a fan of The Simpsons , especially Bart , and had called the producers one night offering to write Bart a number one single and do a guest spot on the show , which is how " Do the Bartman " came about . Jackson eventually guest @-@ starred in the episode " Stark Raving Dad " .

The album The Simpsons Sing the Blues peaked at # 3 on the Billboard 200 , making it the highest charting Simpsons album . On February 13 , 1991 , the record was certified triple platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America for sales of over 3 million copies . The producers followed up on the album with The Yellow Album in 1998 , which featured original recordings by Prince , Linda Ronstadt , C + C Music Factory , and George Clinton of Funkadelic as well as the cast of The Simpsons . The soundtrack albums Songs in the Key of Springfield ( 1997 ) , Go Simpsonic with The Simpsons ( 1999 ) , The Simpsons Movie : The Music ( 2007 ) , and The Simpsons : Testify ( 2007 ) were also released .

= = The Jean and Reiss years ( 1991 ? 1993 ) = =

Although they initially worked well together , Simon and Groening 's relationship became " very contentious " according to Groening . According to John Ortved 's book The Simpsons : An Uncensored , Unauthorized History , Simon resented the media attention Groening received , particularly the praise for the show 's writing ; Simon felt that Groening 's involvement was limited , and that he should have been the one receiving credit for the show . As well as Groening , Simon was often at odds with Brooks and production company Gracie Films and left the show in 1993 . Before leaving , he negotiated a deal that saw him receive a share of the show 's profits every year , and an executive producer credit despite not having worked on the show since . Al Jean and Mike Reiss , who had written for The Simpsons since the start of the show , took over as showrunners for the third season . Compared to being an executive producer , the showrunner position is more involved with the show and acts as head writer and manages the show 's production for an entire season . As well as a turnover in the staff , The Simpsons moved the production of the animation from Klasky Csupo to Film Roman in season four .

During the fourth season the episode "A Streetcar Named Marge" was produced. The musical within the episode contains a controversial song about New Orleans, which describes the city as a "home of pirates, drunks and whores", among other things. Jeff Martin, the writer of the episode, had meant the song to be a parody of the opening number in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, which speaks of London in unflattering terms. A New Orleans critic viewed "A Streetcar Named Marge" and published the song lyrics in his newspaper before the episode aired. Many readers took the lyrics out of context, and New Orleans' Fox affiliate, WNOL, received about one hundred complaints on the day the episode aired. Several local radio stations also held on-air protests in response to the song. The Simpsons' producers rushed out an apologetic chalkboard gag for "Homer the Heretic", which aired a week after "A Streetcar Named Marge". It read, "I will not defame New Orleans".

Ullman filed a lawsuit in 1992, claiming that her show was the source of The Simpsons' success and therefore should receive a share of the show's profit. "I breast-fed those little devils," Ullman once said of The Simpsons. She wanted a share of The Simpsons' merchandising and gross profits and believed she was entitled to \$20.5 million of Fox's estimated \$50 million in 1992. The Fox network had paid her \$580,000 in royalties for The Simpsons as well as \$3 million for the 3½ seasons her show was on the air. Eventually the courts ruled in favor of the network.

= = The Mirkin years ( 1993 ? 1995 ) = =

Several of the show's original writers who had worked on The Simpsons since the first season had left following the completion of season four. David Mirkin took over as showrunner and executive producer for the fifth and sixth season. In *The Simpsons: An Uncensored, Unauthorized History* (2009), John Ortved describes Mirkin as an "outsider" on the show as, unlike the bulk of the writing staff, Mirkin was not a Harvard University graduate. The writing staff were, at least initially, divided on Mirkin's abilities as a leader. Mirkin conducted the show's writing sessions in one room, rather than splitting the writers into two groups as other showrunners had done, and often worked late into the night. Writer Richard Appel praised Mirkin's leadership and comedy style, saying that "the shows were great under him." In contrast to much of Ortved's account, in a 2004 interview with *Animation Magazine*, Mirkin stated that he "really wasn't at all intimidated [ed] to join [the show's writing] crew," because he "had worked with and written with" many of his fellow writers previously.

Mirkin said that he "brought [the show] back to a more story-oriented" approach and increased the character and emotion focus, while "at the same time still keeping it surreal and weird". During his tenure, Mirkin moved the show's focus towards Homer, and developed some of the secondary characters, such as Apu. He also strongly opposed censorship and network interference. Mirkin's era and style of humor are popular amongst the show's fans, but the writing staff were divided on his style of humor, which saw the show move away from more "realistic" emotional and character-based stories to "pure comedy" and "surreal" humor. The episode "Deep Space Homer" was controversial when the episode was in production. Some of the writers felt that having Homer go into space was too "large" of an idea and Groening felt that the idea was so big that it gave the writers "nowhere to go".

The writing staff wanted to do an episode where the Simpsons family traveled to Australia. They had previously poked fun at several American institutions and thought it would be interesting to poke fun at a whole nation. They designed Australia and the Australian people very inaccurately and many things were completely made up for fun. The episode "Bart vs. Australia" received a mixed reception in Australia, with some Australian fans saying the episode was a mockery of their country. Shortly after it had aired, the Simpsons staff received over 100 letters from Australians who were insulted by the episode. Reiss claimed that this episode is Australia's least favorite, and that "whenever we have the Simpsons visit another country, that country gets furious, including Australia". He also claimed that they were "condemned in the Australian Parliament after the episode had aired".

Former showrunners Jean and Reiss had left to produce their own series , The Critic , along with The Simpsons co -creator Brooks . The Critic was a short lived animated series that revolved around the life of movie critic Jay Sherman . For the second season of The Critic , Brooks cut a deal with the Fox network to have the series switch over . The episode " A Star Is Burns " was pitched by Brooks , who had wanted a crossover that would help launch The Critic on Fox , and he thought having a film festival in Springfield would be a good way to introduce Sherman . In addition , Jean and Reiss returned to produce two episodes ( " A Star is Burns " and " ' Round Springfield " ) with the staff of The Critic , to relieve some of the stress on The Simpsons ' writing staff . Groening felt that the crossover was a thirty minute advertisement for another show and blamed Brooks , calling it an attempt to get attention for one of his unsuccessful shows . After unsuccessful attempts to get the episode pulled , he decided to go public with his concerns shortly before the episode aired and had his name removed from the credits . In response , Brooks said , " for years , Al [ Jean ] and Mike [ Reiss ] were two guys who worked their hearts out on this show , staying up until 4 in the morning to get it right . The point is , Matt 's name has been on Mike 's and Al 's scripts and he has taken plenty of credit for a lot of their great work . In fact , he is the direct beneficiary of their work . ' The Critic ' is their shot and he should be giving them his support . "

Groening conceived the idea of an episode in which the character Mr. Burns was shot , which could be used as a publicity stunt . The writers decided to write the episode " Who Shot Mr. Burns ? " in two parts with a mystery that could be used in a contest . Part one was the final episode of the sixth season and originally aired on the Fox network on May 21 , 1995 . Part two was the premiere of the seventh season and originally aired on September 17 , 1995 . It was important for the writers to design a mystery that had clues , took advantage of freeze frame technology , and was structured around one character who seemed the obvious culprit . In the months following the broadcast of the first part , there was widespread debate among fans of the series as to who shot Mr. Burns . Fox offered a contest to tie in with the mystery where the viewers could guess who the culprit was . It ran from August 13 to September 10 and was one of the first contests to tie together elements of television and the internet . Fox launched a new website , [www.Springfield.com](http://www.Springfield.com) , devoted to the mystery which got over 500 ,000 hits during the summer of 1995 . The winner would be animated on an episode of the show . No one , however , was ever animated on the show . This was because no one officially guessed the right answer , so the chosen winner did not have the right answer and was paid a cash prize in lieu of being animated .

= = The Oakley and Weinstein years ( 1995 ? 1997 ) = =

After season six , Mirkin suggested that Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein took over as showrunners , but remained on the show in an advisory capacity , helping them with technical aspects of the show such as editing and sound mixing , and attending the scripts ' table readings . Oakley and Weinstein wanted to produce Treehouse of Horror episodes , episodes about Sideshow Bob , Itchy & Scratchy and several " format bending " episodes such as " 22 Short Films About Springfield " . They aimed for " at least two episodes per season that ' pushed the envelope ' , [ and ] expanded the definition of what an episode could be . " Season eight featured several episodes in which focus was given to secondary characters and in which new issues , such as divorce , were explored . Their preferred choice of guest stars were those with unique and interesting voices , and several of their guest stars were " old grizzled men with distinctive voices " .

Their goal for the episodes was to be realistic and focus more on the five members of the Simpson family and explore their feelings and emotions towards each other . Oakley considered season three to be the single greatest comedic season of television ever produced and so attempted to recreate the feel of that season , focusing on stories with real emotions and situations , as well as some off the wall episodes . Season three was their basis for Homer : " We liked Homer the way he was in the second and third seasons . That was what we consciously used as our model . Dimwitted , loving , hyper enthusiastic , creatively goofy , parody of the American father ? drawn with real emotions , though admittedly amplified . "

The script supervisor for the show and voice of the character Lunchlady Doris , Doris Grau , died on

December 30 , 1995 . The episode " Team Homer " , which aired eight days later , was one of the last episodes to feature her voice and featured a dedication to her . From season nine until season eighteen , Lunchlady Doris appeared only as a background character . She returned as a speaking character in several episodes since " The Mook , the Chef , the Wife and Her Homer " , and is now voiced by Tress MacNeille .

The episode " Lisa the Vegetarian " featured a permanent character development when Lisa becomes a vegetarian . The story had been pitched by David S. Cohen and the producers felt it would be a surefire way to get Paul McCartney to guest star . McCartney agreed , but only on the condition that Lisa would stay a vegetarian and not revert . The trait stayed and is one of the few permanent character changes made in the show . In the season 13 episode " She of Little Faith " , Lisa underwent another permanent character change when she converted to Buddhism .

On February 9 , 1997 , The Simpsons surpassed The Flintstones with the episode " The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show " as the longest @-@ running prime @-@ time animated series in the United States . The producers took this milestone and made the episode deal with the issue of longevity and the problems that arise when the producers try to make a show " fresh " again ; themes commonly known as " jumping the shark " . Alan Sepinwall of The Star @-@ Ledger , in a review printed two days after the episode originally aired , praised the writers for not airing a " very special " episode to celebrate the milestone of overtaking The Flintstones . He noted " [ the episode is ] so self @-@ aware it put the best in @-@ jokes on St. Elsewhere to shame . "

= = The Scully years ( 1997 ? 2001 ) = =

Oakley and Weinstein stood down as showrunners after season eight because they " didn 't want to break [ the show ] " and Mike Scully took over as showrunner in 1997 . As showrunner and executive producer , Scully said his aim was to " not wreck the show " , Scully was popular with the staff members , many of whom praised his organization and management skills . Writer Tom Martin said he was " quite possibly the best boss I 've ever worked for " and " a great manager of people " while writer Don Payne commented that for Scully " it was really important that we kept decent hours " . Scully noted : " I wrote a lot of Lisa 's shows . I have five daughters , so I like Lisa a lot . I like Homer , too . Homer comes very naturally to me : I don 't know if that 's a good or a bad thing . A lot of my favorite episodes are the ones when Homer and Lisa are in conflict with each other ... They 're very human , I think that 's their appeal . "

Despite this , Scully 's tenure as showrunner of The Simpsons has been the subject of criticism from the show 's fans . John Ortved wrote " Scully 's episodes excel when compared to what The Simpsons airs nowadays , but he was the man at the helm when the ship turned towards the iceberg . " The BBC noted " the common consensus is that The Simpsons ' golden era ended after season nine " , while an op @-@ ed in Slate by Chris Suellentrop argued The Simpsons changed from a realistic show about family life into a typical cartoon during Scully 's years . The Simpsons under Scully has been negatively labelled as a " gag @-@ heavy , Homer @-@ centric incarnation " by Jon Bonné of MSNBC , while some fans have bemoaned the transformation in Homer 's character during the era , from sweet and sincere to " a boorish , self @-@ aggrandizing oaf " , dubbing him " Jerkass Homer " . Martin said that he does not understand the criticism against Scully and that he thinks the criticism " bothered [ Scully ] , and still bothers him , but he managed to not get worked up over it . " Ortved noted in his book that it is hard to tell how much of the decline is Scully 's fault , and that blaming a single showrunner for lowering the quality of the show " is unfair . "

UGO Networks ' Brian Tallerico has defended the season against the criticism . He wrote in a 2007 review that comparing " tenth season Simpsons episodes to the prime of the series ( 3 @-@ 7 ) is just unfair and really kind of self @-@ defeating . ' Yeah , I laughed , but not as hard as a couple of years ago . So it sucks . ' That 's nonsense . The fact is that even the tenth season of The Simpsons was funnier than most [ other ] show 's best years . " PopMatters ' Hassenger commented in his review that although the show had declined in quality , " this is not to say that these episodes are without their charm ; many , in fact , are laugh @-@ out @-@ loud funny and characteristically

smart . "

On May 28 , 1998 , Phil Hartman , voice actor of Troy McClure and Lionel Hutz , was shot and killed by his wife while he slept in their Encino , Los Angeles , home . His wife , Brynn Omdahl , then committed suicide several hours later . In the weeks following his death , Hartman was celebrated in a wave of tributes . Dan Snierson of Entertainment Weekly opined that Hartman was " the last person you 'd expect to read about in lurid headlines in your morning paper ... a decidedly regular guy , beloved by everyone he worked with " . After Hartman 's death in 1998 , rather than replace him with a new voice actor , the production staff retired McClure and Hutz from the show . McClure last appeared in the season ten episode " Bart the Mother " , which was dedicated to Hartman .

In the season 10 episode " Thirty Minutes over Tokyo " , the family travels to Japan . The episode references and mocks several aspects of Japanese and American culture , as well as differences between the two . At a sumo wrestling match , Bart and Homer encounter the Japanese emperor , Akihito . After Homer throws him into a trunk of sumo thongs , Bart and Homer are put in jail , where they have to re @-@ enact a kabuki play about the forty @-@ seven Ronin , do origami , flower arranging and meditation . The episode also references the Japanese 's adaption to American culture . Although all other episodes of The Simpsons have been dubbed and broadcast on Japanese television , " Thirty Minutes Over Tokyo " has never aired in Japan . The scene , which shows Homer throw the emperor of Japan into a box filled with sumo thongs , was considered disrespectful .

= = = Labor difficulties = = =

Up until the production of season ten in 1998 , these six main voice actors were paid \$ 30 @,@ 000 per episode . In 1998 , a salary dispute between them and the Fox Broadcasting Company arose , with the actors threatening to strike . Fox went as far as preparing for casting of new voices , but an agreement was soon made and their salaries were raised to \$ 125 @,@ 000 per episode . Groening expressed his sympathy for the actors in an issue of Mother Jones a while after the salary dispute had been settled . He told the magazine : " [ The cast members ] are incredibly talented , and they deserve a chance to be as rich and miserable as anyone else in Hollywood . " The show also made a change for the writers to become signatories to the Animation Guild . Most writers in animation belong to the guild , but The Simpsons as well as other animated shows on Fox were different . Scully commented that " everyone expected a big fight with the studio " and continued that " it never materialized , because they conceded that prime @-@ time animation was successful and everyone was benefiting . "

Voice actress Maggie Roswell left The Simpsons in spring 1999 after a pay dispute with Fox . The network originally reported that she decided to quit only because she was tired of flying between Denver and Los Angeles for the recording sessions . It was then announced by Roswell that she had asked for a raise , not only because she was tired of the traveling , but because of the increasing cost of flight tickets . Roswell was paid \$ 1 @,@ 500 to \$ 2 @,@ 000 per episode during the three seasons before she left , and she asked Fox for a raise to \$ 6 @,@ 000 per episode . However , Fox only offered her a \$ 150 raise , which did not even cover the travel costs , so she decided to quit . As a result of Roswell 's departure , the Maude Flanders character was killed off in the episode " Alone Again , Natura @-@ Diddily " . Voice actress Marcia Mitzman Gaven was hired to fill in for Roswell 's other characters . Roswell returned to The Simpsons in 2002 in the season premiere of the fourteenth season . She reached a deal with Fox to record her lines from her Denver home and thus the dispute ended .

= = The return of Jean ( 2001 ? 2007 ) = =

Jean returned full @-@ time to The Simpsons during the tenth season . He once again became showrunner with the start of the thirteenth season in 2001 , this time without Reiss . Jean said that " the hardest thing at this point is just thinking of fresh ideas . People are so on top of things that we 've done before , so the challenge now is to think of an idea that 's good , but hasn 't been seen . " In



April 2001 , in an interview with the The New York Times , Jean stated that he wanted " to take the show back to the family " . His return was welcomed , with MSNBC 's Jon Bonné stating : " [ Jean ] has guided the show away from its gag @-@ heavy , Homer @-@ centric incarnation ... these are certainly brighter days for the show 's long @-@ time fans . " Bill Gibron of PopMatters.com noted that " the show corralled much of its craziness for more personal stories " and that " Homer ? s Neanderthal nonsense and bratty Bart gave way to ' softer ' episodes focusing on Marge and Lisa . "

In the season 13 episode " Blame It on Lisa " , The Simpsons visit Rio de Janeiro in Brazil . In the week following the episode 's original broadcast , it faced intense controversy involving the country of Brazil , most specifically the Rio de Janeiro Tourist Board ( Riotur ) . The board claimed that the city was portrayed as having rampant street crime , kidnappings , slums and a rat infestation . The tourist board asserted that the show " went too far " and undermined an \$ 18m ( £ 12.5m ) advertising campaign to attract visitors to the city . Fernando Henrique Cardoso , then the president of Brazil , stated that the episode " brought a distorted vision of Brazilian reality . " By April 9 , Riotur , was preparing to sue the producers and Fox , for damage to its international image and loss of revenue . The issue threatened to become a diplomatic incident . Upon knowledge of an impending lawsuit , the show 's producers contacted Fox lawyers , who informed them that a city could not technically sue for defamation . In response , executive producer Brooks apologized , stating " we apologize to the lovely city and people of Rio de Janeiro " . Jean commented that it was " one of the biggest controversies in the history of the show " .

In season 14 , production switched from traditional cel animation to digital ink and paint . The first episode to experiment with digital coloring was " Radioactive Man " in 1995 . Animators used digital ink and paint during production of the season 12 episode " Tennis the Menace " , but Gracie Films delayed the regular use of digital ink and paint until two seasons later . The already completed " Tennis the Menace " was broadcast as made .

As the show 's revenue continued to rise through syndication and DVD sales , the main cast stopped appearing for script readings in April 2004 . The work stoppage occurred after weeks of unsuccessful negotiations with Fox , in which the cast asked for an increase in their pay to \$ 360 @,@ 000 per episode , or \$ 8 million over a 22 @-@ episode season . The strike was resolved a month later and their salary was raised to something between \$ 250 @,@ 000 and \$ 360 @,@ 000 per episode .

Season 16 featured one of the few major character developments since the show 's inception . It was reported a long time in advance of the airing of the episode " There 's Something About Marrying " that a major character would come out as gay during the episode . At the San Diego Comic @-@ Con International convention in July 2004 , Al Jean revealed : " We have a show where , to raise money , Springfield legalises gay marriage . Homer becomes a minister by going on the internet and filling out a form . A long @-@ time character comes out of the closet , but I 'm not saying who . " This led to much media speculation and publicity in the press for the episode . Many fans correctly guessed that it would be one of Homer 's sisters @-@ in @-@ law , either Patty or Selma , while others believed it to be Waylon Smithers .

= = Film ( 2007 ) = =

20th Century Fox , Gracie Films , and Film Roman produced an animated The Simpsons film that was released on July 27 , 2007 . The production staff of The Simpsons had entertained the thought of a film since early in the series , but production never came together . Groening felt a feature @-@ length film would allow them to increase the show 's scale and animate sequences too complex for a TV series . The film was directed by David Silverman and written by a team of Simpsons writers comprising Groening , Brooks , Jean , Reiss , Mirkin , Scully , George Meyer , John Swartzwelder , Jon Vitti , Matt Selman , and Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham . Work continued on the screenplay from 2003 onwards and did not cease , taking place in the small bungalow where Groening first pitched The Simpsons in 1987 . Groening read about a town that had to get rid of pig feces in their water supply , which inspired the plot of the film . He also wanted to make the film dramatically stronger

than a TV episode , as " we wanna really give you something that you haven 't seen before . " Production of the film occurred alongside continued writing of the series despite long @-@ time claims by those involved in the show that a film would enter production only after the series had concluded .

After winning a Fox and USA Today competition , Springfield , Vermont hosted the film 's world premiere . The Simpsons Movie grossed a combined total of \$ 74 million in its opening weekend in the US , taking it to the top of the box office , and set the record for highest grossing opening weekend for a film based on a television series , surpassing Mission : Impossible II . It opened at the top of the international box office , taking \$ 96 million from seventy @-@ one overseas territories ? including \$ 27 @. @ 8 million in the United Kingdom , making it Fox 's second highest opening ever in that country . In Australia , it grossed A \$ 13 @. @ 2 million , the biggest opening for an animated film and third largest opening weekend in the country . As of November 23 , 2007 the film has a worldwide gross of \$ 525 @, @ 267 @, @ 904 . The film garnered a 90 % approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes , with 171 of a total 191 reviews being determined as positive . It received a rating of 80 out of 100 ( signifying " generally favorable reviews " ) on Metacritic from 36 reviews .

= = Post movie seasons ( 2007 ? present ) = =

Jean continued as showrunner after the movie . Critics have argued that the quality of the show has declined in Jean 's tenure . Jacob Burch , an administrator of the website NoHomers.com , said in an interview that the show " seems less cohesive , more about trying to get the jokes in there , instead of make a story and let the jokes come off of that " and adds " I just think there 's only so much you can do [ with the characters ] . " Steven Hyden of A.V. Club argues in an online debate over this issue that " The Simpsons has come to rely too much on wacky Homer shtick and tired , meaningless guest stars " and that the writers are " content to amuse themselves with in @-@ jokes , non sequiturs , and self @-@ consciously silly plot twists . " Jean responded to this criticism by saying : " Well , it 's possible that we 've declined . But honestly , I 've been here the whole time and I do remember in season two people saying , ' It 's gone downhill . ' If we 'd listened to that then we would have stopped after episode 13 . I 'm glad we didn 't . "

The writers of The Simpsons went on strike together with the Writers Guild of America at the end of 2007 . The broadcasting of The Simpsons was not affected by the strike . Since it takes a long time to produce an episode of an animated show , the episodes are written up to a year in advance . So the strike would have had to go on for a while for the show to have run out of new episodes . Production of season 20 was further delayed because of contract negotiations with the six main voice actors . The dispute was resolved , and the actors ' salary was raised to \$ 400 @, @ 000 per episode . The delay in production has caused the planned 22 episodes to be shortened to 20 .

= = = 20th anniversary and run length record = = =

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the premiere of The Simpsons , Fox announced a year @-@ long celebration of the show titled " Best . 20 Years . Ever . " , which ran from January 14 , 2009 to January 14 , 2010 . Morgan Spurlock , an Academy Award nominated documentary filmmaker ( Best Documentary Feature for Super Size Me in 2004 ) and fan of The Simpsons since his college days , was asked to direct the special The Simpsons 20th Anniversary Special ? In 3 @-@ D ! On Ice ! in February 2009 . Spurlock believes " the reason [ the producers ] called [ him ] to begin with was to not have a show that would be a glad @-@ hand , pat @-@ everyone @-@ on @-@ the @-@ back special , that 's why rooting it in the people who kept this show on the air for the last 20 years is important . " It was shown on January 10 , 2010 alongside " Once Upon a Time in Springfield " , which was promoted as the 450th episode of the series .

The episode " Million Dollar Maybe " featured a new character created by the winner of the " Best . Character . Ever . " contest , in which fans could submit their own ideas for a new , and possibly recurring , Simpsons character . Over 25 @, @ 000 entries were sent in . The winner of the contest was Peggy Black from Orange , Connecticut , who created the character Ricardo Bomba . She

described Ricardo as " someone that all the women love and all the men want to be " and " something like a Casanova . " Jean was one of the judges of the contest , which he described as " a thank you to loyal fans . " He also noted that there is a possibility the Ricardo character might appear on the show again . Another change was to air The Simpsons in 720p high @-@ definition television with the episode " Take My Life , Please " on February 15 , 2009 . With the new broadcasting system came a new opening sequence . It was the first major permanent change to the show 's introduction since the beginning of the show 's second season in 1990 ; previous changes have included variations in the duration of the intro . This new intro also includes some 3D animation when the camera pans over Springfield .

To commemorate the show 's twentieth anniversary , the United States Postal Service unveiled a series of five 44 cent stamps featuring Homer , Marge , Bart , Lisa and Maggie . The stamps , designed by Groening , were made available for purchase on May 7 , 2009 and approximately one billion stamps were printed . The Simpsons is the first television series still in production to receive this recognition . After entering into their 21st season in late 2009 , the show beat Gunsmoke 's record as the longest @-@ running American primetime , scripted television series .

= = = Cancellation threat = = =

On October 4 , 2011 , 20th Century Fox Television released a statement saying : " 23 seasons in , The Simpsons is as creatively vibrant as ever and beloved by millions around the world . We believe this brilliant series can and should continue , but we cannot produce future seasons under its current financial model . We are hopeful that we can reach an agreement with the voice cast that allows The Simpsons to go on entertaining audiences with original episodes for many years to come . " One of the problems was that The Simpsons was possibly worth more cancelled than on the air . A 17 @-@ year @-@ old syndication deal with local TV stations prohibits Fox from selling the show to cable networks . As long as The Simpsons still produces new episodes , Fox cannot break this deal . In the mean time , cable networks have grown to become just as big a market as the local TV stations . Another consideration was that Fox 's parent company News Corp was having meetings discussing the possibility of a cable channel that would only air The Simpsons episodes . Analyst considers a cancellation and subsequent second @-@ run deal that includes cable networks to be worth \$ 750 million . On this issue , Jean commented in an interview with TV Guide that " It 's a big company , and there are definitely people whose interests would have been better served by ending it . Those interests were superseded because we 're still valuable to the network in terms of our ratings . "

For the negotiations , the studio requested that the cast members accept a 45 percent cut of their salaries so that more seasons could be produced after season 23 , or else that season would be the series ' last . The actors were willing to take a pay cut , but wanted a percentage of the back @-@ end payments instead . At one point Shearer even offered a 70 percent pay cut in exchange for back @-@ end percentages , but the studio was unwilling to make any deal involving back @-@ end percentages . In the end , the studio and the actors reached a deal , in which the actors would take a pay cut of 30 percent , down to just over \$ 300 @,@ 000 per episode , prolonging the show to its 25th season . As well as the voice actors , everybody involved in the show took a pay cut . This included animators , writers , the post @-@ production crew and even Jean himself . The further use of digital animation also saves money , as the animation of the show becomes more efficient .

In 2013 , FXX purchased the exclusive American cable rights to the series . Airing from August 2014 , the show will also be available on @-@ demand via the Simpsons World website . The website is only available in the United States .