

TV Monster Movie Milestones

- Television, once disparaged and feared by the motion picture industry, becomes a convenient dumping ground for thousands of older titles gathering dust in studio vaults. As local TV affiliates acquire syndicated film packages, countless morning, afternoon, and evening movie showcases turn up on stations all over the country. (See p. 9.)
- The “Shock!” package is sold in 142 markets. Chicago’s ABC-TV network affiliate, WBKB, Channel 7, picks it up in 1957. Simple broadcasts turn zany when stations across the country begin featuring live hosts to introduce the movies and perform skits between commercial breaks. WBKB’s multitalented Terry Bennett becomes hipster-beatnik Marvin on *Shock Theatre*, Chicago’s first horror movie show. (Revel in p. 14–15.)
- Bennett, as Marvin, informs viewers he will swallow poison and then describe in detail what it’s like to die slowly. People are horrified—and the ratings soar. (Gape at p. 18.)
- Throughout 1959 and 1960, local NBC affiliate WNBQ-TV, Channel 5, runs horror thrillers on its Sunday evening *Movie 5* showcase. But even the most cunning students have trouble talking their parents into letting them stay up late to watch. (Flip for p. 34.)
- While the American International Pictures (AIP) sensationalized output is reviled by critics and older observers, kids eat it up. The unabashedly vulgar AIP output has a raw energy and in-your-face style that appeals to the younger set. (Feast your eyes on p. 44.)
- *Creature Features*, unique to Chicago TV viewers because it treated the old horror films with respect, debuts on September 19, 1970, at 10:30 P.M. The hostless program opens with a montage of classic monster scenes as the sound of a creaking coffin lid segues into Henry Mancini’s eerie theme from *Experiment in Terror*. (Stake out p. 68.)
- In the early 1970s, as the youth culture protests the war in Vietnam, a hippie vampire hits the airwaves to put a contemporary spin on the tried-and-true horror host format. Jerry G. Bishop’s Svengoolie, of WFLD-TV, Channel 32’s *Screaming Yellow Theater*, is born. Bonus factoid: Bishop had been one of only a dozen reporters selected to chronicle the Beatles’s 1965–66 U.S. tour. He traveled across the country with the Fab Four, and the access he had to the group resulted in hours of taped interviews. (Dig pp. 88–90.)
- Kaiser Broadcasting takes over WFLD in 1973, replacing *Screaming Yellow Theater* and Svengoolie with Cleveland horror host Ron Sweed (“the Ghoul”). Sweed disses Svengoolie and becomes “as welcome as ketchup on a Chicago hot dog.” (Relish p. 107.)
- *Son of Svengoolie*, with Rich Koz updating the character Bishop created, premieres on June 16, 1979, on WFLD and runs until January 26, 1986. Svengoolie returns to the airwaves on WCIU, Channel 26, in 1995. In 2004 Svengoolie celebrates his 25th anniversary. (Eye pp. 113–132.)

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CHICAGO TV HORROR MOVIE SHOWS FROM SHOCK THEATRE TO SVENGOOLIE

