

# The Five Funniest Women of Television

## Introduction by Phill Lytle

On January 25, 2017, we lost Mary Tyler Moore. Immediately after her death, the REO staff wanted to do something in her honor. After some thought, we chose to honor her as well as a handful of other iconic and hilarious women of television. As opposed to our Top Ten lists, this list was not voted on or deliberated for months. We settled on the first four very quickly – you should be able to guess which ones they are. We finally landed on the final name and then started writing. On a personal note, I wanted to write for Mary Tyler Moore but Ben Plunkett beat me to it. I used to watch *The Dick Van Dyke Show* with my grandparents and I was a little bit in love with Laura Petrie. I guess it's better for all involved that Ben got that one. We hope you enjoy this celebration of five very funny ladies.

## Lucille Ball by Ben Plunkett



Lucille Ball is almost universally accepted as one of the funniest women in T.V. history. And after watching most of the episodes of *I Love Lucy* (my sister and I are one the sixth and

final season via Hulu Plus), she deserves that status for *I Love Lucy* alone. In fact, if this list were about the funniest women of all time, she would most likely still be on it. She is primarily known as the star of *I Love Lucy*, which she co-created and starred in along with her then husband, Desi Arnaz. In doing so, the two became the inventors of the modern situational comedy. Their characters were joined in their wild escapades (mainly Lucy inspired) by their neighbors and best friends, Fred and Ethel Mertz, portrayed by real life arch-enemies Walter Farley and Vivian Vance. Her three costars highlighted her funniness. That Lucy, she was the embodiment of funny in New York, Hollywood, Europe, and Florida. Ball went on to do several other shows, but she will always be known as one of the funniest women on TV mainly thanks to her stint on *I Love Lucy*.

P.S. – Quick shout out to Vivian Vance. She was a perfect comedic sidekick for Lucy, being dragged into most of Lucy's mad schemes. In my opinion she is only slightly less funny than Ball and very, very underrated.

### **Amy Poehler by Mike Lytle**



Amy Poehler first rose to national prominence on *Saturday Night Live*. She was one of the few female performers in the history of the show who would get as many sketches written for her as many of the top male cast members. The writers found her to be funny and versatile enough to trust her with much of

their best material. Not only that, but she co-hosted the Weekend Update segment for several of its strongest years and more than held her own, first opposite Tina Fey and later Seth Meyers. Her movie career has been hit and miss, but I have a special place in my heart for her roles in *Baby Mama* and *Blades of Glory*. What we will remember Poehler most for is her role as Leslie Knope on the third greatest [sitcom of all time](#) – *Park and Recreation*. She took a character that was originally written to be a female version of Michael Scott from *The Office* and made it so much more than that. She wasn't always the funniest character on Parks and Rec, but there was never any doubt that she WAS the show. Leslie Knope's unbridled optimism is the defining characteristic of the show and I have to believe that much of that came from Amy Poehler herself.

### Mary Tyler Moore by Ben Plunkett



The recently deceased comedic icon is known in pop culture history as a primary ingredient of two unforgettable sitcoms: *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. I am coming from the point of view of someone who has only *mostly* seen the former. (I have watched various episodes of *The Mary Tyler Moor Show*.) My sister and I just had the honor of watching the show on Netflix, finishing last month. *The Dick*

*Van Dyke Show* started in 1961. I imagine they had planned Laurie Petrie to be a relatively minor side character, showing up every other episode or so for two or three minutes. She was almost not cast on the show at all. From what I have read, it sounds like she almost missed out on a role of a lifetime. In fact, the entire cast did. The pilot of the show was called *Head of the Family* and starred an entirely different cast, including creator Carl Reiner as Rob Petrie. But in the revised version, everyone obviously expected Van Dyke to take the house down. After all, he had already become known on radio, TV, and stage and had even won a Tony. Moore smashed all their low expectations to smithereens. She ended up being the show's secret weapon, not only matching Dyke's comedic finesse, not only doing pretty well, but perfectly matching her TV show husband in comedic time, acting, dancing, and just flat out amazing, all-around talent. I don't think TV history has ever seen two actors with better chemistry. The show finalized in 1966, but Moore wasn't finished yet. She went on to be the main of star of one of the most famous shows ever, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

One last thing: Moore would still be on this list if we were doing the five best looking funny women. At least, I would fight hard for it. That Laura Petrie, one great looking gal, she was.

**Carol Burnett by Phill Lytle**



Actress and comedienne, Carol Burnett is best known for *The Carol Burnett Show*, which ran from 1967 through 1978. Needless to say, I did not watch the show as it aired, seeing as how it ended its run a few months after my birth. I did get to see the show on reruns with my grandparents though, and I was always impressed and entertained. Watching her perform with her costars, it was clear how gifted, tireless and committed she was to making the show as funny as possible. She was also incredibly graceful in her ability to allow one of her costars to get the biggest laughs in a skit, or to take center stage if their performance warranted it. That kind of generosity of spirit is as rare today as it was then. But most of all, she was funny.

A few years ago, I was watching an awards show and either she was being honored or she was presenting an award – my memory fails me on that count. Regardless what her specific role was, she got up on stage and she talked and made a few jokes and had the crowd laughing – genuinely laughing. Not the feigned laughter you see at many of those shows when a legend is speaking. She was surprising and sharp and funny. It was great to watch and it only solidified in my mind how singular of a talent she has always been.

## Julia Louis-Dreyfus by Gowdy Cannon



I've watched a lot of *Seinfeld* over the last 25 years but I am not so pompous to think I can't see new things and change my mind on opinions about it. Just last summer as my wife and I went through it I was, more than ever, blown away by how much Elaine added to the show. Performing next to a comedic legend superstar and two of probably the Top 5 greatest sitcom characters ever, I am sure I had not appreciated her as she deserved. She had her moments: "You want germs? I'll give you germs." "We don't have to name names...or point fingers...or name names!" "YOU'RE BALD!" Her GET OUT push is as iconic as anything in the show's pantheon of icon. But until this last time through I am sure I didn't see her the way I saw the other three. I do now. With time I can see how Elaine wasn't eclipsed even slightly by the legends around her because she was far too bright. She was audacious in a way TV women often weren't and it was hilarious. In hindsight it's hard to believe Jerry and Larry David didn't have a woman written in at first and NBC had to demand it. She could not have fit in better in the well oiled comedy machine that was *Seinfeld*.

She continued her success with *The New Adventures of Old Christine*, adding another Emmy to the one she won in *Seinfeld*. And while I have not seen it, she continues to rack up the awards in her new series *Veep* as well. But she'll always be Elaine to me. The woman who cedes ground to no man. The woman

who dropped Frank Costanza like a bag of dirt, who went toe to toe with the Soup Nazi and scored a KO, who dominated karate champ Kramer . It took a special actress to share a screen with Alexander, Richards and Seinfeld. She is their equal and that may be the highest compliment I can pay her.

So, what do you think? Does our list meet your approval? Let us know what you think in the comment section below. We would love to talk about these and other hilarious women of television.