



THOMAS W. SARNOFF MEDIA ADVISORY
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THOMAS W. SARNOFF
1927 - 2023

(**LOS ANGELES** – June 8, 2023) — Thomas W. Sarnoff, scion of a fabled American media family, whose six-decade career left an indelible mark on the NBC Network (now part of NBCUniversal), impacted iconic TV brands and created touring spectacles while guiding the television industry’s premier professional associations, passed away at the age of 96 on June 4, 2023.

The youngest son of radio and television pioneer and RCA/NBC media mogul David Sarnoff was born Feb. 23, 1927, in New York City. According to family lore, he was television’s “first live star” as a test subject for the RCA/NBC World’s Fair demonstration of television in the 1930s.

From 1965-1977 Sarnoff was staff executive vice president, West Coast, and president of NBC Entertainment Corporation, reporting to the president of NBC. During that tenure he negotiated contracts for NBC's famed Burbank facility and production deals with world-renowned NBC talents such as Bob Hope as well as the historic deals with Colonel Tom Parker for Elvis Presley's iconic television specials. He was also responsible for the production and worldwide touring of live, all-family arena shows including *Peter Pan* and *Disney on Parade*, the latter in partnership with (then) Walt Disney Productions. "The highlight of my career at NBC," said Sarnoff, "was building a close-knit and very efficient organization on the West Coast that served NBC very well for many years."

Following his career with NBC, Sarnoff created Sarnoff International Enterprises Inc., producing the *Yabba Dabba Doo* live-arena tour featuring Hanna-Barbera characters. His Sarnoff Entertainment Corporation revived the popular clay-animated character *Gumby* in association with creator Art Clokey and produced a 1987 half-hour series. He also served as executive producer of three *Bonanza* television movies and a retrospective.

Sarnoff rose through NBC's executive ranks when he joined the network in 1952 after paying his dues with a stint at ABC (1949-1951) as television took off post-World War II. He also worked at MGM learning film techniques that he would later apply to his work in television and his oversight of film productions for NBC Productions and California National Productions.

Renowned for his participation and active leadership in the television industry and in community affairs, [Sarnoff](#) most notably was a champion and leader of both the Television Academy and Television Academy Foundation for five decades. From 1973-1974 he served as chairman of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (before the organization's 1977 split into the Los Angeles-based Television Academy, which oversees the primetime Emmy Awards, and the New York-based National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, which oversees Daytime, News and Sports Emmys). He served on the Television Academy's executive committee for the board of governors and in the 1990s took on the chairmanship of the Television Academy Foundation, for which he was named chair emeritus in perpetuity. Sarnoff also chaired the Television Academy's council of former chairs for a number of years.

Sarnoff is one of the founders of the Foundation's *The Interviews: An Oral History of Television* initiative, formerly known as the *Archive of American Television* when it was conceived and greenlit in 1995 during his tenure as Foundation chairman. He continued to be a huge advocate for the entertainment industry's largest oral history program and served on *The Interviews* committee until his passing. The archive was recognized by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2022 as part of its "A More Perfect Union" initiative to honor the role of the humanities in

U.S. history and invest in its preservation. The archive is currently being preserved at the USC Digital Repository. Sarnoff was interviewed by Morrie Gelman in 1999 for *The Interviews: An Oral History of Television*. [Watch his interview here.](#)

In 1997 Sarnoff received the Syd Cassyd Founder's Award from the Television Academy, an award honoring a very select few Television Academy members who have made a significant, positive impact on the Academy through their service over many years of involvement.

In addition, Sarnoff served on the boards of the American Film Institute, Hope Enterprises and Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center in Burbank. He was a member of the national board of trustees of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (now known as the National Conference for Community and Justice) as well as its regional board of directors and was honored by the NCCJ's broadcast motion picture recording division with its Humanitarian Award. He also took on the roles of president of the Entertainment Industry Foundation, president of the Research Foundation at Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center, advisory council member of the radio-TV department of the University of Judaism, and served on the California Commission for the Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education.

Sarnoff attended Princeton University, prior to his World War II service as a combat engineer and as a signal corps instructor at the U. S. Military Academy at West Point. Post-war he transferred to Stanford University where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering in 1948 and attended the university's Graduate School of Business Administration. Later in life Sarnoff was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters by Columbia College.

Sarnoff had a distinguished career; but his children, grandchildren and friends will remember him best for his sense of humor, his deep personal connections and loyalty to his friends, and for his boundless love of his family.

In 2021 Sarnoff was preceded in death by Janyce, his wife of 67 years. He is survived by sons Daniel and Timothy; daughter, Cynthia Sarnoff-Ross; and nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

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