

“A Fistful of Popcorn”: Twenty Years, Four Hundred Shows

At their July 30 taping, the cast of “A Fistful of Popcorn” will be marking their 20th year and 400th show on Princeton Community Television. Regular panelists Bob Brown, Marilyn Campbell, Janet Stern, and Carol Welsch will gather and reminisce.

“A Fistful of Popcorn” (FOP) is Princeton Community Television’s longest running show. It began in January 1998, when Princeton residents Chuck Creesy and Gretchen Oberfranc, recent graduates of the town’s new public access cable station filmmaking course, wished to use the technology they had just mastered. To that end, they tapped four cinephile friends to sit and discuss on camera two or three current films, either positively or negatively. One panelist’s brother composed the show’s theme song, and the “studio” was set up every third Sunday morning in the producers’ living room.

On their first show, the panelists discussed *Deconstructing Harry*, *As Good as It Gets*, and *Good Will Hunting*. On their second show they plunged into a discussion of *Titanic*.

In 2001, the show won national recognition--as “best entertainment talk show by nonprofessionals on public access TV”--in the Hometown Video Festival, sponsored by the Alliance for Community Media.

In the early days, additional Princeton TV program graduates volunteered to operate one of the four cameras, and each show took up to 14 hours to edit. That all changed with digital technology, and now the show can be seen on a variety of media: Comcast Channel 30, Verizon FiOS Channel 45, Roku, Apple TV, and soon on YouTube Live and Facebook Live. In addition, past shows are archived on Vimeo.

Each January, the panelists have discussed their own “ten best” lists for the previous year, and each February or March they project their picks for the upcoming Oscars. They have also hosted interesting and entertaining guests, including filmmakers, film series curators, authors who write about film, and movie theater owners.

The once-hourlong show is now one half hour, and for several years it has been taped in the studio at Princeton Community Television. During those years, several staff members have produced and directed FOP, including George McCollough, Sharyn Murray, and Markian Bek, to whom the panelists owe profound gratitude for their reliability, patience, expertise, and support.

On their 400th show, FOP’s panelists will look back at the past 20 years: their memorable disagreements, their favorite films and guests, as well as how movies and moviegoing have changed over the past two decades.

FOP airs on Wednesday evenings at 8:00 p.m. and repeats on Sunday mornings at 10:30 a.m.