

On this page

The weeks between now and Nov. 22 will be an on-going media event commemorating the 25th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Included are video releases, prime-time network TV specials and syndicated and cable programming. Here's a roundup.

Videos preserving the JFK legacy

John F. Kennedy has become known as the first president of the TV era. That means he is also the first executive whose photogenic tenure is now a home video staple. Here is a sampling of the tapes dedicated to preserving his memory on the 25th anniversary of his death.

John F. Kennedy: The Commemorative Video Album (CBS/Fox, \$19.98, currently in stores). Almost two hours long; thorough, yet disjointed. It seems that little effort was expended producing this program.

CBS has pulled from its vault original footage from the coverage following the assassination and leading to the burial. At that time, the network relived his presidency and life in four days of news segments. The re-edited, quarter-century-old news adds little perspective.

Typical oversight: Harry Reasoner's interview with Rose Kennedy took place before Kennedy was elected, during his administration or after his death?

Four Days in November (MGM/UA, \$29.95, currently in release). David Wolper produced this 1964 film, which concentrates on the assassination. Great footage, but watching it today it seems incredibly dated. Narrator Richard Baseheart is hopelessly theatrical; the music is overly somber.

Remembering Kennedy (Vestron Video, \$19.95, currently in release). ABC's 1983 special broadcast in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of JFK's death. This video does probe deeper into the lingering issues from the early '60s: civil rights, Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis. A decent history lesson.

Thank You, Mr. President: The Press Conferences of JFK (Goodtimes, \$9.95, currently in release). If remembering JFK means watching a young, charming president being witty and inspirational, this is the video for you. It's 45 minutes of JFK at his best — courting the press. It, too, is a vintage TV special from the 1970s, hosted by E.G. Marshall, but it holds up very well.

Life in Camelot: The Kennedy Years (HBO Video, \$19.99, release date, Nov. 9). Only 15 minutes of the 55-minute tape were available for preview. As short as that was, it looks to be the best of the Kennedy videos.

Rather than a rehash of familiar footage and facts, this cassette features state-of-the-art video techniques. HBO obtained audio tapes from the JFK Library Collection in Boston and unseen family film footage from the 1950s and '60s. Using recorded remarks, the producers allow JFK to narrate this portrait himself.

Like the other videos, this stresses the positive aspects of JFK, avoiding conspiracy theories. "This is strictly an autobiography," says HBO senior vice president Henry McGee. "In his own words."

The program will premiere on HBO Sunday Nov. 6 at 10 p.m. EST/PST, then appear in video stores three days later.

By Jefferson Graham

TV specials capture a moment in history

By Karen Ridgeway
USA TODAY

Television's commemoration of the 25th anniversary of John Kennedy's assassination includes footage ranging from family home movies to secret police files and FBI phone taps.

The Disney Channel offers the most extensive look at JFK's personal and political life; it's the only TV program done in cooperation with the family.

The TV rundown:

► **The Making of the President 1960** (Oct. 23, 9 p.m. EDT/PDT, The Disney Channel).

Producer David Wolper's TV documentary — based on Theodore White's Pulitzer Prize-winning book about 1960's election campaign.

Wolper's Kennedy vs. Khrushchev follows at 10 p.m.

► **American Exposure: Who Murdered JFK?** (Nov. 2, syndicated, check local station schedules). Investigative columnist Jack Anderson hosts a two-hour, live re-enactment of the assassination with new evidence



MANY LOOKS BACK: John F. Kennedy, left; Lee Harvey Oswald

implicating organized crime.

► **JFK: A Celebration of His Life and Times** (Nov. 6, 11, 20, 9 p.m. EST/PST, Disney). This three-part, definitive film bio uses rare photos, home movies and news footage, tracing the family back to Ireland.

► **A Nation of Immigrants** (Nov. 6, 10 p.m. EST/PST, Disney). A Wolper-produced documentary based on Kennedy's book of the same title.

► **Who Shot President Kennedy?** (Nov. 15, 8 p.m. EST/PST, PBS, times

may vary). Nova probes the evidence using sophisticated techniques of photo enhancement and three-dimensional computer modeling.

► **CBS Reports** (Nov. 17, 9 p.m. EST/PST). Dan Rather anchors a two-hour special highlighting 53 hours of news broadcasts over four days.

► **On Trial: Lee Harvey Oswald** (Nov. 22-23, syndicated, check local station schedules). A re-edited version of the 2-year-old Showtime special — trying Lee Harvey Oswald in court as if he had lived — is combined with Geraldo Rivera's investigative reporting and commentary. Viewers call a 900-number to vote on whether they believe Oswald acted alone or as part of a conspiracy.

► **JFK Assassination: As It Happened** (Nov. 22, 156 p.m. EST/10:56 a.m. PST, Arts & Entertainment). Programming will be interrupted exactly 25 years after TV viewers were first told of JFK's assassination. Edwin Newman introduces a historic retelecast of six hours of coverage by NBC News.



GERALDO RIVERA: Reports in Dallas for 'On Trial: Lee Harvey Oswald.'

Miniseries goes back to Kennedy's roots

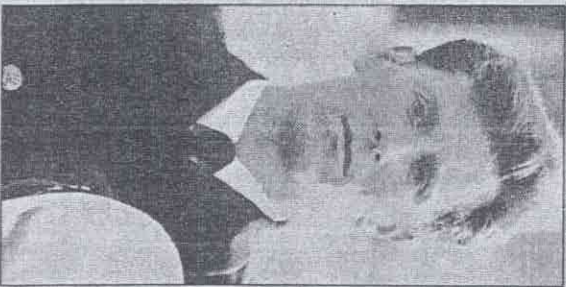
By Brian Doolan
USA TODAY

POCASSET, Mass. — Here, 20-odd miles from the famed Kennedy compound in Hyannis, another dazzling colonial home faces the ocean. If it weren't for all the trucks, trailers, people and commotion, one could mistake this home for the famous family's estate.

Breaking all the seaside scenery, filming for *The Kennedys of Massachusetts*, a six-hour ABC miniseries scheduled for February 1988. Based on Doris Kearns Goodwin's 1987 book, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, the project is not just another Kennedy mini, promise the producers. (There have been at least five already.)

"They are the closest thing to royalty we have in the country," says Sue Pollock, executive producer of the mini.

The focus here will be on the clan's matriarch, Rose Fitzgerald, her husband, Joseph, their courtship, relationship and the birth and death of their children.



By Henry Hillard
WEBER: The JFK look-alike was 2 when Kennedy died.

Though the mini covers Joseph Sr.'s reputed manipulation of the stock market and a fair with actress Gloria Swanson,

Still a memorable date

The Kennedys of Massachusetts will air in February. On Nov. 22 — the 25th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy — the six-hour miniseries will be in post-production, but the ramifications of the day will be on the minds of cast and crew.

Annette O'Toole, who plays Rose Kennedy, says like "most people, that date in 1963 has a red circle around it." O'Toole was in Roman Catholic grammar school in Houston, "and when it was announced we were sent to Mass."

"I, like every American, sat glued to the TV set," says executive producer Sue Pollock, then a young mother. "It is that interaction with TV that Pollock believes will always link JFK and the Kennedy family with people. 'We feel that family belongs to us because of TV.' TV took us into the most personal odyssey of grief."

son, Pollock predicts some will call this story "a whitewash."

The script doesn't ignore scandal, but it doesn't dwell on it either. Pollock says this is "inspirational," and the tragedy the family endured are not lost on the cast.

Annette O'Toole, who plays Rose, says she "always felt sorry for the matriarch because of the children she lost and lost so violently."

The most famous of Rose's lost children, the USA's 35th president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, is played by Steve Weber.

While not identical, there is a resemblance. And it's almost all natural.

He's visited the Kennedy library in Boston three times to study JFK's youth. In the course of his research, the 27-year-old actor — who was 2

when JFK was killed — says he discovered that Kennedy "was not just a 60s pop figure," the perhaps all too common concept held by his generation.

The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys concludes at JFK's inauguration, excluding seamy tales that have grabbed headlines regarding his presidency.

"I didn't want to do any of that," Weber says. "Despite all the trash that has come out, the things he stood for, that he said and did were incredible."

The Kennedy family mystique has fascinated people for the better part of three decades. "It's like stepping into history," O'Toole says.

But the life of JFK has consistently captured the imaginations of authors and producers.

"This celebrates the life of Jack Kennedy because it examines the roots of his family and helps us understand the man," Pollock says.

As to why the fascination has continued 25 years after JFK's death, Pollock says, "Maybe his death is why he's become a myth. People can manufacture all the endings they want."