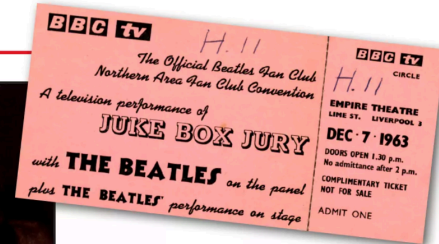




The Beatles' cameo was the most viewed episode, while (below) the show invited a myriad of guests onto the panel



# HIT OR MISS?

It's a testament to the timelessness of the format of one of Sixties TV's most popular shows that it was revived not once, but twice. Juke Box Jury may have been axed by the BBC in 1967, but so potent was its brand, it was brought back in 1979 and again in 1989. Its winningly simple premise of a panel of celebs deciding whether a new single release would be a 'hit' or a 'miss' was so classic that, at its height in the Sixties, it was attracting audiences of 12 million. And so important was it in the lives

**Hosted by the genial David Jacobs, Juke Box Jury was an essential watch for pop fans in the Sixties. Steve O'Brien remembers one of TV's most iconic music shows...**



of pop-loving teenagers that The Beatles' manager Brian Epstein even convinced the Fab Four to guest on the show, on December 7, 1963. That episode, now sadly lost, won Juke Box Jury its biggest ever ratings, with 23 million Brits tuning in to witness John, Paul, George and Ringo cast their critical eyes over that week's new releases.

spectacularly wrong, sometimes they'd call it right. And every episode, to add some spice, a mystery artist would be revealed after the panel had voted on his or her latest disc, to the joy or embarrassment of the various guests.

**IF IT AIN'T BROKE...**

Presiding over all this was radio DJ David Jacobs. Already familiar to pop aficionados as the presenter of the BBC Light Programme's Top 20 run-down Pick of the Pops, he proved an affable, well-tailored host, knowledgeable enough about pop music to appeal to the kids, but not enough of a maverick to scare away the parents.

The show's set-up never really changed during its run. Each episode, a panel of four guests would listen to a batch of the latest pop 45s and judge them a potential Hit Parade smash or a chart failure. Sometimes those guests would get it

The first episode was screened on June 1, 1959 with DJ Pete Murray, singers Alma Cogan and Gary Miller, and teenage actress Susan Stranks as guests. That panel stayed pretty much the same for the first few months, until producers decided that having different guests each week would keep the show fresher. Over the course of its original eight-year run, a bevy of famous faces would appear on the show, ranging from such unlikely names as Ian Carmichael, Beryl Reid and Thora Hird to more pop-savvy celebrities such as DJs Simon Dee and Alan Freeman and pop giants Johnny Mathis, Roy Orbison and Adam Faith.

Other than The Beatles, various bands were invited to pass judgement on their peers. The Seekers and The Bachelors both

guested, but the most notorious were The Rolling Stones, who certainly lived up to their bad-boy reputation. The group's then-manager Andrew Loog Oldham wrote in his book *Stoned*, "They grunted, they laughed among themselves, were merciless towards the drivel that was played and hostile towards the unflappable Mr Jacobs."

The Stones were an aberration, however. Guests such as Hayley Mills, Val Doonican, Bob Monkhouse and Jayne Mansfield generally pulled their punches more than Jagger and co, never forgetting that this was a Saturday tea-time show and they didn't want their public to see them being nasty or unduly negative.

One of the most notable aspects of Juke Box Jury was its instantly

memorable theme tune, titled Hit and Miss, composed specially for the programme by future James Bond composer John Barry. Played by his band, The John Barry Seven, it was only changed for the last few months of the show's run, when Barry's version was swapped for one played by the Ted Heath Band.

**LOSING THE EDGE**

By 1967, Juke Box Jury was beginning to look somewhat old-fashioned. The pop scene was changing and David Jacobs was cutting an increasingly anachronistic figure. Though producers were hiring more contemporary names such as DJ Emperor Rosko and singer Cat Stevens, the continued presence of older faces from outside the world of music, such as Clement Freud and Eric Sykes, was beginning to make the show look comically out of touch. With ratings slipping, the BBC axed the show, with its last edition being screened on December 27, 1967, with original jurors Pete Murray and Susan Stranks appearing once more.

Jacobs – and Murray – would return for a special one-off episode of the programme in 1989 as part of the arts show *Arena*. More fully fledged revivals would arrive in 1979 with Noel Edmonds as presenter, and once more in 1989, this time fronted by Jools Holland (only to be cancelled for a third time in 1990).

Those resurrections only served to show how, with a fresh lick of paint, Juke Box Jury could be as relevant in the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties as it was in the Fifties and Sixties. Because, as TV shows go, Juke Box Jury was always more of a hit than a miss.



Millicent Martin on set with host David Jacobs and bandleader Ted Heath in 1960

**DID YOU KNOW?** Because of the BBC's policy of wiping tapes of its programmes in the Sixties and Seventies, only two episodes (both from 1960) of Juke Box Jury exist in their entirety.