

SOPRANOS, THE (*Crime Drama*)

BROADCAST HISTORY:

Home Box Office

60 minutes

Original episodes: 1999-

Premiered: *January 10, 1999*

CAST:

Tony Soprano James Gandolfini
Carmela Soprano Edie Falco
Meadow Soprano Jamie-Lynn Sigler
Anthony "A.J." Soprano, Jr. Robert Iler
Livia Soprano (1999-2000) Nancy Marchand
Janice Soprano (2000-) Aida Turturro
Dr. Jennifer Melfi Lorraine Bracco
Christopher Moltisanti Michael Imperioli
Paulie "Walnuts" Gualtieri Tony Sirico
Silvio Dante Steven Van Zandt
Salvatore "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero (1999-2000)
..... Vincent Pastore
Corrado "Uncle Junior" Soprano Dominic Chianese
Adriana La Cerva Drea de Matteo
Rosalie Aprile Sharon Angela
Artie Bucco John Ventimiglia
Charmaine Bucco Katharine Narducci
Jimmy Altieri (1999) Joe Badalucco, Jr.
Richie Aprile (2000) David Proval
Furio Giunta (2000-2002) Federico Castelluccio
Gigi Cestone (2000-2001) John Fiore
Hugh DeAngelis (2000-) Tom Aldredge
Mary DeAngelis (2000-) Suzanne Shepherd
Ralph Cifaretto (2001-2002) Joe Pantoliano
Patsy Parisi (2001-) Dan Grimaldi
Vito Spatafore (2001-) Joseph R. Gannascoli
Eugene Pontecorvo (2001-) Robert Iler

One of the most popular and influential dramas of the late 1990s and early 2000s appeared on a premium cable channel, seen in only about one-third of U.S. television homes. Despite its limited distribution, *The Sopranos* sometimes drew larger audiences than programs running opposite it on the broadcast networks, and it won far more awards (including several Emmys). Tony Soprano was the cunning but conflicted boss of the northern New Jersey Mafia. A big, grinning bear of a man, he was by turns genial, a worried father – and a murderous thug. The drama came from the conflict between Tony's two dysfunctional "families," one personal and the other professional, and the show's unusual mixture of introspection and psychological tension, interspersed by occasional flashes of intense violence.

At Tony's opulent suburban home was his loyal but ambivalent wife, Carmela; his resentful teenage daughter, Meadow, a straight-A student embarrassed by the family "business"; and his adoring but uncommunicative son, A.J. His crime empire was run

out of the Bada Bing Club, a local strip joint that he owned. Among his most loyal soldiers were old-school enforcer Paulie; somewhat dense Silvio; hefty, friendly Pussy; and green young nephew Christopher. When the series began, Tony was still a *capo*, but the old boss, Jackie Aprile, was on his deathbed. Tony and the other *capos* decided that Tony (whose father, Johnny Boy Soprano, had once been boss) should take over. This did not sit well with his father's older brother, Uncle Junior, however, and a power struggle ensued. In the course of the 1999 season, Uncle Junior plotted with Tony's bitter, ill mother Livia to order a hit on Tony; and henchman Jimmy Altieri was discovered wearing an F.B.I. wire and was "whacked" (killed). Tony's problems with his scheming family, as well as home problems with a resentful wife and rebellious kids, drove him to see a shrink, the beautiful and understanding Dr. Melfi. Melfi soon learned Tony's real occupation, but due to her fascination with him could not let go.

During 2000 Uncle Junior was jailed on a R.I.C.O. charge; unstable long-lost sister Janice flew in from Seattle to cause trouble, plotting with Jackie Aprile's brother Richie to overthrow Tony (Janice later killed Richie); trusted soldier Pussy ratted to the F.B.I. and was whacked; and there was a failed hit on Christopher.

In 2001 the F.B.I. made a major effort to get Tony, bugging his home, but failed. There were more problems at home with Meadow and A.J., and Tony's psychiatrist, Melfi, was brutally raped. (She tried to hide it from Tony, knowing what he would do.) Drunken, out-of-control Ralph took over Richie's businesses, causing more grief and a confrontation with Tony. Livia finally died, full of hatred and bile for her family. The following year saw Uncle Junior tried and acquitted (they fixed the jury), and Tony finally took care of the "Ralph" problem by brutally killing him. Carmela was increasingly despondent over her empty marriage to Tony. First she lusted for his handsome driver, Furio (who was promptly shipped back to Sicily); then, having had enough of his mistresses (including Adriana), she threw him out of the house and demanded a divorce. Bada bing.

From *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present*. 8th ed. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003. pp. 1101-1102.