

# 'They Have Mooned!'

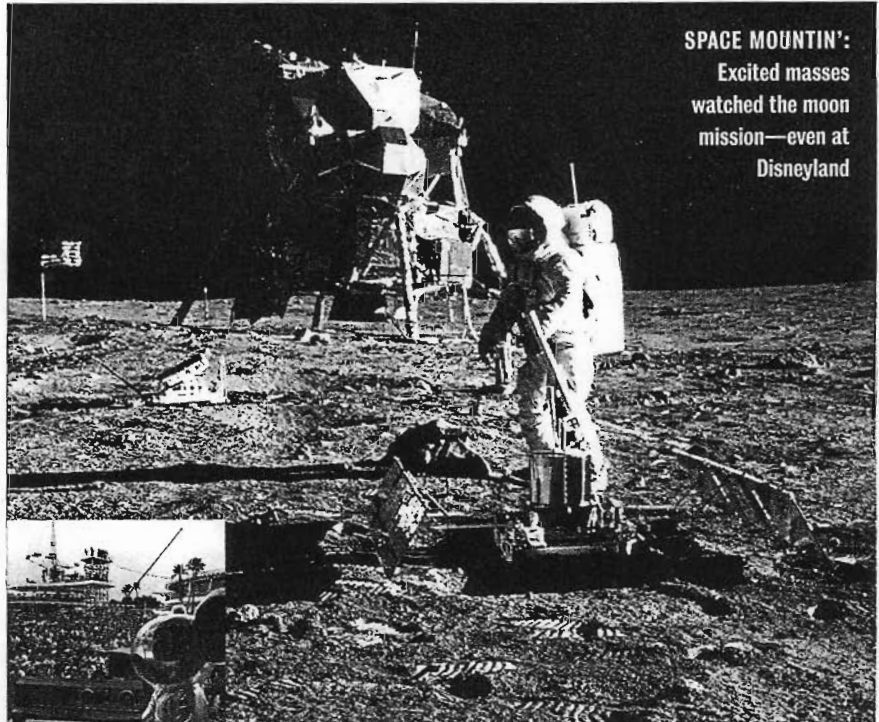
The 1969 lunar landing, broadcast on TV and radio to millions of awestruck earthlings, was a giant step for mass media

BY CAREN WEINER

**F**INAL FRONTIER INDEED: Though Cold War space-race mania had sent Americans and Soviets into orbit by 1962, walking on the moon was still the stuff of science fiction—until July 20, 1969, when *Apollo 11* astronaut Neil Armstrong took the “giant leap for mankind” that became the first international mega-media event.

On radio, home TVs, and huge public screens set up in New York's Central Park and Kennedy International Airport, London's Trafalgar Square, Paris' science museum, and the streets of Seoul, half a billion earthlings followed Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin's two-hour-plus moon walk. Tribesmen in rural Zambia listened to news reports on government-issued transistor radios. Even *Pravda* put the lunar landing on page 1, under the unintentionally inaccurate headline **THEY HAVE MOONED!**

Intermittent snippets of the mission had appeared on TV since the launch July 16, but on the day of the landing, the three networks preempted all programming for 30-plus hours of news coverage (costing \$11 million to \$12 million in lost ad revenues and production expenses), including interviews with sci-



**SPACE MOUNTIN':**  
Excited masses watched the moon mission—even at Disneyland



entists, cartoons of landing procedures, and low-tech simulations with scale models. To leaven the science-speak with art, ABC asked Duke Ellington to write and perform a piece for the occasion, “Moon Maiden.” NBC invited James Earl Jones to give a dramatic reading and Rod McKuen to recite poetry. And CBS called on

sci-fi author Arthur C. Clarke as well as Buster Crabbe (film's Buck Rogers).

Today, space shuttle launches are routine, and the public seems to focus mainly on mishaps like June's *Mir* collision. But with *Pathfinder's* July 4 Mars landing, NASA hopes to renew interest in space triumphs—in part by showing *Pathfinder* footage on the newest mass medium, the Net. ■

**TIMECAPSULE**

**JULY 20, 1969**

REFLECTING THE PUBLIC'S fascination with space and futurism are Zager & Evans' pessimistic No. 1 pop hit “In the Year 2525” and Oliver's upbeat, boppy No. 3 song, “Good Morning Starshine,” from the musical *Hair*. (Neither act would have a hit after 1969.) **THE TOP-**

**RATED TV SHOW, *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* (right), launches the career of bikini-clad dancer (and future *First Wives Club* star) Goldie Hawn. PHILIP ROTH HITS pay dirt with his third novel, the seminal No. 1 best-seller *Portnoy's Complaint*; the title becomes an enduring moniker for a certain type of Jewish-American eth-**



**nic self-consciousness. IN THE REAL WORLD, the Kennedy clan regroups after Ted's July 19 auto accident in Chappaquiddick, Mass., in which Mary Jo Kopechne drowned and the senator waited eight hours to alert police. The incident has haunted Kennedy throughout his ongoing 35-year political career. —CW**

APOLLO 11: GARDNER; MARTIN, HERTZ; JAMES EARL JONES: JEFF; BUSTER CRABBE: JEFF; MARY JO KOPECHNE: JEFF; PHILIP ROTH: JEFF; GOLDIE HAWN: JEFF; DUKES: JEFF; ELLINGTON: JEFF; JONES: JEFF; MCKUEN: JEFF; CLARKE: JEFF; CRABBE: JEFF