

TWO AND A HALF (MILLION DOLLAR) MEN

Sitcom or sit-con? How much money do TV stars earn? **James Madden** finds out.

EMBATTLED TELEVISION STAR of the CBS hit sitcom *Two and a Half Men*, Charlie Sheen, was recently quoted as requesting a 50 per cent increase on his current \$2 million per episode payment to return for another season, while his co-star Jon Cryer receives \$550,000 per episode. While his comments come at a rather erratic time, his proposed \$3 million landmark per episode fee would mark a new record on the high earners list for sitcom actors.

While we question how much is enough, let us consider some of the past high earners in sitcom land:

CAST OF *FRIENDS*: In the first season of the hit sitcom *Friends*, the cast were paid \$20,000 per episode. In the second season, they were paid varying salaries. During negotiations before the third season, the cast of six banded together and demanded uniform salaries. Their fee for the final season in 2004 was \$1 million per episode.

RAY ROMANO: Nasal voiced comedian Ray Romano (a.k.a. the Fran Drescher male voiced equivalent)

brought in a healthy \$1.8 million per episode for the eighth season of *Everybody Loves Raymond* in 2004. From earning \$800,000 per episode in the previous season, Romano enjoyed \$50 million dollars for the show's eighth season.

KELSEY GRAMMER: Turns out playing the *Cheers* originated character Dr. Frasier Crane paid off for Kelsey. The actor struck a deal to play the talkback doctor for \$1.6 million for the show's tenth and eleventh seasons in 2004.

JERRY SEINFELD: Star and co-creator of the show about nothing, Jerry Seinfeld, received \$1 million per episode in the show's final season in 1998. Seinfeld reportedly turned down a \$5 million per episode payment if the show were to continue into another season. While he turned it down, he received a \$225 million payment for syndication rights in 1998. Seinfeld's co-star's Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Michael Richards and Jason Alexander received a wholesome \$600,000 per episode in the show's final season.

However, small screen earners are not limited to



sitcom roles. Talk show queen Oprah Winfrey reportedly earned \$315 million annually, Judge Judy Sheindlin landed a \$45 million deal for her 2010 contract, and late night talk show host David Letterman pulls in \$32 million a year for his work on *The Late Show*.

Hollywood's highest paid film actor is Johnny Depp, who earned a sizeable \$75 million for his efforts in 2010. Sandra Bullock came in number one for the ladies, earning \$56 million for her contributions. Bullock also enjoyed an Oscar win for her role turn in *The Blind Side*; which also became the first film to make over \$200 million with a sole female name above the title.

But the question still begs, are they worth the bang for the buck?