Russell, Nipsey (1920?-) Encyclopedia Article

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Russell, Nipsey (1920?—)

With an air of grace and intelligence, and an endless supply of original comic poems, comedian Nipsey Russell was one of the first African Americans to become a national television personality. Russell came to prominence in 1959 after a series of appearances on *The Tonight Show* with Jack Paar. Since then, he has surfaced on a long list of comedy, variety, and talk shows. His forte, however, is as a quiz show panelist. Known as "the poet laureate of television," he entertains with clever conversation and the recitation of his poems, which range in humor from silly to topical. His game show credits include *To Tell the Truth, Match Game 73,* and *Masquerade Party.* During the 1961-62 season, Russell played the character of Officer Anderson on *Car 54, Where Are You?,* a popular situation comedy about police antics in the Bronx. His big-screen credits are sparse, with his most memorable movie performance as the Tin Man in *The Wiz,* a 1978 black-cast musical version of *The Wizard of Oz.*