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EDITOR: Jerry Leichter

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MID-WEEK SPECIAL

NEWS - COMMENT - POSSIBILITIES

The new year has brought no let-up in the rumor and fact parade about programs that will depart from the nets in the next few months and those that will replace them. Some of the replacements that have merely been announced have already picked up prospective pallbearers. Television is presumed to be in a new state of flux because of changing advertiser patterns (more alternate-week sponsors), changing viewer habits (they don't seem to look in as often some evenings), and the competition of local movie programs beefed up with movies from the big A libraries (good movies have always been a fine attraction on TV, now with better movies all the "old shows" have to be better). Much has been made of the fact that some new M-G-M, Warners, RKO and Columbia films have knocked off some pretty good competing half-hour shows in local situations. One might consider that the movie industry has been building its stars and its product for a great many years. Most good movies cost a great deal more to put together than the finest television programs. There's still a longer history of loyalty among movie fans than among TV viewers, and most viewers are former movie fans. It really shouldn't surprise anybody that TV showings of good movies should have a better audience appeal than quite a few television programs. Perhaps too much is being made of the momentary success of the movie shows since television has a history that indicates that even the hot shots level off from meteoric peaks. The biggest problem facing television is the question of asserted mediocrity in television's own programming. One sometimes forgets that many things that make up a television schedule have to be blended before programs get on the air and affect the shows after they arrive. The wishes and ideas of producers, network executives, agency executives and the sponsor's executives have worked cruel havoc on some fine ideas. They have also worked together to create some of television's finest material (if it is understood that the term "producer" stands for all the elements that make up his organization, including the writers). If one may flirt with a truism: show business's best minds haven't always found the answer on Broadway, in the movies, on radio or on television. Maybe there isn't any answer to the best way to catch the interest of a fickle audience. Maybe television will just have to moan about the mediocrity of "last season," remembering the wonderful seasons before, and try to find the cue for next season.

NBC Research has prepared a special report, based on Nielsen ratings, that shows that all of NBC's special one-shots, with the Saturday and Monday night Spectaculars, have averaged 18 per cent higher this season than the comparable programs of last season in pulling audiences. As a special nudge for advertisers, the NBC report also pointed out that this season's Specs and Specials averaged a 45 per cent higher rating this past fall than the average of all nighttime programs on the three networks. NBC, by the way, has presented 69 Spectaculars (apart from one-shot specials) on Saturday, Sunday and Monday evenings during the past three seasons.

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(MORE)

Audrey Hepburn and Mel Ferrer arrived in New York this week to begin rehearsals for "Mayerling," to be presented on Producers' Showcase on Feb 4, with Anatole Litvak producing, staging and directing the program.....Columbia Records' "Song for The Ninth Day," being released across the country, is a Mitch Miller arrangement of the theme music for tomorrow (10) night's Playhouse 90 drama, "The Ninth Day." Two of Miller's previous arrangements of TV music which were successful were from Studio One productions, "Song for a Summer Night," and "Let Me Go, Lover.".....The Lone Ranger will mark its 24th anniversary with another hour-long film revival of the origin of the Lone Ranger legend during February. The 24 years spans the program's history in radio and television.....MCA-TV's State Trooper, being sponsored in 71 markets in 28 states by Falstaff Brewing Corp., is spotted in 91 per cent class A viewing time. The number of markets in prime time periods include eight at 8:30-9pm; eight at 9-9:30pm; 19 at 9:30-10pm and ten at 10-10:30pm.

Judy Garland's next CBS show is slated for February 25, with the big question -- will it be live or film? Miss Garland has been quoted as saying that she will never appear live on television again, but the history of the singer's own efforts in film is that she and Sid Luft are never satisfied, so could the program be put together in time?.....CBS is shooting the pilot for a series starring Walter Slezak this week in New York. Some reports have it that the show is titled Slezak and Son, but CBS cautiously calls it the "Slezak Project.".....The pilot for the new Richard Boone star-rer, Have Gun -- Will Travel, rolled before the end of the year. It brought recollections of two attempted Paul Gilbert pilots for NBC under the title, Have Camera -- Will Travel. Someone forgot to load the camera; maybe the gun will have more success.Jack Webb's announcement in Hollywood that he has agreed to suspend production after only 23 films in the Noah's Ark series, followed by a few days the word that he would produce and star in another 78 films for the Dragnet series. Webb has had plans for an airline pilot series for future production, but he will probably put this off to concentrate on adding new interest to the Dragnet films for next season.....Frank Gruber will act as story consultant for Overland Productions, Inc., on the new Wells Fargo film series. The pilot film, which Revue had on Schlitz Playhouse recently, was based on a Gruber original, one of his many Western books. Gruber is also reported to have an interest in the production firm which is headed by Nat Holt.

The Billboard Publishing Co has purchased "TV Availabilities," monthly television magazine which has specialized in the publication of listings and specifications of locally broadcast TV shows in which national advertisers may purchase participations. Beginning in February, the editorial content of the magazine will be incorporated into "The Billboard's" monthly TV merchandising reprint, which will be renamed "The Billboard's TV Availabilities" and will be issued in 9 x 12-inch format.

NBC's new Tonight show, starting Monday, Jan 28, has settled on its columnists, format and production staff. The program will be seen Mondays thru Fridays, 11:15pm-1am EST, 11pm-12midnight CST and 11:30pm-12:30am PST. Norman Frank will be producer, with his New York staff to include Roger Gimbel, associate producer; Ted Nathanson, director; Frank Barton, managing editor, and Ed Cosgrove, unit manager. Don Meier will be location producer for Chicago. Furth Ullman as location producer and Bill Bennington as director, will handle all West Coast telecasts for Tonight. There will be three complete mobile television units, one each in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, to cover on-the-spot news and features. Control center and main origination will be at RCA Exhibition Hall on West 49th St., in New York. Basic format plan calls for concentration "to capture the tempo and pacing of night life throughout the country... highlights of the entertainment world will be a regular feature." The New York columnists who will cover "America After Dark," will be Hy Gardner, N. Y. Herald Tribune syndicated columnist; Earl Wilson, New York Post and Hall Syndicate columnist; and Bob Considine, International News Service columnist. Irv Kupcinet, syndicated columnist of the Chicago Sun-Times, will cover the Midwest from Chicago. Paul Coates of the Los Angeles Mirror-News and Vernon Scott, Hollywood reporter for United Press, will cover the West from Los Angeles.

CBS is planning on a February start for production of its one-hour films for the Ferry Mason series, which will star Raymond Burr, William Hopper and Barbara Hale. Gail Jackson and Ben Brady are co-producers.....Hal Roach Studios expects to continue its trend in using its facilities for "house packages" during 1957. The Studios had a total production expenditure of \$4,867,000 for 1956, representing investments by Hal Roach, Jr., for TV films in which he had sole or joint proprietary interest. During previous years, studio outlay including filming for independent production companies, networks and syndicates. The 1957 production schedule includes continued filming for Ch! Susanna and Telephone Time, both on CBS, and Blondie, just started on NBC; plus a new group of Code 3 films to be added to the 39 currently syndicated by ABC Film Sales. The Roach Studios also has five new Roach properties under consideration for either network showing or syndication, depending on sponsor interest.

Screen Gems lists 18 pilots and series for the 1957-58 season. Titles, production firms and stars are: Here Comes the Showboat; Calhoun-Orsatti Enterprises and Briskin Productions with Screen Gems; starring Rory Calhoun, with Allen Case. The Shape, The Face and The Brain; Harry Sauber Productions with Screen Gems; starring Mamie Van Doren, Gail Robbins and Virginia Field. Tom, Dick and Harry; Briskin Productions with Screen Gems; starring Gene Nelson, Joe Mantell and Marvin Kaplan. The Book of Books; William Goetz with Screen Gems; great religious dramas from the Bible. Dr. Mike; Bryan Foy Productions with Screen Gems; starring Keith Andes. Casey Jones; Briskin Productions with Screen Gems; starring Alan Hale, Jr., with 11-year-old Bobby Clark. Shore Leave; Harry Sauber Productions with Screen Gems; starring Paul Gilbert and Pete Marshall. Ivanhoe; Screen Gems; starring Roger Moore, with John Pike. Danger Is My Business; Briskin Productions with Screen Gems; starring John Payne. Western Ranch Party; Ranch Party-Briskin Productions with Screen Gems; starring Tex Ritter as host and Jay Stewart as m.c. Johnny Wildlife; Wildlife Adventure Corp. with Screen Gems; starring Paul Langton, with Trudy Marshall and Tony Dowd. You Can't Take It With You; Screen Gems; no stars named. Johnny Nighthawk; Briskin Productions with Screen Gems; no star named. Clipper Ship; Screen Gems; no star named. The Web; Goodson-Todman Productions with Screen Gems; mystery anthology series. University Award Theatre; Screen Gems; drama anthology series with a top name permanent host. The Leathernecks; Briskin Productions with Screen Gems; two stars, not named. Standing Room Only; Screen Gems; drama anthology series.

First of the new "two-and-a-half" series to be produced by Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., for ABC Television will be Amazon Trader, half-hour weekly series to be filmed on location. Two planned one-hour programs will be set for the fall of 1957 for the network. ABC-Warners filmed programming will be supervised by James T. Aubrey, Jr., for ABC and William T. Orr for Warners.....Paddy Chayefsky will collaborate with the American Psychiatric Assn on the development of a new TV series planned for this year, with the association aiding in the preparation of scripts, which will be concerned with the mechanisms underlying human behavior as the psychiatrist views them. No definite production plans have been announced.

PEOPLE GOING PLACES: John H. Mitchell, ABC v.p., has been named general manager of KGO-TV and KGO, ABC-owned stations in San Francisco.....Mortimer Weinbach appointed v.p. and general counsel for ABC, succeeding James A. Stabile, who resigned to join NBC's talent and contract administration dept.....Robert Lawrence Productions, Inc., New York film commercial producers, bought Loucks & Norling Studios, New York industrial film firm.

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