HAL HUMPHREY

Hysteria Grips TV Sponsors

By HAL HUMPHREY

HOLLYWOOD, Jan. 17—The television industry is heading into a depression of its own making. Sponsors are pulling away from new programs which they've had on the air only a few weeks. Some of them are buying into alternate week partnerships on other shows, but many are pulling out altogether.

Advertising agency men, producers and writers are huddling in quiet hysteria to see what can be done to "beef up" shows tottering on the brink of oblivion. A one-tenth of a point change in any of the four major TV audience rating services will catapult a TV producer into joyful leaps or a pit of despair—depending upon whether the fraction is a plus or a mnus.

"I've never seen anything like it," said a Hollywood TV executive this week. "Everybody is pushing the panic button."

Paradoxically, more money is being spent to sponsor TV shows than ever before—over a billion dollars a year. Salaries for TV performers have reached heights which make the heyday of old movie stars look cheap by comparison. In other words, network TV certainly can be said to be immersed in a wave of prosperity.

CASE OF NERVES

So, why all of the panic? Basically it's a case of nerves. The average national TV sponsor never really knows how much good, if any, he actually derives from a TV program. The show can be drawing people, but he has to guess whether or not they are buying his product as a result of watching his show.

What is beginning to worry many a sponsor is that the price of buying this pig-in-a-TV-poke keeps going up, and the only gauge he has for measuring the worth of this cost is the various audience ratings. The price he pays the network is divided by the hypothetical number of people viewing his show, giving the sponsor the answer to how much it costs him to beam his message to each viewer.

With the cost of TV shows constantly rising, a sponsor figures his show's rating must rise proportionately. One large soap company recently informed its ad agency that if the network drama show it sponsors drops below a 25 in the Nielsen ratings, then it will drop the show.

RUN ON THE BANK

If all major network sponsors should suddenly decide that a 25 Nielsen rating was minimum, more than half of the TV shows on the air today would fold. There are disturbing indications that a run on the bank already has begun.

Twenty-seven new network TV shows made their debut last fall, and six of these now have received cancellations. Another dozen or more of these 27 are in rating trouble, if a rating below 25 is considered unsafe.

Not one of the new shows this season has made its way into the charmed "top 10" circle of any of the rating services. Closest to it is Tennessee Ernie Ford's nighttime show on NBC with a Nielsen of 33. Walter Winchell's new show (already gone) had an 18.4 for the first two weeks in December. Jack Webb's "Noah's Ark," which goes in March, had a 19.3 for the same December period.

NUMBERS GAME

This "numbers game," as it is played by sponsors and networks, is wreaking havoc with lots of better-than-average TV entertainment. First, there is no proof that the ratings are accurate, but even more damaging game is played.

Sponsors feel they can't afford to wait long enough to see if a show will eventually catch on and build an audience. They want the answer right now because of the expense. With so many shows on TV, there must be hundreds of thousands of viewers who read that a show has folded before they were even aware it was on, or had an opportunity to sample it.

If the game keeps getting faster and the stakes higher, everybody is going to lose.

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TELEVISION MAILBAG

Q.—Who were the foreign correspondent and the areas where they operate that Edward Murrow interviewed Dec. 30?—N. N. H., Danville.

A.—Howard K. Smith, London; David Schoenbrun, Paris; Bob Pierpont, Tokyo; Dick Hottelet, Bonn; Eric Severeid, Washington; Winston Burdett, Rome, and Daniel Scharr, Moscow.

Q.—How old is Johnny Washbrook of "My Friend Flicka"?—Grace Spinardi, San Leandro.

A.—12.

Q.—Where can I get some information on the one and only double zowie George Nader?—J. H., Oakland.

A.—From Universal Studios, Hollywood.

Q.—Why are we seeing repeaters of the Rosemary Clooney show?—I. C., Oakland.

A.—A few got into the series, but from now on, all new.

Q.—Was Jay Jostin the original "Mr. District Attorney"?—Mrs. Agnes DuRee, Oakland.

A.—He was.

Q.—Will "Beat the Clock" and "Two for the Money" be back?—A. A. W., Berkeley.

A.—Beat the Clock is on CBS network, but not shown locally. "Two for the Money" is off, with no plans for renewing it.

Q.—Where do I write to Perry Como and the Four Lads?—J. N. El Cerrito.

A.—In care of National Broadcasting Company, New York City.

For an answer to your question about any TV program or Tribune, P. O. Box 509, Oak-TV actor write to TV KEY MAILING, care of The Oakland land 4.

Three Suspects Face Charges In Holdup Here

Three San Francisco men, captured by police moments after a liquor store was robbed of $128 at 2100 Market St. here, have been ordered held to answer to superior court.

They are Herbert Hall, 30, a welder, and Exum Walter, 22, a student, both of 2832 Sacramento St.; and Preston Sample, 31, a machinist, of 1525 Oak St.

Patrolman Earl Delaney, alerted by radio, saw the suspects' car shortly after the holdup on Dec. 3, and seized the three.

Hall and Walter were later identified as the pair who robbed another liquor store, at 3039 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, where $110 was taken on Nov. 28.

Charged with two counts of armed robbery, Hall and Walter are being held in lieu of $6,000 bail.

Sample's bail was set at $4,000. He is charged with one count of robbery and one prior robbery, for which he served a term in San Quentin.

The three appeared late yesterday in the Municipal Court of Judge Joseph A. Murphy.

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DIAL SMILE . . . . - - - - - By Bil Keane

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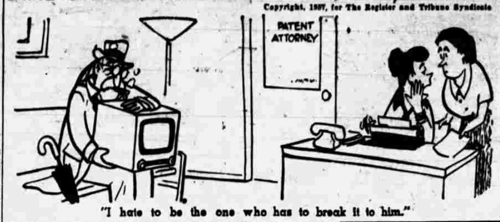

"I hate to be the one who has to break it to him."

MARIE TORRE

Judy Garland's Row With CBS

By MARIE TORRE

With an air of indignation and grief in his voice, producer Sid Luft stepped into the Judy Garland-CBS fracas and emphatically declared that network forces have done his wife wrong! Although he's never been one to resort to fisticuffs, Luft is clearly in the mood to take on the most strapping CBS executive who can look him in the eye and say that Judy doesn't want to work on TV, as had been indicated in the report about the cancellation of her Feb. 25 spectacular on CBS.

"Nothing is farther from the truth," boomed Luft. "Judy wants to work on TV. It's CBS that hasn't lived up to our original bargain."

The conflict flared out into the open the other day, you may remember, when CBS passed along the word that it had cancelled a 90-minute Judy Garland spectacular and it had two big sponsors, too—because, said a spokesman, "Judy would not work." "Judy obviously did not want to work on TV since she had rejected half a dozen ideas for that February show."

But Luft tells a different story.

"What half a dozen ideas?" he said. "As of right now, CBS has come up with only two plans for that February show—one amounted to the same thing she did at the Palace Theater, the other was a combination of her acts both at the Palace and Las Vegas. Judy did her Palace show on TV once before. Is she wrong in wanting to come before the public in something new, something different?"

The terms of Judy's CBS contract provide her with right to approve director, producer and script, and stipulates that she will perform in a show 10 weeks after the acceptance of a script.

But CBS never showed Judy a script of anything, just short outlines for those same "old Palact Theater things," Luft fumed on. "That whole CBS network didn't come up with one original idea—a good theme for a revue or a book show, which Judy would love to do. And if you'll look at the contract it says that CBS is to supply her with her TV material."

Luft's anger did not subside throughout his explanation of the imbroglio.

"I know why CBS is so upset about that Feb. 25 show," he continued; "They sold the show to Buick and Liggett and Myers before consulting Judy. So now they're hollerin' copper. Well, that's not Judy's problem, and they had no right to make damaging claims that she tossed a monkey wrench into the whole thing."

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BREACH OF CONTRACT LAID TO COLUMBIA

NEW YORK, Jan. 17—(AP)—The husband of Judy Garland says the Columbia Broadcasting system has ended its three-year contract with the singer two years ahead of the expiration date.

CBS last week said it had dropped plans for Miss Garland's Feb. 25 show, which would have been her second program under provisions of the contract—calling for one show a year for three years.

Sid Luft, her husband and business manager, said yesterday that CBS, by dropping the February show, "has certainly breached our contract."

Asked if he planned legal action, Luft said, "I expect so."

Alameda Barracks

ALAMEDA, Jan. 17—Comdr. J. M. Hirst of Alameda Naval Air Station will speak to Alameda Barracks, Veterans of World War I, at 8 p.m. tomorrow in the Veterans Memorial Building on "How to Live to Be 100."

Tentative Settlement Reached in Radio Strike

A tentative settlement was reached in the month-old strike of radio announcers against members of the Bay Area Independent Broadcasters Association.

The agreement, still to be ratified by both the association and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, came at a meeting which lasted until early today.

Taking part in the discussion were committees from both the Alameda County Central Labor Council and the San Francisco Labor Council, and Larry Corbett, attorney for the broadcasters' association.

AFTRA will submit the tentative agreement to its members tomorrow. Corbett is expected to discuss the proposal with the employers today and tomorrow. Meanwhile, picket lines were maintained and announcers stayed off the job at three stations.

No terms were announced pending ratification.

Radio announcers went on strike against station KSFO in San Francisco on Dec. 19 in a wage dispute. The strike was later extended to KYA and KROW.

The fourth member of the association, KLX in Oakland, was not struck but will be affected by the agreement.

Rabbi Schulweis Speaks Tomorrow

Rabbi Harold Schulweis of Temple Beth Abraham, 327 MacArthur Blvd., will speak on "How to Become a Prophet," tomorrow at 8:30 p.m.

Mr. and Mrs. Louis Abrams will be the hosts for the reception following the service.

John Erskine Papers

NEW YORK, Jan. 17—(AP)—Columbia University has received the private papers of the late John Erskine, a former professor and poet, who helped establish Columbia's system of general education which later spread to other colleges. Erskine's papers, which include much unpublished material, were presented by his widow, Mrs. Helen Worden Erskine.

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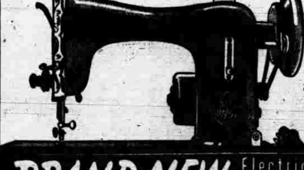

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