

Caldwell series coming

By JAY SHARBUITT

LOS ANGELES (AP) — For years, independent TV stations have griped they can't afford top-quality new shows with which to effectively compete at night against costly, glossy network wares.

And network affiliates occasionally moan they get stomped in the ratings on a given night because their network gave them a dog of a first-run show or, yes, another rerun.

But in early May, the first step of an effort to solve both gripes starts when at least 75 stations begin airing a costly, star-studded miniseries in a new venture called "Operation Prime Time."

The six-hour opus is "Testimony of Two Men," based on Taylor Caldwell's novel. It features such folk as Theodore Bikel, Steve "S.W.A.T." Forrest, and

Barbara Parkins, late of "Peyton Place."

It's being made at an estimated cost of nearly \$1.6 million by MCA-TV, the syndication arm of Universal Studios. And there may be more like it if "Testimony" ratings testify to big local audiences.

That's the word from Richard H. Frank, head of independent station KCOUP here and a prime mover in the "Operation Prime Time" project.

He said it began a year ago when he and officials from independents KTVU-San Francisco, WGN-Chicago, WPIX-New York and KTSW-Seattle sat down after an industry convention to ponder the lack of good, first-run shows for local stations facing the network goodies at night.

They decided to sound out MCA-TV on the idea of the independent stations financing their own series as a group, he said.

"Our goal was to see if we could get the stations to be able to generate enough money to produce first-run quality programs that, if put opposite network shows, would get comparable ratings," he added. MCA said yes to the idea, provided Frank's group paid for the cost of seeing if enough stations would buy the plan. Enough did.

Although it originally was planned only to tap independent station money, he said, network affiliates also expressed interest, and at last report he has 22 independents and 53 network affiliates taking part.

He said these stations — and others deciding to join in — are putting up on a fair-share basis nearly \$3 million of the cost for "Testimony," the \$600,000 balance to be paid by MCA.

While the series begins nationally the first week of May, it won't air everywhere the same night or at the same

time, lest the networks hammer it on premiere night with a hit movie or a big special. "Every station in every market is running it in a different time period," Frank said. "That was one of our basic strategies. We don't want to give the networks a chance to counter-program."

At the heart of "Operation Prime Time" is a belief that because of an improving economy, the demand of advertisers for air time now is exceeding the ability of the networks to provide it.

"I've been calling it an occasional (program) alternative for lack of a better term," Frank said. "We won't want to get rid of the networks. We need the syndicated programs (reruns) they provide."

But we're in an economy now that's more than a three-network economy. So the demand is there."



RUSH concert

RUSH, a Canadian rock trio is scheduled to appear in concert Thursday at 9 p.m. at the Cayuga County Community College gymnasium. The Toronto based

musicians will be introduced by the Canadian band Max Webster. Tickets are available at the college and at Carma Record Shop.

Cline records selling

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Country music great Patsy Cline died in a plane crash 14 years ago this month but her legacy survives.

"Crazy," Linda Ronstadt's current release, is an old Patsy Cline song. So was "Sweet Dreams," a big hit last year by Emmylou Harris.

Her records sell today. Radio stations continue to play her songs. Fans put flowers on her grave in Winchester, Va.

Says her widower, Nashville record company executive Charlie Dick: "People talk to me about her all the time."

On March 5, 1963, Miss Cline, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Cowboy

Copps and their pilot, Randy Hughes, were killed when their plane crashed during a thunderstorm near Dyersburg, Tenn.

She was at the crescendo of her career with seven hits in three years. Many but she had displaced Kitty Wells as the top female country singer.

For Dick, time has trimmed the tears and the torment. With composure and commemoration, he talks willingly about her tragic death.

"I was tore up for some time," he recalled in an interview in his office, a picture of Miss Cline nearby. "I was good friends with the others killed, too. Their relatives and I sort of

put it all back together. Dottie West was a good friend of Patsy's. She and Loretta (Lynn) asked me to go on the road with them to get me away from things."

"She was ahead of her time, definitely. She'd still be on top today — still selling records with no problem at all. You still hear her songs on the radio, but you'd hear a lot more except that she didn't have much in the can when she died."

"She was one of the first to cross over (into the pop field). Her records aren't dated; there's not that much difference from what you hear today. A lot of people are trying to sing like her. She had mass appeal —

more than just country." Dick, who remarried in 1965 and divorced in 1972, was supposed to be on the ill-fated flight. But he stayed behind because the single-engine plane was crowded.

"We had been to Birmingham and landed in Nashville just long enough for me to get off before they headed on to Kansas City," he said. "I was lucky."

Miss Cline, who was 30 when she died, has a daughter, Julie, 18, and a son, Randy, 16.

Miss Cline, whose biggest hit was "I Fall To Pieces," was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1973.

Farrah, Lee quit shows

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Farrah Fawcett-Majors, the fawny-maned leader of "Charlie's Angels" and her husband, Lee Majors, television's "Six-Million-Dollar Man," are both leaving their top-rated ABC series after the current season, her manager says.

Manager Jay Bernstein said Monday that the couple had formed Fawcett-Majors Productions and their first project will be a television movie.

Miss Fawcett-Majors, 30,

notified her producers that she is quitting the show after its first year, her manager Jay Bernstein said Monday, confirming reports that had been circulating for weeks.

Her attorney, Charles Silverberg, said his client planned to pursue a career in films. He denied that the actress was threatening to leave the series as a ploy for more money and said she had "never had a signed agreement" with the producers, Spelling-Goldberg Productions.

Neither producer Aaron

Spelling nor Miss Fawcett-Majors could be reached for comment.

Officials at ABC declined to comment. Production for the first year of the show has been completed.

Miss Fawcett-Majors became widely known through more than 100 television commercials, with products including cars, shampoos, milk, makeup, airlines, soft drinks and sun glasses, but her popularity soared to new heights in "Charlie's Angels." The series concerns the

derring-do of three women — Kate Jackson, Jaclyn Smith and Miss Fawcett-Majors — who depend more on sex appeal than their powers of crime detection. The sex appeal has had a decided effect on the ABC show's ratings, making it the only new smash hit of the fall season.

Her popularity has been further boosted by soaring sales of a poster in which she appears in a revealing red swim suit.

She is married to actor Lee Majors, star of "The 11 Million Man." She has made guest appearances on that series.

PBS doing family show

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A few years ago, public TV aired a controversial documentary series, "An American Family," showing the gradual breakup of the William Loud family of Santa Barbara, Calif.

On April 4, the Public Broadcasting Service starts a six-part documentary effort, "Six American Families," each clan interviewed at a three-weeks-per-family rate by freelance writer Paul Wilkes.

But don't consider this an attempt to depict the happiest families of America since, as Wilkes jokingly puts it, "we didn't try to purge the country of Loudism" when filming began in May 1975.

Wilkes, the series' host and

writer, says the show simply aimed at recording — with no point of view — the lives and thoughts of a cross-section of America, six families in six regions.

They range from a Politan-American, blue collar family in Chicago to a Jewish, upper middle-class tribe torn by marital discord in Mill Valley, Calif. Each family show appears on succeeding weeks.

A unique show, but "Families" is unique in another way. PBS says this is the first time one of its series will appear both on public and commercial TV in the same week, although on different nights.

The commercial airings will be in San Francisco, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Baltimore on stations owned by the Group W chain, which put up most of the cost — \$900,000, Wilkes says — to make the series.

Another \$200,000, he says, came from the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church, with an equal amount in a grant from the Travelers Insurance Companies for the series' public TV telecasts.

Wilkes, 38, who says he comes from a large, working-class family in Cleveland, says "Families" is an outgrowth of a book he wrote about a New Jersey family with whom he lived a year as an observer.

The Group W troops asked him, he said, to put his one-family chronicling techniques to work in a documentary about a number of families "to show what's going on in this country, what people are about." They backed their idea with bucks.

And Wilkes, who used four documentary teams at different

times, set off to work, gaining access to the families he chose with the help of church, civic and neighborhood groups.

The filming of each family was done, he said, with the understanding "that if they didn't want us to film something they should tell us." Such talking occasionally occurred, he added, citing one example.

He said when he was questioning a separated couple about their other relationships "sometimes they said, 'Hey, this is far enough.' And we'd back off. But we wanted them to call that shot. We didn't want to censor ourselves."

Wilkes, who lives in New York, conceded that an awareness of being photographed can alter one's usual behavior. But he said he found each family remarkably natural after the first few days.

"I really think we have the essence of them," he said. "Exactly as they are? Totally? No. Nobody sees that but the people involved. But I feel pretty good that we got very, very close to the truth."

Booze wholesaler barred

NEW YORK (AP) — The State Liquor Authority has barred Foremost-McKesson, the nation's largest liquor and wine wholesaler, from operating in New York State for 15 days following the firm's plea of "no contest" to charges of supplying more than \$200,000 worth of free liquor to retailers from 1972 through 1974.

The company's licenses in the Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse areas will be suspended for 15 days beginning March 13, 1977.

A fourth license was not suspended so as not to interfere with the company's sales out of state. However, Foremost agreed not to use that license to make any sales in New York State during the suspension period, the SLA said.

One SLA official said Monday that the suspension was an "extremely serious" penalty and said it was the first time in recent memory that a liquor wholesaler had temporarily lost its license.

Delivery of the free liquor was concealed by recording the free goods on the books as samples, the SLA said.

"None of this goes in benefit the consumer, since the retailer receiving the free liquor is not allowed to pass his savings along in the form of lower prices," said SLA chairman Michael Roth.

Foremost distributes a wide variety of products, including Dewars, Catty Sark and Vat 69 scotches, Old Granddads bourbon, Schenley Reserve blended whiskey, Gilbey's Glen and De Kuyper cordials.

Wallet found after 35 years

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Louis Kimball has gotten back a wallet he lost almost 35 years ago and 1,000 miles away.

He lost the billfold when he was visiting Stockton, Calif., to watch his brother's graduation from a flight training school in 1942.

Kimball recently got a letter from the Stockton Police Department, inquiring if he was the Louis Kimball who had lost the wallet there in the 1940s. Apparently Officer Jim Watson made a personal project of tracking down the owner of the billfold which had been found in a wall of a demolished Stockton hotel.

"When I called Officer Watson and told him I was the right man, he was thrilled," Kimball said.

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