



"How would you like to get on my list of ten best boy friends?"

A Closer Look

By Ernest Kreiling

HOLLYWOOD — It's appropriate — perhaps even inevitable — at this time of the year that everyone with access to a few column inches of newspaper space filing a few semantic barbs at that venerable television tradition, the summer re-runs. So I'll probably be accused of high heresy by suggesting that re-runs aren't all bad.

In the first place they do afford us a chance to see any number of programs we missed during the regular seasons. For example, I didn't see one episode of My Man Higgins or Going My Way all year. Now I'll have a chance to see why millions like myself made a weekly habit of avoiding these two cancelled shows.

A second reason why some defense can be made for re-runs is that however you evaluate the level of television it is as high as it is partially because of re-runs. In other words, there is an economic necessity behind summer repeats. Most programs are able just to break even financially on the first go-around between October and June.

THE PRODUCERS must depend on the summer re-runs, subsequent repeats on local stations and sales abroad to turn the profit they expect and deserve. So without these sources of profit the budgets of most series would have to be so sharply trimmed as to reduce the quality of writing, production, and acting that goes into the programs now.

Hollywood can no more turn out top notch programs by cutting financial corners than General Motors can produce a Cadillac at a Chevrolet's cost, a rather obvious fact that is too often neglected in appraising television fare today. The familiar laws of economics function just the same in the creative market place.

BUT THE REAL tragedy of the summer is not the re-runs per se, although I too find myself impatient with them. The real tragedy, and where the local stations and networks are remiss, is in not making use of the summer months for more program exploration, creative experimentation, and talent development. There was a time a few years back when the summer served as a testing ground for new programs and talent, some of which moved into regular season prime time. Today the networks try out a few game shows only.

Television is infamous for its voracious appetite for material and talent. It consumes both at a rate faster than all

other entertainment forms combined. The networks, which consume the bulk of it carry a moral responsibility, it seems to me, to do more to insure the replenishment of the supply — a talent conservation program if you will.

THEY ARE enjoying bountiful years at present and the investment of some of their liberal profits in a Research and Development Division would be in order, following the pattern of most far-sighted industrial corporations.

The R & D unit would live parasitically off profits and would not be required to produce revenue. It would devote all its energies and resources to developing new program ideas and techniques, and it would be charged with stepping outside of familiar bounds, with reaching into untried areas and with shaping and molding promising new talent. Some prime summer hours should then be used to try out the new ideas and talent without regard for their commercial potential.

Such an approach can do much to insure that television in America matures and develops instead of simply aging as it is at present.

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