

Assignment TV

By **TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY**

Any list of the best television programs of 1968 is certain to be marked with strong contrasts — from Rubenstein to rock; from Disney to Chekhov; from Ann-Margaret to Margaret Meade. It is appropriate that the outstanding TV drama of the year was ABC's Canadian-made production of "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" because there were many programs on the little box which appealed to both extremes in all of us — even if the Mr. Hydes in the audience had more to watch than the Dr. Jekylls.

PERSONAL appearances ran the gamut from inspiring Vladimir Horowitz at Carnegie Hall to perspiring Elvis Presley in beautiful downtown Burbank. Both were well-produced and — depending on personal tastes — high in vitamin content. Enough additional protein to satisfy almost any sort of gentleman in the audience was provided by specials starring curvy Brigitte Bardot, the French boulevard doll; Ann-Margaret, the darling of the black leather, motor-psycho set; Mitzl Gaynor, the girl of 1,000 faces but master of none; and Brooklyn's suffragette, Barbra Streisand, who cried aloud in Central Park for her little lost Rose of Second Avenue.

RELIGION — a programming subject which is usually exiled to Sunday morning when those who appreciate it most are in church — was given prime-time treatment from both ends of the hymnal. The paintings in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel were examined on scaffolds in ABC's "Secret of Michaelangelo" with a reverence equalling that of the artist.

At the other extreme, CBS' "Business of Religion" was a courageous, critical report on the growing wealth of tax-free, church-owned financial ventures far from the area of celestial devotion which inspired Michaelangelo to lie flat on his back for 10 years to illuminate the story of Creation on a ceiling too high for anyone but ABC ever to see in detail.

WHILE TV'S news programs showed a year of racial viciousness in streets that were normally quiet, many excellent efforts were made to put together the pieces of American life shaken loose by the strife. Among them were Group W's "One Nation Indivisible," Xerox's "Of Black America," NET's "Black Journal," and local shows directed toward the black minority such as "Black Dignity" (KGO-TV San Francisco) which is based on the principles that personal dignity and self-respect can be achieved only by contributing something positive and warned that your Negroes cannot afford the luxury of classroom disruptions when every minute the teacher spends in discipline is equal to an hour lost in learning.

LIFE'S TWO extremes — its beginning and its end — were examined in two remarkable shows: "How Life Begins" by ABC's Jules Power, and "Don't Count The Candles," Lord Snowdon's camera essay on the delights of growing old gracefully. Birth and death, themselves, provided the National Education Network's "PEL" with a memorable, second season debut. But it is unlikely that any contrast in 1968 could equal that provided by coincidence by CBS when its sorrowful study of Indian poverty, the worst on earth, in "The Forgotten American," was followed directly by a newscast of President Johnson pledging a continuation of the Vietnam war — "because we have promised, as Americans, to come to the aid of underfed and under-developed nations wherever they are . . ."

It was painfully evident that they are right here at home.

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