

# 20TH CENTURY-FOX IN TURNABOUT: \$15 MILLION TABBED FOR TV FILM

- Skouras puts Martin Manulis in charge—with blank check
- Ambitious schedule for productions readied for marketplace

20th Century-Fox Film Corp., which seven months ago voiced profound anguish over the inroads of television [FILM, May 26], last week staked a \$15 million bankroll on "the most extensive tv production program ever undertaken by a motion picture company."

President Spyros P. Skouras spelled out the change of heart in a New York news conference last Thursday (Dec. 11).



MR. MANULIS

Named to head the project — involving some 16 individual properties ranging from 30-minute situation comedies to 90-minute showcase specials—was Martin Manulis, 41-year-old former CBS-TV staff producer (*Playhouse 90*, *Climax!*)

who joined Fox in September as head of the studio's tv production arm.

In effect, Mr. Skouras has handed Mr. Manulis a blank check, saying "he can spend as much money as he wants . . . since the future of 20th Century-Fox (in television) rests in his hands."

Then, turning to the producer, he added, "God help you if you don't do a good job."

According to Mr. Manulis, the blank check is substantial; initially, \$15 million have been allocated to cover production of the 16 series—10 of which are "ready to go," nine of these possibly being ready in time for the 1959-60 season. All will be filmed shows, though "should an advertiser so desire," Fox would custom-tailor the shows live as well. Pilots will be shot, although this activity will be "kept to a minimum." Mr. Manulis is planning to tempt agencies and networks on the strength of his past credits.

Though no pitches have yet been made, agencies "have been informed of our plans." Business negotiations will be handled through the William Morris agency and Fox, latter being represented by 20th Century-Fox Vice President Irving Asher and tv Business Manager John Beck.

TCF Productions Inc., the studio's tv subsidiary, will continue but under a different name, it was disclosed. Effective immediately, TCF becomes "Twentieth-Century Fox Television," with access to all of the studio's scattered lots and 28 sound stages. The old TCF group will continue to produce *Broken Arrow* for NBC-TV, and the NTA Film Network's *How to Marry a Millionaire* and *Man Without a Gun* video series, and will also "be available to any outside tv producers who wish to enter into a joint production agreement," Mr. Manulis said.

S. Charles Einfeld, vice president of advertising-exploitation (representing the par-

ent company), pointed out that the 16 programs would be geared for network exposure and that "little thought" had been given to setting up a syndication branch. Asked why Fox had launched such an ambitious program at this time—when most, if not all, of its sound stages were humming with theatrical film production—Mr. Einfeld said simply: "We want to make money." He added, "this in no way means we are any less unhappy over the effect of tv on box-office receipts. But we are an entertainment company in business to produce entertainment of all sorts . . . and obligated to our stockholders to earn profits . . ."

The company hopes to attract advertiser and network support before actually undertaking production—admittedly a risky proposition—and it explains the massiveness of its program by pointing out "we are geared for mass production."

The seven properties that will get top priority:

*Mr. Belvedere*, 30-minute comedy series based on Fox's theatrical film, "Sitting Pretty" (Clifton Webb) and subsequent *Belvedere* shows; *Esther Williams Show*, 30-minute dramatic anthology featuring Miss Williams as hostess on weekly basis, as actress on alternate-week basis; *The Many Lives of Dobie Gillis*, 30-minute teen-age situation comedy based on Max Shulman's book and adapted for tv by Mr. Shulman; *Helimariners*, 30-minute action series on the U. S. Marine Corps' latest combat arm, written by unofficial USMC historian Richard ("Guadalcanal Diary") Tregaskis; *Sunny Side Up* (tentative title), 30-minute comedy series dealing with travel agents and designed for Fox contract player Tom Ewell;

*Five Fingers*, a 30-minute counter-espionage series inspired by Fox's post-war film of the same name which dealt with "Operation Cicero" spy case; *Whodunit*, 30-minute murder melodrama series with a twist: viewers are asked to guess the solution to each episode, then are told in the closing moments.

Beyond these, Fox plans to produce *The Peggy Lee Show*, 30-minute situation comedy interlaced with music; *The 'Forty-Niners*, 30-minute adventure series set in the 49th state of Alaska; *The Nanette Fabray Show*, 30-minute musical comedy series with Miss Fabray; *Tales of Broadway*, undefined series of tv adaptations of Garson Kanin stories produced by the playwright; two series by Broadway author Leslie ("Marriage-Go-Round") Stevens and a romantic adventure series with a South Pacific setting to be developed by Pulitzer prize-winner James M. Michener.

The two series with which Mr. Manulis will be personally identified are *Festival*, a monthly, 90-minute "prestige show" which he hopes will attract the top writing, direct-

ing and acting tv talents and *Profile*, a 60-minute dramatic biography series he says was inspired by the "non-chronological" treatment given the lives of singer Helen Morgan, deaf-mute Helen Keller and Irish Dublin Mayor Robert Briscoe on *Playhouse 90*. These seem most likely to get the live treatment should such be ordered.

## Fourth ITC Division, Promotions Announced

The evolution of Independent Television Corp. into a "tight tactical sales and service operation" in tv film sales, as expressed by President Walter Kingsley last week, appears complete.

ITC has set up a fourth sales division, that of regional sales, to add to its national sales, Arrow Productions (re-run) and syndicated sales divisions.

Four executive promotions were announced: Hardie Frieberg, assistant general sales manager of the syndicated division, to general manager of all syndicated sales operations, and William DuBois, general sales manager of the syndicated division, to director of operations and sales planning.

Mr. DuBois will supervise traffic, sales service, research and sales planning and development departments and work closely with all sales divisions including sales development, hiring and training of new personnel. Mr. Frieberg will supervise the geographic sales divisions, the New York City sales department and the newly formed regional sales division. The regional sales unit specializes in working with regional advertisers on new, first-run syndicated properties.

In the regional sales division, Kurt



MR. FRIEBERG



MR. DuBOIS

Blumberg, ITC's manager of sales administration, becomes manager of regional sales, eastern division, and Carl A. Russell, formerly with Ziv Television Programs, becomes manager of regional sales, midwest division. Both men report to Mr. Frieberg.

ITC is a new \$25 million tv film production-distribution-financing company established for world-wide operation by the Jack Wrather Organization, Beverly Hills, Calif., and Associated Television Ltd., London.

## More Production, Distribution For Radio & Tv Packagers Inc.

Radio & Television Packagers Inc., New York, last week announced a stepping up of its production schedule and a reorganization of its distribution set-up.

Effective Dec. 1 distribution of the com-