

It could be a Hollywood scenario. Title it "Resurrection." Tom Kuhn could be a leading man.

Fade in on a moldering film factory known as Warner Bros. Burbank. The time is 1969. The plot has it that this used to be a place of plenty—hard-boiled-action movies, lots of action-adventure television.

But now the production line is all but stilled. Ownership of the place is up for grabs, turned loose by mogul Jack B. Warner, latched on to but then fumbled by Seven Arts, finally secured by a one-time parking-lot operator, Kinney Corp.

The question was: Can a Hollywood studio make it in television any more? There's all that facility overhead to overcome. And what about deficit financing, that unavoidable attendant to mass program development and pilot-making activities?

Enter Ted Ashley and Gerald Leider, both ex-talent agents. Their kind is usually the heavy in such pieces. This time put them down as good guys. Ted Ashley would run the over-all business; Jerry Leider would be TV boss. They knew where they were going right from the start.

"... full-scale effort which our company is undertaking to build a television business that will become a prime factor in that industry. We will become active in every aspect of television. . . ." The lines are Ted Ashley's. "We will seek acquisitions and co-productions with producers, writers, stars and existing production companies. We aim to utilize to the fullest the extraordinary resources of our studio. . . ."

The start was virtually from scratch. First there had to be a crack executive to fire up the production line. Jerry Leider pointed at Tom Kuhn—a surprising choice.

He had less than 10 years in the business and all with NBC. A director of the network's live-on-tape nighttime programs and specials, he worked successfully in the development and production of such shows as *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, handled such top performing talent as Dean Martin, Flip Wilson, Andy Williams. But what did he know about film-making, which, after all, is what Warner Bros. is all about?

"Come, let's learn together." Jerry Leider said to him in effect. The mandate for both was to bring this studio back to life again.

Physically, certainly, Tom Kuhn is attractive casting. Slim and boyish, he looks like Dick Powell in "Gold Diggers of 1933." The son of a certified public accountant, Tom Kuhn came to a business career from an early four-year fling as a singer in the Chicago area. He had gone West in 1961, joined NBC at the local-station level, and had achieved

Staging a comeback for Warner's TV: Thomas Kuhn

some significant promotions in a brief time.

His move to Warner Bros. was made in February 1970. It was already two months late in its program development for the upcoming television season. The only hold-over series from the old regime was *The FBI*, and program is really Quinn Martin's baby, nurtured

Week's Profile



Thomas George Kuhn—VP in charge of production, Warner Bros. Television, Burbank, Calif., division of Kinney Services Inc., New York; b. Nov. 10, 1935, Chicago; BS in business administration, Northwestern University, Chicago, 1953-57; MA in business administration, University of Southern California, 1963-65; professional singer of popular music, in theaters, nightclubs, local TV; with singing group, recorded for Roulette Records, Chicago area, 1957-61; account executive in sales service for KNBC(TV) Los Angeles, 1961-63; talent-contract negotiator, business-affairs department, NBC West Coast, Burbank, 1963-65; manager, NBC's West Coast live-on-tape nighttime programs and specials department, 1965-68; director, NBC, live-on-tape department, 1968-1970; appointed VP in charge of program development, Warner Bros. Television, Feb. 16, 1970; appointed VP in charge of production, Warner Bros. Television, Nov. 23, 1970; bachelor; hobbies—reading, movie-viewing, swimming.

merely in association with Warner Bros.

He began assembling creative producer-writer people as a nucleus for future strength. His experience at NBC suggested the so-called "hyphenates" were the best ones to make development plans happen.

Joining the Warner team were Paul Monash and Hal Kanter, then among others, Mel Shavelson, Jerry Thorpe, Leslie Stevens, Sam Rolfe, Danny Arnold, Ed Adamson, James Lee Barrett, Gary Marshall, David Seltzer, Fred Coe—a cream sampling from the Producers Guild and Writers Guild lists.

To make a quick mark, Warner Bros. bought into several commitments. That's never a sound way to go and Tom Kuhn knew it and knows it. Most notably there were expensive agreements with James Stewart and James Garner. Still, stars the caliber of Stewart and Garner could be sold without pilots and by the start of the 1971-72 season—little more than six months after Tom Kuhn came in as vice president in charge of program development (there wasn't as yet any production to head)—Warner Bros. had four prime-time series, totaling three hours, on all three networks.

Now with a full year to go at development, Tom Kuhn has five shows in contention for the 1972-73 season at NBC-TV, one at CBS-TV and one at ABC-TV, in addition to two movies-for-TV in the works for ABC. One of the NBC shows, *Banyon*, already has sold and *The FBI* has been renewed for an eighth season, but then one of his 1971-72 season shows, *The Chicago Teddy Bears* at CBS, has been canceled. The possible net result is that if the hold-over James Garner *Nichols* and half-hour *Jimmy Stewart Show* are renewed, Warner Bros. could have a minimum of four shows and three-and-a-half hours on prime-time television next season and an unlikely, but possible, maximum of 10 shows and eight-and-a-half hours.

It's a mind-numbing, ever-active time for Tom Kuhn. He needs more hours than the requirements for maintaining proper health allow. Into his office at the Burbank studio by 9 or 9:30, after long-distance calls to New York, he takes note of a schedule that usually calls for screenings, screen tests, production meetings, business luncheons; topped by a social-business dinner nearly always. Home is a house in the Hollywood Hills, luckily only seven minutes from the studio.

Being single helps. He gears his social life around business. Things he learned as a performer about performers served him well. He learned, too, what works before an audience.

"I thrive on work," says Tom Kuhn, who has never stopped achieving in his 36 young years.