

MIP programmers bask in Cannes sun

Paramount and Telepictures among firms reporting successful sales in foreign marketplace; home video market boon in some countries

The sun shone in Cannes last week, and it didn't take the sunbathers along the Plage de la Croisette to signal that springtime had indeed arrived. A more certain measure was the thousands of television program executives at this Riviera resort for the 20th Marche International des Programmes de Television (MIP-TV). Over 5,500 registrants passed through Cannes Palais des Festivals to sample scenes from among 22,000 television programs up for sale.

How many of those attending actually purchased programs at MIP remains to be seen. Halfway through the market last week, more than one seller remarked that traffic in the Palais was unusually light. But most blamed that on a coincidence of three factors. The first was the timing of the market, which began immediately following the long Easter holiday and was cited as the reason for the sparse attendance on the market's first day. The second was a slowdown among Air France employees, which delayed people traveling from Paris to Nice. The third—half jokingly—was said to have been the weather, which was described as unseasonably warm and sunny and thus a slight deterrent from immediate sojourn to the exhibit floor to conduct business.

But once MIP-TV got under way, the complaints quickly subsided. Distributors from around the world swelled the Palais. Although U.S. suppliers were a conspicuous minority, much of their product was in demand, and at least two American companies—Paramount and Telepictures—commandered center stage.

For Paramount, its good fortune lay in *The Jesse Owens Story*, which was committed by 32 foreign markets in the first two days of selling. Bruce Gordon, president of Paramount Television's international distribution division, predicted that it would be sold to 50 markets by the end of the show. The mini-series will be dubbed into 15 languages, Gordon said, with each hour of dubbing requiring about 10 days. Gordon added the "headache" will be to have *The Jesse Owens Story* delivered to the foreign markets in time for this summer's Olympic games in Los Angeles, as promised. "After the Olympics," Gordon acknowledged, "it wouldn't have much pull."

Gordon also said that *Return to Eden*, for which Paramount holds foreign distribution rights, had been picked up in 22 markets as of last Wednesday.

The second American company making its presence felt on the international scene was Telepictures. Michael J. Solomon, Telepictures' chairman, announced at MIP-TV that both the BBC and the Italian Canale 5 network had bought the 12-hour mini-series, *Anodomini*, which cost \$34 million and required 20,000 extras to produce. *A.D.* will be broadcast in the U.S. on NBC-TV during the 1985 February sweeps, but Solomon,

without being too specific, characterized *A.D.*'s sale to Canale 5 as "a record" purchase by that network. Solomon said that had *A.D.* not been produced in Tunisia, it would have cost about a third more.

After Telepictures previewed portions of *A.D.* at an evening reception in Cannes, "we had potential buyers literally lined up the next morning," Solomon related. Asked later what other countries might be expected to buy *A.D.* by the close of MIP-TV, Solomon replied: "The reason a deal may not be closed here is that I'm asking for such a high license fee that some thinking has to be done" on the part of the buyer. Contemplative buyers notwithstanding, Solomon said Telepictures was presently in discussion with 40 countries regarding rights for *A.D.*

Telepictures also used MIP-TV to announce the creation of a new company called TeleLex-VIP Media Scandinavia, which will supply 545 hours of TeleLex programs for cable television systems in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark, beginning Jan. 1, 1985. TVMS is a joint venture comprising TeleLex, a company formed last year by Telepictures and Lexington Broadcast Services to exploit opportunities in international barter programming, and VIP Scandinavia AS, a publicly traded Oslo, Norway-based media company.

The new three-way joint venture will supply daily three-hour blocks of programming for cable systems in Scandinavia in exchange for six minutes commercial time per hour. The six minutes of advertising will be sold to both American and European sponsors. Solomon said the programming will be a mixture of movies, documentaries, family and children's programming and will carry subtitles for each respective country in which the programming is carried. Solomon stressed there would be no adult programming of any kind.

At present, Telepictures executives said there only about 320,000 cable subscribers in Scandinavia, but the number is expected to grow to 2.6 million by 1986. Solomon

also indicated that discussions are also taking place to expand the venture to other European cable systems and other delivery vehicles—such as direct broadcast satellites.

Another deal involving an American company and a foreign counterpart was Worldvision's arrangement to distribute programming to two German television companies. Worldvision, which is owned by Taft Broadcasting, sold 100 hours of *Love Boat* to Axel Springer, a German publishing company, which in turn was planning to distribute *Love Boat* by satellite to cable television systems in Germany. The second Worldvision deal involved the sale of 365 hours of *General Hospital* to Beta Films, a German distribution company.

Worldvision officials said that its *General Hospital* deal marked the first time an American soap opera had been sold to a German television company. The Beta Films deal also included 100 hours of another soap opera—the title of which Worldvision executives were withholding, to be announced at a later date—and covers the first full season of *Highway to Heaven*, the new Michael Landon production committed by NBC for the 1984-85 season. Worldvision also concluded an arrangement to sell 100 half hours of various animated programs to Beta Films.

Bert Cohen, senior vice president for international sales at Worldvision, said Axel Springer is planning to deliver the programming via the Westbeam satellite ECS-1 to a cable television service provided free to German subscribers. "These deals represent the impact of the new media technologies that are rapidly emerging in Europe," Cohen said.

But individual deals aside, MIP-TV was an opportunity for programmers to exchange not only their wares but their ideas as well. Dick Coveny, president of Blair Entertainment, was attending his first MIP-TV. Blair Entertainment has been distributing new first run episodes of *Divorce Court*, which it acquired the right to do after buying Rhodes Productions—the original distributor of the



Looking for programming in the Palais