

NBC wins week 23, CBS takes news

NBC won the prime time week (ended Feb. 26) with a 16.2 rating and a 25.9 share. CBS was second with a 14.6/23.2. ABC closed

out the week with an 11.7/18.6.

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Nielsen	Net	Nielsen	Net	Nielsen	Net
1	27 2/42 N	27.	16 0/26 C	53	11.1/18 C
2	24 9/38 N	28.	15 6/28 N	54	10 6/16 A
3	24 2/35 A	29	14 8/22 A	55	10 5/16 C
4	23 8/38 C	30.	14 6/22 A	56	10 3/16 A
5	23 3/35 N	31	14 6/24 C	57	9 9/17 A
6	22 8/33 C	32	14 4/25 N	58.	9 8/15 A
7.	22 5/38 N	33.	14 3/23 A	59	9 5/16 A
8	21 9/33 A	34	14 0/22 A	60	9 2/14 C
9	21 2/33 C	35	14 0/21 C	61	9 2/15 N
10	19 8/30 N	36	13 9/21 N	62	9 0/16 A
11	19 7/34 N	37	13 9/22 N	63	8 3/14 C
12	19 6/32 N	38	13 7/21 A	64	8 1/13 F
13	19 2/30 N	39	13 4/20 C	65	8 0/15 C
14	18 6/28 N	40	13 3/20 N	66	7 9/13 C
15.	18 5/34 N	41	13 1/19 C	67	7 8/11 A
16	18 4/27 N	42	13 1/22 N	68.	7 3/12 A
17	17 9/30 C	43	13 0/21 A	69	6 8/12 C
18	17 5/28 A	44	13 0/19 C	70	5 6/8 F
19	17 5/27 N	45	12 8/22 A	71.	5 4/9 A
20	17 2/28 C	46	12 5/20 A	72	5 2/8 A
21	17 2/30 N	47	12 5/18 F	73	4 7/9 A
22	16 8/26 N	48	11 8/19 N	74	4 6/7 F
23	16 7/28 A	49.	11 5/17 C	75	4 5/8 F
24	16 5/24 N	50	11 5/17 F	76	3 4/5 F
25	16 1/24 N	51	11 5/17 N	77	3 2/5 F
26	16 0/25 A	52.	11 3/19 N		

TNT buys Sheen-produced feature

Story, rejected by broadcast networks, concerns atomic testing in 1950's and will star Sheen and Emilio Estevez

Actor-producer Martin Sheen is bringing his political activism to the television screen on March 8 when *Nightbreaker* premieres on Turner Network Television. A fictionalized account of the U.S. Army's testing of atomic weapons in Nevada in the 1950's, the two-hour, \$3 million project was, according to the filmmakers, rejected by the studios and networks because of its controversial nature.

Produced by Symphony Pictures, formed by Sheen and William Greenblatt six years ago, *Nightbreaker* was adapted by T.S. Cook (whose credits include co-authorship of "The China Syndrome") from Howard Rosenberg's 1980 historical novel *Atomic Soldiers*. Cook brought the script to Symphony very early in the company's history. "We had the script for a few years," said Sheen during a Los Angeles press tour. "and we did try to get it out on the commercial broadcast networks, and never really got any interest." Asked if the networks gave any reason for passing, Sheen said: "No, but I think it's obvious...they do controversial themes when those themes are safe to deal with and they can still sell their products."

Cook, who served as the telefilm's co-executive producer (Sheen was executive producer with Jeffrey Auerbach), proceeded to call "every studio and film player" on his own, but was unsuccessful in obtaining a deal. "They all said it was lovely writing but not for us," he told BROADCASTING, "and I knew the networks wouldn't want it because of its political and critical nature. I had this project for seven years and couldn't sell it."

Last year, Ted Turner, a fan of Sheen's, approached Symphony looking for original projects for TNT, his new basic cable net-

work. "He said he was particularly interested in material more controversial than network fare," said Greenblatt, Symphony's president and the show's producer. "We remembered *Nightbreaker*, called Tom Cook, and found it was still available." The script was sent to TNT on a Thursday or Friday, said Greenblatt, and by Monday "we had a go on the picture."

"We found *Nightbreaker* to be a socially responsible, moving project," said Scott Sassa, TNT executive vice president. "with a nice story and real good characters, but also an overriding theme important to society today." TNT, TBS and CNN are engaged in what Sassa characterizes as "monumental" on-air support of *Nightbreaker*. According to Sandy Knox, manager of on-air promotion, TNT is showing five- and two-minute behind-the-scene fills, 30-, 20-, 15- and 10-second promo spots aired at least once an hour last week, and 60-, 20- and 10-second spots are being added this week. In addition, TBS and CNN have been showing six spots a day for the last two weeks, with 10 a day appearing on Headline News. Heavy emphasis is also being placed on print advertising in "the usual TV suspects," said Sassa.

Due to the uncharted waters of presenting controversial material on a recently launched service, Sassa is wary of predicting viewer response. "I think that this type of programming right now is a tad incongruous because people haven't gotten accustomed to it," he said. "I would suspect that this is a property that's going to be an evergreen for us; it will play subsequently down the line for us just as well. In a roundabout way I guess I'm saying I don't want to put our hopes too high on what this might do."

Directed by Peter Markle, *Nightbreaker* stars Sheen and his son Emilio Estevez. The story focuses on Dr. Alexander Brown, a former army psychologist turned neurologist who returns to Las Vegas for the first

time in 30 years to receive an award. While there, he is forced to confront his past participation in atomic testing. Shot very close to the original test sites during late summer last year (Symphony had an interim agreement with the Writers Guild of America), the filmmakers incorporated actual Army footage of test explosions into the drama.

Nightbreaker also stars Lea Thompson, Melinda Dillon and Joe Pantoliano. The role of Dr. Brown was originally intended for one actor, but Cook rewrote the script specifically for Sheen and Estevez, who portrays the younger Brown during the 1950's. "The action is divided into 85% past, 15% present," according to Auerbach.

Asked if he would approach the networks with future projects, Sheen said, "Oh, sure. We try it all the time.... I'll give them as many chances as I can."

Symphony changed its name from SheenGreenblatt a year ago because, according to Greenblatt, "our intention is to become a much broader full service production entity not relying on Martin Sheen's acting skills, although in many of the things we take on he is involved in that way or directing."

About two-thirds of their current in-house projects do not involve Sheen in a direct way. Among these are:

- A mini-series in development at CBS, to be directed by Jeremy Kagan, based on the true story of a group of children lost in Russia during the Russian Revolution and rescued by an American reporter.

- A feature in development starring Al Pacino as a reporter going after a fascistic big city police department.

- A possible series deal with Garson Kanin from a "dramady" originally written for the late Ruth Gordon. Now scripted as a one-hour film, no network is yet involved.

Previous Symphony projects include the features *Da, Judgment in Berlin*, and several CBS *Schoolbreak Specials*. □