

PARAMOUNT AND DISNEY GET CREATIVE

Companies sign writer-producer talent to keep pace with expanding video landscape

By Steve Coe

Both Paramount and Disney solidified their writer-producer and director ranks last week, with Paramount signing a slate of 20 writers-producers or directors and Disney renewing the contract of one of that studio's most prolific producers of prime time product.

The Paramount signings consist of six writer-producer or writer-director teams and eight individuals. Many of the new Paramount writers or producers were formerly with Universal, where Paramount TV Group President Kerry McCluggage was recently president of network television. John Pike, president, Paramount Network Television, said the signings are, in part, an answer to the ever-growing video landscape.

"The video spectrum is going to continue to explode. This roster indicates our ability to produce in every area of video," he said. Pike added that Paramount has been known primarily as a producer of comedies and that many of the new names are known for their prowess in drama series or long-form projects.

Pike also said the large slate of signings isn't an attempt to make the studio the largest supplier of network programming, but rather to give Para-

mount more diversity and hopefully a better ratio for success. "We're not in the scoreboard business. Basically we'll look at every development opportunity and see where it takes us. This won't necessarily increase our output, but it will improve our success ratio. Your [development] output can kill you if you don't have a lot of success," he said.

Although not as significant in terms of numbers of individuals, Disney's signing of Michael Jacobs to a five-year deal insures the studio will hold on to one of its more productive and successful writer-producer-directors for the immediate future. Dean Valentine, Disney Television executive vice president, network television, said Jacobs had another year-and-a-half on his existing contract, but "we decided we wanted him to be here on a long-term basis and give him an indication of our commitment to him." Jacobs is currently the executive producer of ABC's hit series *Dinosaurs* and is also executive producer of NBC's *The Torkelsons*, which was recently given a 13-episode pick-up for mid-season. In addition, Jacobs has a 13-episode mid-season order from ABC for *Where I Live* and a series commitment from NBC.

Among the Paramount signees: **Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo**, who

are currently executive producers of the hour drama *Human Target* and who also were executive producers of CBS's action hour of two seasons ago *The Flash*. **Christopher Crowe**, executive producer and writer of Paramount's new syndicated *The Untouchables*. **Jacob Epstein and Ken Solarz**, who are also part of the creative team involved in *The Untouchables* (the two previously were writers for *Hill Street Blues* and *Miami Vice*). **Barry Fanaro and Mort Nathan**, the M and B of KTMB Productions, whose contract was recently not renewed at Disney Television, and former executive producers of *The Golden Girls*. **Terry Grossman and Kathy Speer**, the K and T of KTMB Productions and also co-executive producers of *The Golden Girls*, who were also co-creators of last year's *Pacific Station* and *The Fanelli Boys* with Fanaro and Nathan. Don Johnson's **Buffalo Wallet Films**, currently producing a made-for-for CBS, will create and produce all forms of television for Paramount. **Janet Leahy** was most recently executive producer of *The Cosby Show*. **John Mankiewicz** was most recently creator and co-executive producer of the CBS mid-season series *The Human Factor*. **Tim O'Donnell** most recently created and served as executive director of CBS's *Uncle Buck*. ■

CONVENTION

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increase substantially, since viewers looking for comprehensive coverage will have few alternatives.

Outside of prime time, the broadcast networks will continue to provide a host of programming about the convention. All three morning shows will dedicate the bulk of their time to convention issues.

Absent from the convention will be news teams from many stations in mid-size and smaller markets, and even some larger markets, who have said they will instead rely on services such as satellite feeds and packages that Fox will offer its affiliates.

Aside from budget cutbacks and a

lack of interest in the conventions, which have contributed to the decisions of local stations to stay home, the logistics and expense of covering a convention in New York may have also been a factor, says Steve Blum, vice president, Conus Communications. "The space limits of Madison Square Garden and the perceived problems of doing all this in New York City is definitely keeping people away."

There won't be much heard from the Bush and Perot camps during the convention this week. Neither candidate, so far, is scheduled to appear on television this week, although CBS *This Morning* is hoping to get Quayle and has lined up the heads of all three campaigns for one show. Nor has either candidate bought any media

time, but a pro-Bush independent group called the Presidential Victory Committee—which was responsible for 1988's Willie Horton ads—has. The spots, attacking Clinton's character, will air in New York all this week.

There's no clear indication yet of how Bush and Perot will use the media to get back in the news when the convention is over. There have been inquiries from all three campaigns in buying time, including Olympic inventory on NBC, but nothing has been bought so far. ■

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