

MCA IS NEWEST ON KID BLOCK

'Exosquad' is first of planned kids offerings

By Steve McClellan

MCA's new first-run animated cartoon, *Exosquad*, is the first show of a planned first-run kids block to be supplied by MCA Family Entertainment and distributed by MCA TV.

Exosquad is the first first-run animation project from the two-year-old Universal Cartoon Studios, a division of MCA Family Entertainment, which is run by Jeff Segal.

According to Segal, *Exosquad* will be followed by a cartoon version of *Beethoven*, the Ivan Reitman-directed theatrical with Charles Grodin and the title character, a Saint Bernard. Segal said the plan was to develop both a network Saturday version of the cartoon and a first-run strip version.

Segal said *Beethoven* was targeted for 1994, coinciding with the release of the theatrical sequel, currently in production. "It's getting pretty crowded in syndication," Segal said of the amount of kids fare currently in the market. "To start, we'll shoot for mornings" with the cartoon block.

"We think we have a good shot at being a major player in first-run," said Segal. "Our tie to MCA gives us a leg up because so many of the company's divisions are major advertisers in the TV spot markets, including the movie and music division, and also companies linked to our parent [Matsushita], such as Panasonic. So if we can bring ad commitments to stations along with strong programs, that could be a real advantage."

In addition to animated programs, MCA Family Entertainment is developing live action kids programming. Segal reports that his division is supplying Showtime, the pay channel, with a soon-to-be-announced kid-targeted sitcom. The company is also talking to NBC about a possible *Saved by the Bell*-type series for the network's teen-targeted Saturday lineup for 1993-94.

Also in development for NBC is a "family TV movie" slated for later this year that would be produced in association with actor Michael J. Fox's Snowback Productions. ■

BI-COASTAL

Keeping up with the TV set
from Burbank to Sixth Avenue

Leno at 10?

Yes, that was **Jim Waterbury**, president and general manager, KWWL(TV) Waterloo, Iowa, and chairman of the NBC affiliates advisory board, whom some viewers saw repeatedly over the New Year's weekend on CNN. An interview with Waterbury made its way into the long weekend story rotation regarding the network's Leno-Letterman dilemma. The interview dealt with Waterbury's suggestion that NBC consider stripping Leno and *The Tonight Show at 10 p.m.* and using *Late Night with David Letterman* at 11:30 p.m. to avoid losing either talent. According to Waterbury, CNN contacted him after learning of a note he dropped to NBC Television President Pier Mapes wondering if the network had considered such an alternative. "It was really just a suggestion given in the spirit that all options ought to be considered," said Waterbury. He noted that NBC had considered moving Carson to prime time in the early 1980's, the last time the network was mired in third place.

'Empty Nest' hatches spinoff

Word in Hollywood is that Witt-Thomas-Harris Productions (WTH) is developing a fall 1993 series spinoff for **Park Overall**, who plays Laverne the nurse in the WTH series *Empty Nest* for NBC. In the last phase of its exclusive series development deal with The Walt Disney Co.'s Touchstone

Television division, WTH is fulfilling a long-expressed desire by Disney and NBC executives to develop a series revolving around Overall's popular Southern-accented character. Last season, WTH introduced spinoff *Nurses* as a Saturday 8:30 p.m. lead-out from *Empty Nest*. Both are relative bright spots in NBC's prime time lineup. If the Overall project comes to fruition, it would mean the departure of two of the show's stars in as many seasons. Earlier this season, Kristy McNichol left for treatment of a manic-depressive condition. No word yet on her return.

Kinder, gentler Stern?

Howard Stern has at least one faithful listener in Washington: FCC Commissioner **James H. Quello**, whose disapproval of Stern is a matter of record (and record fine). Commissioner Quello says he listens every day to make sure nothing goes awry. He thinks Stern's act has been cleaned up appreciably since the FCC's crack-down.

Grove makes first-run push

Dallas-based distributor Grove Television Enterprises, which is targeting its half-hour reality weekly, *Firefighters*, for premiere the week of Jan. 18, is stepping into first-run syndication in a big way with three more series. Grove is teaming up with Dick Clark Productions and Bindersteinberg Productions to distribute *Heart-*

line, an interactive late-night dating show where singles can submit "video greeting cards" and home viewers call an 800 phone number to make a date. **Bob Goen** (formerly host of the network version of *Wheel of Fortune*) and **Amina Fakhir** are co-hosts of the April 1993 hour strip, offered on a seven-minute local/five-minute national barter basis.

GTE has also teamed with *Prevention* magazine on a half-hour reality strip, *Prevention*. Produced by Lifetime Medical, **Mike Jerrick** and **Heidi Bohay** host the fall 1993 strip, being sold on a four-minute local/three-minute national barter split. Grove is also looking to enter the kids arena with *The Land of I*, a half-hour live-action puppet show produced by TLC Productions and offered on a three-and-a-half/two-and-a-half barter basis for fall 1993.

More first-run firsts

Thunderbird Productions, a Reston, Va.-based distributor, is launching three fall 1993 strips in its first visit to the NATPE convention in San Francisco (Jan. 24-28). First off is 92607, a first-run half-hour sitcom strip set in Laguna Beach, Calif. Then there is *Honeymoon*, a hybrid soap/game show where viewers can send in a form (printed in *TV Guide* advertising inserts) to win a honeymoon in Jamaica. Finally, there is the more mainstream *School's Out*, a teenage "battle of the stars" taped in Florida.