

Paramount, P&G strike program deal

By Steve Coe

Signaling what likely will be greater advertiser involvement in the future development and distribution of television shows, the Paramount Television Group announced last week that it is joining in a production alliance with Procter & Gamble.

Under the three-year deal, the Paramount Television Group and P&G will jointly fund, develop and produce network and first-run programming and will be equity partners in those projects.

The deal assures P&G access to advertise its products on shows produced under the partnership including network, syndication and international distribution.

"This agreement will extend P&G's ownership of programming from our traditional daytime soap operas and specials to a full array of mass audience shows," says Edwin Artzt, P&G chairman/CEO. "We believe this action is necessary to ensure P&G brands access to the

best in advertiser-sponsored entertainment in the media environment of the future. We will pursue other such opportunities in the coming months."

The main advantage for Paramount is that the studio now has a partner to share in the escalating costs of programming. With program suppliers carrying larger deficits on series, the alliance will soften Paramount's burden by 50%. It also is expected that because Paramount will distribute the shows produced under the alliance, P&G will pay a distribution fee to the studio.

With this agreement, Paramount aligns with one of the largest advertisers on TV. P&G annually spends more than \$3 billion on advertising, with about 90% going to television.

The first project under the alliance will be announced within the next few weeks, according to Kerry McCluggage, chairman of Paramount Television Group. He said the deal calls for a minimum 10 network series and all Paramount first-run product. ■

Wind Dancer signs with Disney

If there were thoughts that Disney would sit back and allow the new DreamWorks SKG studio-in-the-making to raid Disney executive and producing talent, those suggestions were put to an end last week with the announcement that Wind Dancer Production Group has signed a development and production deal with Walt Disney Television & Telecommunications and Walt Disney Motion Picture Group.

Under the deal, Wind Dancer, which produces *Home Improvement* and *Thunder Alley*, will produce television, motion picture and theatre productions for the various Disney divisions.

There has been widespread speculation that Wind Dancer would sign a production agreement with DreamWorks, of which former Disney Studios executive Jeffrey Katzenberg is a joint founder and partner. It also was assumed that Wind Dancer would not re-sign with ABC, since the principals, especially Matt Williams, have publicly been critical of the network.

One reason for the producers' ire was ABC's move of *Home Improvement* from Wednesday to Tuesday night against NBC's *Frasier*. As a result of the move, *Roseanne* took over the 9 p.m. Wednesday slot (previously *Home Improvement's*) sparing it from the *Frasier* competition, and sapping some of *Home Improvement's* ratings strength.

While working under the ABC deal, Disney was the distributor of Wind Dancer product. Before the ABC deal, which went into effect more than two years ago, Wind Dancer had been producing exclusively the Disney banner. It was that arrangement that yielded *Home Improvement*. —SC

'Simon' to star on WB Network's second night

A comedy from the production team of NBC's *Mad About You* is the first show that the WB Network has ordered for its planned second night of programming. *Simon*, from Infront Production in association with TriStar Television, has received a 13-episode commitment from the fledgling network.

The series stars stand-up comedian Harold Williams as a five-year veteran of junior college who moves to New York City and takes a job at a cable television network.

Williams most recently appeared in the blockbuster comedy "Dumb & Dumber." Peter Dobson co-stars.

According to WB, the start-up network won the project over CBS and NBC. Its second night of programming is set to debut in August on a night still to be determined. —SC



'Simon' will debut on the WB Network in August.