

film work. Next season it'll be a full-time job." Ohlmeyer said next season's cast will be contractually bound to put the show before outside interests. "I don't know if it's been in the contracts before or not, but if it has, it hasn't been enforced."

Two things that won't change about the show, according to Warren Littlefield, president, NBC Entertainment, "are live and from New York," he said, referring to the opening line used since the show's inception. "Other than its live format and New York origin, everything else will be looked at."

Coupled with the prospect of reinventing their franchise, NBC executives now are faced with the spectre of the other networks launching one of their most aggressive runs at the show. "We can't assume there won't be more competition," said Littlefield. "It's time to reinvent the show, but the good news is that it's been done in the past."

Having established a strong Monday-Friday late-night lineup rather quickly, after years of almost comic futility, CBS hopes to have a project in place in early 1996. Currently in development is a one-hour weekly, scripted show that has been described as a soap opera in the vein of *Melrose Place*, specifically for a young, late-night audience. Given that the project is slated for an after-prime time airing, the show is expected to push the boundaries in terms of content and language.

That the project will be more risque than the typical prime time soap is further evidenced by the fact that Zalman King, executive producer of Showtime's steamy *Red Shoe Diaries*, will serve as co-executive producer on the show. Also overseeing the project is Bill Bell Jr., president, Bell/Phillips Television Productions Inc. CBS executives are expecting to see a bible of the project within the next three months. Thus far, no acting talent has been attached to the show.

"We are keenly interested in the time period," says John Pike, senior vice president, late night, CBS Entertainment, adding, "It's a major priority on CBS's late-night plate."

Whatever project CBS decides on for the time period, Pike says it proba-

bly won't be an *SNL* knock-off. "The hardest thing for anyone to do is to try to reinvent what *Saturday Night Live* did beautifully for so many years."

An ABC spokeswoman says the network is "looking to develop for late night on Saturday as well as Monday through Friday. Because we're going into an area we're not currently in, any project has to be talent- and quality-driven. It has to be strong to get the stations to change what they're doing, not only for the affiliates but also for our owned stations," she said.

Fox has been looking at development projects for late night almost

since *The Chevy Chase Show* left the air. Fox executives would not comment specifically about their Saturday late-night plans other than to say the network continues to evaluate development for the time period.

Through the February 19 airing of *SNL*, the show has averaged a 7.6 rating and 21 for the season. Thus far, the show is off more than a half rating point from its 8.3/23 average last season. If the current numbers hold for the remainder of the season, the ratings would be the show's lowest since the 1990-91 season (7.6/23). At its height in the 1979-80 season, *Saturday Night Live* averaged a 13.5/39. ■

## Bochco signs deal with CBS

*Three-series, four-year pact kicks in in 1987*

By Steve McClellan

Veteran television producer Steven Bochco has formed a new three-series, four-year, exclusive program alliance with CBS, effective in 1997.

In a teleconference last week, Bochco and CBS Entertainment President Peter Tortorici said it was likely Bochco would produce one or more shows for CBS this year or next, before the venture kicks in.

Those shows would involve projects offered to and passed on by ABC. Bochco's deal with ABC started in 1988 and still has three series and almost two years to go. But a year ago, the ABC deal converted from an exclusive setup to a first-look basis. Bochco can immediately shop all projects on which ABC passes.

Bochco's next show for ABC, the legal drama *Murder One*, is in development for the 1995-96 season.

Bochco's program distribution arrangement with Fox (including use of the Fox lot to produce his shows), sunsets with the expiration of the ABC deal. Fox would continue to distribute and syndicate the Bochco programs originally produced for ABC.

It's likely that CBS will serve as distributor of the shows Bochco produces for the network, since the two

sides will share equally in after-market revenue.

The ABC-Bochco alliance has produced memorable, if not always successful, programs. *NYPD Blue* is perhaps the biggest hit to have come from the alliance.

*Doogie Howser*, which debuted in 1989, was a more modest hit that lasted four seasons. But other shows from the ABC alliance never caught on, including the oddball *Cop Rock*, a police drama/musical.

*Civil Wars*, a legal drama based in New York, struggled for two seasons before being canceled. *Capitol Critters*, a half-hour animated political parody, lasted only a few episodes.

Bochco told reporters that he had discussions with ABC last year about extending his deal there. Asked why those talks broke off, Bochco said a number of factors were involved, "not the least of which have to do with their current successes." Asked to elaborate, Bochco said that because ABC's programming needs are currently not as great, the network would not benefit as much from extending the alliance—at least for the kind of return that Bochco was looking for. But at CBS, the timing and the need are "absolutely right." CBS has dropped from first to third in the prime time ratings. ■