

ROSS REPORTS — TELEVISION INDEX ✓

MARCH 13, 1957

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VOLUME 9 NUMBER 11 A

PROGRAMS · ADVERTISERS · TALENT

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551 Fifth Avenue · New York 17 · MUrray Hill 2-5910

PUBLISHED BY TELEVISION INDEX, INC.

MID-WEEK SPECIAL

NEWS - COMMENT - POSSIBILITIES

Firestone provided the climax for another suspense story for ABC by signing for another season for the Voice of Firestone, which will be seen over the net on Monday evenings in the fall, 9-9:30pm, starting Sept 9.....The Steve Allen Show will originate from Hollywood on March 24 and 31. Allen and the advance crew leave for the Coast this week, with a total of 18 members of the New York staff slated to work with a Hollywood-based production crew. The March 24 show will topline Lou Costello and Greer Garson among others, while the following Sunday's show will have Tennessee Ernie Ford, Peggy Lee and The Collins Kids.....Judy Johnson has been named permanent hostess for Tonight!, working with host Jack Iescoulie in New York. The singing redhead survived an elimination that had eighteen prospects trying out during a six-week period in New York.....San Francisco Call-Bulletin columnist Paul Speegle will be host for all Tonight! originations from San Francisco, now added to the program's basic group of cities. The first feature from the city will be on Thursday, March 14.....Eddie Bracken stars tonight (13) as the m.c. for Masquerade Party, returning to the air over NBC. Johnny Johnston will join the panel group, with Betsy Palmer, Ilka Chase and Bobby Sherwood.....Twentieth Century-Fox stars Debra Paget and Jeff Hunter will be hostess and host of the NTA Film Network's showings of 20th's films over 128 stations starting April 1. The program will be titled Premiere Performance.

Leo Durocher, Lindsey Nelson and Jim Woods will be the announcers for NBC's version of Major League Baseball on television on 26 Saturday afternoons this summer. Ross Reports booted one last week in considering the new NBC baseball program a successor to the CBS version which ran last summer. A release that was a bit vague on antecedents misled us. CBS will have its Baseball Game of the Week back this summer as usual, with Dizzy Dean and Buddy Blattner returning as the knowledgeable action reporters. Falstaff Beer and American Safety Razor will also return as sponsors, with Marlboro Cigarettes joining the sponsor roster for the first time. It'll also be the first summer that two nets will carry major league telecasts, but despite the wide coverage few cities will have conflicts. All telecasts are blacked out in major league cities.

Ieland Hayward has signed an exclusive five-year contract with CBS Television that calls for the production of one 90-minute show per year, plus the creation during each year of one program series which will be co-owned by Hayward and CBS. MCA handled the negotiations for Hayward.....Paul Monash is coming to New York at the end of this month to scout and discuss future scripts for Climax!.....Ad-promotion budgets of the nets will be stepped up considerably this fall because of the new patterns being set for "specials." CBS is coming back into the "big" picture with its ten hour-and-a-half live evening shows to be sponsored by DuPont, while NBC in breaking its every fourth week pattern for its specials will also have to re-educate its viewing public.

Stage wives made news last week, with the biggest divorce certainly that of Sid Caesar and Janet Blair. Miss Blair had replaced Nanette Fabray who, among other considerations, had been turned down on a request for better billing. Miss Fabray had been a big hit during the 1955-56 season. Miss Blair, an established star, felt that her assignments on the show were not what had been promised to her when she was first signed. The addition of other featured players to the regular Caesar cast cut the time available for a more extensive display of the Blair talents during the season. The successive Fabray-Blair tempests probably means the end of the "Commuter" sketches on the Caesar show if the comedian returns with his revue format next fall.....Another big stage wife story is the coming "marriage" of Danny Thomas in his filmed series. On the show of April 4 he'll meet Marjorie Lord as a new character, "Kathy," and three weeks later, on the April 25 show, Thomas will propose marriage, setting next season's cast lineup.....The third stage wife story is really incidental. Jeff Donnell who has had her ups and downs during the two years of the George Gobel Show returns to the program for the first time this season to portray again, for at least one program, Gobel's wife "Alice.".....The television roles of many stars, their problems with their shows and all the other oddments of a television career, have become as newsworthy as the private lives of movie stars and receive as much page two and page three attention (if they don't hit the front page) as the movie stars do with their real life problems.

Howdy Dooddy is casting one of its developments adrift to star in a show of its own, starting next Saturday, March 16 over NBC. The character, "Gumby," a small wedge-shaped character made of modeling clay, will have its own The Gumby Show, complete with sponsor, The Sweets Company of America, in the time spot immediately after the Howdy Dooddy half-hour, 10:30-11am EST. It displaces the re-runs of I Married Joan in the time spot. The Gumby character was created by film artist Art Clokey. The new program will be produced by Roger Muir and directed by Bob Hultgren, the Howdy Dooddy production team.....Gene Kelly will be host and m.c. of NBC's hour-and-a-half Salute to Baseball on Saturday evening, April 13. Kelly will fly to New York to handle the special role.....Prudential Insurance Co has agreed to a unique sponsorship plan for The Twentieth Century, new CBS Public Affairs program series set for this fall, replacing You Are There for the sponsor. The 26-week series, according to the agreement, covers 26 filmed programs, covering the past, the present and the future, under the program title, presenting a pictorial history of world events since 1900. The basic "past" series includes 17 half-hour and one full-hour presentation. The present series will include four half-hour shows, with the unusual added feature of up to six special news programs to be slotted on a pre-emption basis. These six programs, unscheduled until a major news story develops, allows flexibility to report fast-breaking news stories. Although CBS belived it has "the first sponsor in television to provide for stand-by sponsorship of important news events," it is only the first in network TV. General Petroleum Corp. has had a public service stand-by sponsorship set-up with KFTV(LA) for several years which calls for pre-emption coverage by the station of all top, fast-breaking news stories on the West Coast. This doesn't take anything from the pioneering step in the expensive world of network TV by Prudential.

PEOPLE GOING PLACES: Bertram Berman named director of daytime program development, and Edwin S. Friendly, Jr., appointed daytime program director, for CBS Television, with both reporting to Oscar Katz, v.p. in charge of daytime programs..... J. English Smith named manager of TV network programs for ABC in New York. Sandy Cummings appointed manager of TV network programs for the ABC Western Division in Hollywood.....Alan Douglas joined WEWS(Cleve) as producer-announcer.....Francis C. (Bob) Wood, Jr., elected president of Sound Masters, Inc., New York, succeeding Harold E. Wondsel, who has resigned after 20 years in the post to form his own film production organization.....Ray Favata, cartoon and design artist, has joined the staff of CBS Terrytoons as a director.