

OUR RESPECTS to Robert Morton Werner

A thorough 'education' in client, agency and network fields

Mort Werner is in one of the more responsible posts in the NBC executive suite at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York.

Mr. Werner is vice president, programs, NBC-TV. This places him in the catbird seat or near the hot seat, depending to a large measure on the outcome in a TV season of such indeterminates as the public's appetite, taste or disposition.

Mort Werner can reduce the equation even further by this comment: "What do I do in my spare time? I practice playing on my piano, in case I have to go back to it."

If programing people are going to talk to themselves, this is the time of year for it. One season has just begun and already it's necessary to think, plan and scheme for a year later. There is hardly time to carefully chart the box-score on this season because the one coming up needs immediate attention.

Mr. Werner, however, talks to people other than himself. A broadcast veteran (he was in the business at 14, when some of today's other successful moguls were still in knee pants), Mr. Werner is generally recognized as one of the most respected executives in the broadcast field.

And when Mort Werner takes time to chat, it's more than likely he's going to be as interesting as the latest and hottest program pilot around at NBC.

Program Sledding ■ Has it become more hectic and tougher for the TV programmer in recent years? Mr. Werner is in the affirmative:

"Programing," he says, "is now more competitive. People are more demanding. The TV business decision rests on various factors. Some are variables. It's like the dress designer who has to judge public taste before the public sees the design. You can bomb out as easily in dress designing as in TV programing."

Mort Werner apologizes for having to speak in platitudes, but he says, "How else can I say that what NBC is trying to do is to really diversify and balance its schedule?"

"We are not just going for the big audience. We are placing our hopes on what we think people will want in the future."

If Mr. Werner appears cautious it's because NBC may be premature in judging future audience tastes. The network, it's said, is taking a calculated risk that the public is ready for adventure and drama which have different "levels," offering in particular, according to Mr. Werner, "deeper, more meaningful and better produced" dramatic showcases.

Or to put it bluntly: "Strong, emotional drama." Already ahead of the

pollsters, Mr. Werner says, "We know with this drama we may not get the mass audience necessarily. But we are looking for the 'different' TV audience, one that will want and appreciate the best in drama. *Dick Powell Theater* [now off] and *Eleventh Hour* on NBC and *The Defenders* on CBS are the type shows which were steps in that direction."

Busy Youth ■ At the age of 15 (he was born on May 5, 1916, in San Francisco), Mort Werner worked at KGGC San Francisco (now KSN), broadcasting to high school students on the basis of a percentage of the business he brought in. He also led a dance band. He sang, too—at KFRC in San Francisco, becoming a "personality" with Columbia-Don Lee Broadcasting System, continuing this association in Los Angeles when it became the hub of radio activity on the West Coast.

Later he worked as a program director for KMTR, now KLAC, and also was associated with the Phil Harris band on a nightly transcontinental radio broadcast. He also helped develop and was MC on *Sing With Your Favorite Band*.

On March 18, 1939, Mr. Werner married Martha Wilkerson, an employe at the station. Mrs. Werner is a talented, veteran script writer. Among her credits: *Hollywood Star Theatre*, *Big Town* and *Big Story* on radio; *Robert Montgomery Presents*, *Somerset Maugham Playhouse* and various episodes in leading network series on TV, and motion picture scripts for Paramount and Columbia. During World War II, Martha was "GI Jill" on the Armed Forces Radio Services, 1941-



Mr. Werner

49. The Werners' older daughter (married name is Carol Werner Tieg) carries on a showbusiness tradition—she is a singer on TV as Carol Werner. Another daughter, Jill Werner, 16, is a student at Scarsdale, N. Y., high school.

In 1941, Mort Werner was made program director for the Office of War Information in San Francisco, and in 1943 joined the AFRS as program director.

After the war, Mr. Werner in 1946 formed a summer stock theater with associates at Laguna Beach, Calif. He then entered station management and with a group developed KHUM in Eureka, Calif., and also applied for a construction permit for a station in Ventura, Calif., erecting KVEN there and with which he was associated as general manager. He also was consulted by other stations on operations and sales.

In 1951 his career began in network-ing, joining NBC in New York where under the aegis of Sylvester L. (Pat) Weaver, Jr., Mr. Werner was involved with the *Today* show from the blueprint stage, and later also with the *Home* and *Tonight* shows. (He was executive producer of all three.) During his early NBC association, *Monitor* on the radio network was developed.

Among the stars Mr. Werner helped launch: Steve Allen, Jack Paar, Johnny Carson and the late Ernie Kovacs.

Mr. Werner worked at NBC in television's development years—another series then created was the afternoon *Matinee* live drama show. In February, 1955, Mr. Werner was named director of participating programs, NBC-TV, and later in the year, national program director. In December, 1955, he was elected vice president, national programs, and in 1957, as vice president, television daytime programs.

In July of 1957, Mr. Werner worked the client field, joining Kaiser Industries as a vice president. At Kaiser, Mr. Werner concentrated in the advertising and broadcasting fields. During this time, he says, "I got real lucky. We became associated with *Maverick* for Kaiser on ABC-TV," and Kaiser purchased KHVH(TV) Honolulu.

Mr. Werner joined Kaiser's advertising agency, Young & Rubicam, as vice president and director of radio and TV in October of 1959, becoming senior vice president and member of the executive committee a year later.

On July 17, 1961, Mr. Werner rejoined NBC-TV as its man in charge of the network program department, and with his present title. Said Mr. Werner: "I returned to NBC, but with a thorough 'education' in the client, agency and early TV network fields."