

JEFF'S COLLIE



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TPA

IN REVIEW

THE BOB CROSBY SHOW

Emmet Kelly, sad-faced circus clown, was first to greet Bob Crosby's audience June 14 (NBC-TV, 8-9 p.m.) and was, as usual, charming and delightful. What followed was an equally charming attempt to keep Perry Como's fans happy while Mr. Como relaxes through the summer.

Basic format of the Como replacement is that of a musical-comedy-variety show similar to Mr. Como's year-round top-rated hour. Mr. Crosby was an amiable emcee and presented a spirited group of performers including comedian Joey Bishop and rock and rollers The Everly Brothers.

Gretchen Wyler, his vivacious co-star, should afford many an enjoyable moment in the weeks to come. Other regulars, including the Carl Hoff orchestra, Clay Warnick singers and Peter Gennaro dancers, provided colorful musical background. A highlight of the show was a Dixieland number featuring Mr. Crosby's famous Bobcats.

Production costs: Approximately \$25,000. Sponsored on NBC-TV, Sat., 8-9 p.m. EDT, by various firms. Started June 14.

Producer: Louis Dapron; director: Cort Steen; technical director: Henry Bomberger; writers: Hugh Wedlock and Howard Snyder; announcer: Kenneth Roberts.

MEMBER OF THE WEDDING

When "Member of the Wedding" was chosen as the final *Du Pont Show of the Month* for this season, the producers had one major asset—a story with which every adult viewer could identify. Furthermore, the Carson McCullers drama, which in 1950-51 ran for 501 performances on Broadway and won the highest critical acclaim, needed no major changes for its move from stage to tv studio.

But the selection also posed a major problem, finding an actress skillful enough to portray the emotional pre-adolescent while looking no older than 12. On Broadway, Julie Harris succeeded admirably. On tv, a tougher assignment with its revealing closeups, Collin Wilcox was not so successful. Face, figure, voice all showed her to be a young lady in her 20's. Perhaps this could not be helped. But there is no excuse for the direction that made her imitate, speech by speech, move by move, Miss Harris' portrayal of the role of Frankie Adams. What was right for Miss Harris gave a false ring to Miss Wilcox' performance. Only in the final scene, as a formally attired schoolgirl prattling of girl chums, football and class assignments, was she believable.

None of this applies to Claudia McNeil. As Berenice, the Adams' cook, she was superb. She made the role her own. Dennis Kohler, as John Henry, Frankie's little boy neighbor, was acceptable, but the part seemed cut to a minimum in tv.

What held the home audience was the story of the 12-year-old who, trying so desperately to find somebody or something to identify with, convinces herself that when her soldier brother gets married he'll take her, along with his bride, on the honey-

moon. Frankie's unguided choice of a tawdry evening gown as proper garb for the wedding, her attempt to leave with the newlyweds and her bodily removal from the honeymoon coupe; these are the material for high tragicomedy and as delineated by Miss McCullers they overrode the flaws in execution to produce an interesting, if not thoroughly enjoyable, 90 minutes.

Production costs: Approximately \$100,000. Sponsored by DuPont Co. through BBDO on CBS-TV, Thurs., June 12, 9:30-11 p.m.

Producer: David Susskind for Talent Assoc. Ltd.; adapted by Jacqueline Babbin and Audrey Gellin from play by Carson McCullers.

Production supervisor: Murray Susskind; associate producer: Audrey Gellin; director: Robert Mulligan.

KRAFT MYSTERY THEATRE

The premiere dramatization in the new *Kraft Mystery Theatre*, summery live drama dish served by Kraft Foods Co. on NBC-TV, was "Killer's Choice," a selection that was penetrating and a good notch above the ordinary whodunit presentation.

The story got off to a chilling pace: a young, pretty woman was shot down in cold blood. The woman, who worked in a retail liquor store, was victim of a seemingly aimless act of mayhem. From there on, adapter Alvin Boretz (original story by Evan Hunter) sustained the viewers' interest; in swift strokes rounding out characterization and filling in detail on the dead woman. By midway through the program, the viewer became sharply aware that several people had reason to kill her.

Emphasis in this production was on the greys—the dead woman was not seen as totally "evil" nor as simply "good" but as somewhere in between. The process of building a character was accomplished without the loss of credibility.

Even though the plot showed its threads because of much former wear in print, on the movie screen and on tv, the commonplace storyline was placed in unusual and dramatic perspective through crisp direction, clever camera handling and sound development of characterization. Even the unveiling of the killer and the arrest by two detectives in the program's closing minutes came off with believability and minus the histrionics which mar many a superior cops-and-robbers production.

This new series sponsored by Kraft is the last gasp of live drama for the advertiser before the reincarnation next season of Milton Berle and a half-hour western. It is sad for drama-loving viewers that the Tv Theatre should be this killer's choice.

Production costs: Approximately \$50,000. Sponsored by Kraft Foods Co. through J. Walter Thompson on NBC-TV, Wed., June 11, 9-10 p.m.

Produced by Talent Assoc., adapted by Alvin Boretz, directed by Paul Bogart.

Cast: Michael Higgins, Staats Cotsworth, Joanne Linville, Martin Rudy and Joan Copeland.