

Cable gets 'L.A. Law'

Lifetime acquires off-network reruns of NBC hit, paying most it has ever paid for program

Lifetime struck a deal with 20th Century Fox Syndication last week for the cable program service to carry the off-network reruns of NBC's hit show *L.A. Law* for five years starting in September 1990. Fox and Lifetime executives declined to reveal how much the latter will pay, but one source with knowledge of the deal put the price at between \$205,000 and \$210,000 per episode. Pat Fili, senior vice president, programming, Lifetime, said, however, that the cable network is paying more for *Law* than it has for any previously acquired off-network property. The network paid a reported \$100,000 per episode for the rights to Orion's *Cagney and Lacey* two years ago.

The *L.A. Law* deal and a similar agreement for *The Equalizer* (see below) are the two most recent examples of syndicators opting to sell hour-long dramas to cable before the station market.

Commenting on the acquisition last week, Fili said Lifetime acquired *Law* because "we think it's a quality show with strong female demographic performance." She added that with *Cagney* coming off the



air in 1991, Lifetime will need a high profile off-network replacement. "It's also a good locomotive to promote original series," she said. It also seems to repeat well, if the rerun performance on NBC is an indication, said Fili.

The initial deal gives Lifetime rights to the first four years of the program (82 episodes and a two-hour pilot) as well as rights to pick up episodes for the 1990-91 season and beyond. There has been no decision on where the show will air, "but obviously it will be in a high visibility position," Fili said. *Cagney and Lacey* ran as a strip at 8 p.m. during its first two and a half years on the network.

Lifetime also announced last week another new original series, to be produced in New York at the Lifetime Astoria Studios, where the network is based. It is called *The Parent Survival Guide* and will be produced by Scholastic Productions. The program will feature parents in a "workshop setting" discussing the ups and downs of child rearing. The show will debut as a morning strip Sept. 18. A special, hosted by actress Jill Clayburgh, entitled *Ask Me Anything: How to Talk to Kids about Sex*, will air Sept. 6 at 10 p.m. A previously announced series, *What Every Baby Knows: The First Three Years*, debuts Aug. 5. □

USA calls in 'The Equalizer'



Meanwhile, while Lifetime was busy pursuing *L.A. Law*, USA Network picked up the rights to another off-network show—*The Equalizer*, which just completed a four-year run on CBS. The exact price USA paid co-owned MCA TV for the program was unavailable, but one source indicated it was "well in excess" of the \$200,000-plus Lifetime paid for *Law*. The cable network will begin airing *Equalizer* this fall, Saturdays at 6 p.m. and Sundays at 9 p.m. The deal gives USA the rights to all 88 episodes that were made. Some reports last week speculated a possible return to production of the program as it airs on USA. But David Kenin, senior vice president, programming, USA, downplayed that notion. "I won't rule out anything," he said, adding: "But it's not in the current plan."

Turner to move NBA to TNT

With 30 million homes, basketball moves from superstition to TNT; other networks unveil program plans

Turner Network Television landed another major piece of programming last week, by virtue of its passing 30 million cable homes. Ted Turner announced at the cable portion of the TV critics tour that the network has reached 30 million homes, which will allow it to move the NBA from WTBS(TV) Atlanta to TNT this fall. "We are meeting the challenge and doing what we said we were going to do," said Turner at the Century Plaza in Los Angeles last Wednesday.

The NBA package will now join the classic movies and original productions that are the centerpiece of TNT, which launched last October with 17 million homes. The superstition will now carry 25 regular-season games of the Turner-owned Atlanta Hawks.

Turner also discussed the financial health of TBS's four services (TBS, TNT, CNN and Headline News), both operating profits and ad revenues. "This year we'll crack the \$1 billion mark in ad sales, but the networks will crack the \$3 billion mark. While I have to program four channels with that money, the networks only have to program one," he said. And "while we can't beat them with quantity, we can beat them with quality."

Turner services will generate an operat-

ing profit of somewhere between "\$325 million and \$350 million this year," he said. "That's more than the others. CBS will probably break even, and if they're lucky, they'll make maybe \$50 million." CNN's operating profit alone, he said, will be "over \$100 million."

On the upcoming WTBS special, *Abortion for Survival* (July 20, 8-9 p.m.), which Turner admitted carries a pro-choice theme, Turner said he is "prepared for the hailstorm of protest." The special runs a half hour (8-8:30) and is followed by a half-hour discussion hosted by Martin Agronsky with representatives of both sides of the issue. Turner said the discussion portion of the hour would be balanced, with members of the pro-life movement, whom he called "idiots," getting to argue their position. As for advertising during the program, Turner said he wasn't worried about poor advertiser support. "If you're a responsible broadcaster, you don't worry about it," he said.

Turner also had words for the broadcast industry's free TV campaign. "You know a pig is hurting when it's squealing," he said. "If I had their sleazy, rotten programming, I'd want a campaign to make people like me too."

Elsewhere at the press tour

Nickelodeon announced the premiere dates of several original productions. The weekly