

**The Texaco Star Theater**

Reviewed Thursday (27) 8-9 p.m. EDT. Sponsored by the Texas Company thru the Kudner Agency, via the National Broadcasting Company, New York. Producer-director, Ed Cashman. Cast: Milton Berle, Bill Robinson, Billie Burke, Jackie Robinson, Bela Lugosi, Al Roth orchestra, the Maxellos, Sid Stone.

In some respects, tele does a lot of things radio does but on a much larger scale. It makes stars faster—witness Milton Berle; it builds ratings faster—witness Milton Berle—and it may exhaust show formulas much faster. Berle may eventually be the star witness on this last, too. The reason, obviously, is that the tenacious adherence to the formula quickly deprives it of the freshness so vital to continued success. Fred Allen once observed that only a schrook tinkers with a successful formula, but Fred was speaking of radio, and years before television began reshaping the showbiz world.

So it will become a question of time before Berle runs out of trick costumes for his first entrance, and a question of time before his repeated use of certain stock gags becomes as familiar to the TV audience as it is to perpetual night clubbers. This in no wise detracts from Berle as kingpin of TV, but it makes his problem that much more acute. In what direction do you travel from the top?

**Bojangles Overworked**

Thus, skipping lightly over the first Texaco show of the series, and taking up with the second, it adds up to taking up just where the series wound up last spring, sans anything new—and noticeable short of outside acts to lend variety. The result was that not only did Berle work, as always, thruout virtually the entire show, but one of the acts, the ageless Bill Robinson—so great a showman—did his own number and participated in two others, one with Jackie Robinson, the Dodger ball player, and one in a Ziegfeld nostalgia reprise session closing the show. If acts are short now, in the second week, what's the outlook upcoming?

The Ziegfeld number, cued in via Berle's interview with Billie Burke, was high in nostalgia value, with a number of mimics doing Helen Morgan, W. C. Fields, Nora Bayes et al., winding up with Berle's imitation of Eddie Cantor. The preceding palaver, tho, with Miss Burke, was entirely artificial and overly saccharine.

**Slapstick Vital**

Berle should make it a must to get one wild sketch into each show, the sort of slapstick, cornball-idiocy built around Bela Lugosi on this show. It's almost Keystone cop-like in its flavor; provides a wonderful pace for the show and provides ample opportunity for Berle's own antics. Which the people want.

Opener was the crack Risley four-some, the Maxellos, with Berle in, of course, for the bounce-around pay-off. A later spot, with Jackie Robinson, was poorly handled, with the ace ball player standing awkwardly and abruptly cut off in the middle of an interview to bring on a baseball sketch.

Sid Stone's pitchman commercial, this time using a youngster caparisoned in like garb, was more than usually inventive. Jerry Franken.

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**Arch Oboler's Comedy Theater**

Reviewed Friday (23), 8-8:30 p.m. PST. Sustaining over KECA-TV, Hollywood, American Broadcasting Company. Written-produced-directed by Arch Oboler. Television director, George M. Cahan. Cast: Frances Rafferty, Hans Conreid, Olin Soule, Sara Berner, Ken Christy, Marna Kenneally. Music, Rex Koury, organist.

*Ostrich in Bed*, initial Comedy Theater offering, marks Arch Oboler's tele debut in his series to be written-produced-directed for ABC-TV. Oboler's video vehicles are among the shows net is producing in Hollywood for kine distribution to its other outlets.

As farces go, *Ostrich* makes the grade, but reveals little that's worthy of the Oboler pen. While awaiting a prospective client's arrival for dinner, an agency rep and his wife discover an ostrich in their bedroom. Hubby calls the cops, but the desk sarge is too busy reading the Kinsey Report to be bothered and passes off the caller as a drunk. Humane society can't help the distressed couple because neither man nor wife can say whether the bird is male or female.

With the ostrich closeted in their bedroom, pair undertake to entertain the client (Hans Conreid). To cover the bird's racket, ad man keeps breaking dishware while the guest proceeds to get plastered on his own 90-proof product, "Grandmother Bedlia's Elixir." Client continually begs to be excused from the table, but host and hostess fear he'll discover the bird and therefore ignore his pleas. One bottle and set of dishes later, guest can no longer contain himself, forces his escape only to be encountered by the ostrich. Client runs from the house in semi-hysteria. To rid the show of the ostrich, Oboler has the wife drive it from her house.

Flimsy tale stretched to 30 minutes is saved only by the comedy talents of Hans Conreid who steals the show first as an eccentric advertiser and then as a drunk. Even his over-acting hits the laugh spot. As a whole, *Ostrich* holds plenty of chuckles. Pace is snappy and camera work, cutting and lighting well handled. Scenes with the ostrich

**Look Photocrime**

Reviewed Wednesday (28) 8:30-9 p.m. EDT. Sustaining over the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). Produced by Murray Burnett for Mildred Fenton Productions. Direction, Babette Henry. Script, Murray Burnett. Designer, E. Albert Hescong. Cast: Chuck Webster, Diana Douglas, Joe De Santis, Lyle Sudrow, James Van Dyke, Casey Allen, Charles Gaines and Don Patrick.

The first episode in the *Look Photocrime* TV series represented a measure of noticeable but not spectacular progress in bringing mysteries to the video screen. The acting was strong thruout, the script was spotty but offered natural lifelike dialog and the slick production held consistent interest. Where the show fell short was in its story, involving a female free-lance investigator who gets some information on a big time gangster and then tries to sell it to a mayoralty candidate. Her informant, however, gets "lead poisoning." Page Inspector Hannibal Cobb.

The device used to trap the criminal was a routine one often employed. The brainy inspector sent the girl's fiance out with papers desired by the gangster as bait to trap the hoodlum. Needless to say, the detective's scheme clicked.

**Relaxed Shamus**

The fact that the inspector is a relaxed type of shamus makes for a refreshing change from the current tough guy gumshoe operating on the air and in TV. Nevertheless, the character must have more color, either in the writing or the playing, to hold the audience. Chuck Webster did not give the role the lift required, probably because of the script.

Diana Douglas turned in an unusually good portrayal of the female private eye. Miss Douglas intelligently underplayed but with a method that socked her role across. Lyle Sudrow was an effectively jittery fiancee. James Van Dyke looked properly, pompous as a would-be mayor.

Babette Henry's staging contained good visual movement. The show was also aided by some fine camera work.

Leon Morse.

were filmed and capably blended into the live action.

Lee Zhito.

**"Inside U. S. A." Preem Strictly Inside Boredom -- and on Wheels**

This was an eagerly awaited premiere, representing one of the most lavish production expenditures in tele to date. As it played on the screen, it was also one of the most disappointing shows on the books. If any further proof is necessary that television and the production techniques of other ends of showbiz—be they legit, films or radio—are completely incompatible, *Inside U. S. A.* provides that proof, and with plenty to spare. The show most likely to be compared with *Inside* is the defunct *Admiral Broadway Revue*; but one was produced for video, and was a good video show. The other, *Inside*, was produced along formal legit revue lines, not along TV lines, and was a bad show. Would have been a bad legit, too, to note in passing; the material wasn't there.

And the legit approach was so apparent. An opening chorus, ensemble singing in several numbers, choreography with a strictly orchestra-seat, rather than living-room-easy-chair, approach. How TV is reshaping

showbiz! Once you had to give 'em as many dancers as possible; now, in TV, once you have more than two on the screen, it becomes a mess. Maybe when home-movie-size screens at standard inside U. S. A. homes, then some compromise between the legit-film dance techniques and the TV techniques will be possible. But not while those 10 and 12-inch jobs dominate.

In one measure, there's no excuse for the debut flop of the show. True enough, Arthur Schwartz and company have had no tele experience, but that doesn't hold true of Campbell-Ewald, the agency on the show. The repeated mistakes *Inside U. S. A.* exhibited should have been as glaring on the rehearsal monitor as they were on the air. Beyond that, there could be no excuse for the parade of dull material, especially two trite and overdone sketches each of which began with a flaccid premise and grew progressively worse.

The tele show is out of the legit,

**Philco Television Playhouse**

Reviewed Sunday (25), 9-10 p.m. EST. Sponsored by Philco, thru the Hutchins Advertising Company via the National Broadcasting Company, New York. Director, Gordon Duff; adapted to TV by Sam Carter from Paul Gallico's novel, "The Lonely." Cast: William Prince, Kim Hunter, Walter Greaza, Regina Wallace, others.

Philco's new fall show features dramatizations of current novels chosen in co-operation with the *Book of the Month Club*. Judging by last week's rapid, slow moving performance of *The Lonely*, the literary conferees need to brush up on their video requirements. Paul Gallico's introspective love story, based on a wartime triangle, was mainly concerned with mental conflict, and, as such, offered slim script pickings for action-demanding TV.

Transcribed to video, sans the plot motivation of the characters' thoughts, the play resolved itself into a pointless yarn about a young U. S. Air Force pilot (William Prince), suffering from occupational fatigue. On sick leave, he trekked to Scotland with a mousy little corporal (Kim Hunter) and fell in love with her over the week-end. In order to break his engagement to a childhood sweetheart, he hummed an AWOL ride home. A weepy session with his mother, however, changed his plans, and he left without seeing the gal. Back in England he staged a grand reunion with Patches, and, for no reason apparent to the televiewer, asked her to marry him.

**Kim Hunter Tops**

Top cast honors went to Kim Hunter who brought a tender, quiet charm to the role of Patches. Her wholesome American accent, tho, was at odds with the character's avowed English heritage. In the totally unbelievable title role William Prince had a tough histrionic row to hoe. He managed to be fairly convincing as the nerve-ridden young soldier, but his spasms of boyish enthusiasm were overdrawn. The combined thespian efforts of his parents were strictly from soap opera.

The script's generally sluggish pace was briefly brightened during the holiday scene, via several beautiful scenic film clips of the Scottish country side.

Philco gave a neat interpretation of its sales slogan — "Famous for quality the world over" — by flashing close-ups of its appliance line against a whirling prop globe. Additional plugs between acts modestly termed Philco's 1950 set line . . . "the most sensational radio ever built" and made a big pitch for the firm's new built-in TV aerial system.

June Bundy.

via virtually the same production group, and originally out of John Gunther's omnibus. The lead is Peter Lind Hayes, a talented comedian who quite naturally couldn't surmount his handicap, the script, but whose facile performance and mobile face offer much tele promise. If no better material is forthcoming, Hayes ought to do some of his own special material—not too hard to work into the routine—and give the show a bolstering badly needs.

Routining started off with the usual legit type of mixed chorus opening; (See "Inside U. S. A." on page 12)

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