

Entertainment

Rush is on to the altar as TV season nears end

by JERRY BUCK
LOS ANGELES (AP) — With television networks figuring wedding bells can ring up big television ratings, characters on TV series are heading for the altar in unprecedented numbers as this season draws to a close.

"It's a staple of television that births, weddings and such occur in November, February and May, which happen to be ratings sweeps months," says Alan Sternfeld, ABC's vice-president for program planning. "That doesn't mean nothing happens at other times, but it's much better when it occurs in those three precious months."

In April and May there will be weddings on ABC's Civil Wars, Perfect Strangers, The Wonder Years, Homefront, Baby Talk and Life Goes On, on CBS' Northern Exposure, and on NBC's The Golden Girls, A Different World and Cheers.

"Look, the end of the season is May for most shows," says Deborah Aal, executive producer of A Different World. "And since May and June are big wedding months I think the thinking among those who produce television shows is that if you have characters in your story lines who might appropriately get married this is the best time to do it."

ABC's soap opera General Hospital got the highest ratings in the history of daytime dramatic programming when Luke and Laura were married in November 1981.

The Brady Bunch, which began with a wedding in 1969, practically turned it into a cottage industry with the Brady Brides in 1981.

Cheers has been to the brink a few times with Ted Danson as Sam Malone, while barmaid Carla (Rhea Perlman) has been over the brink. On Thursday, May 14, Woody Boyd and Kelly Gaines will actually get married — although the wedding will be off-stage.

ABC's Sternfeld says he looks for some of the weddings to produce births in time for the November sweeps.

One show, ABC's Baby Talk, is having a wedding for that very reason.

"We needed another baby because the baby Mickey is starting to talk on his own," says Saul Turteltaub, who is executive producer of Baby Talk with Bernie Orenstein. On the show, the baby expresses his thoughts through the voice of Tony Danza. The series is from the popular movie Look Who's Talking.

The mother, Maggie, played by Mary Page Keller, marries James, played by Scott Baio, in a ceremony to be televised Friday, May 1.

NBC might consider a double wedding On Thursday, May 14. That's the night Woody gets married on Cheers, while Whitley Gilbert is scheduled to marry Byron Douglas on A Different World. The romance between Gilbert and Douglas, played by Jasmine Guy and Joe Morton, has been heating up since she became a volunteer in his campaign for the U.S. Senate.

Whether Whitley's former boyfriend, Dwayne Wayne, played by Kadeem Hardison, is going to stand aside will be determined that night.

On CBS' Northern Exposure Adam and Eve, contrary to popular belief, are not married, but will tie the knot on Monday, May 11. The odd couple — he's a compulsive liar and she's a hypochondriac — is played by Adam Arkin and Valerie Mahaffey.

Beatrice Arthur celebrates her departure from NBC's The Golden Girls with her marriage to Leslie Nielsen on Saturday, May 9. Betty White, Rue McClanahan and Estelle Getty will stay with the show as proprietors of a Miami hotel when it moves to CBS next season as The Golden Palace.

Nielsen plays McClanahan's rich Uncle Lucas who becomes enamored with Dorothy Zbornak (Arthur).

And besides the weddings, there are two proposals.

Lily Harper (Regina Taylor) gets a proposal from jazz musician Clarence Charleston (Dorian Harewood) on NBC's I'll Fly Away in a two-hour episode on Friday, May 15.

On NBC's Sisters, Beatrice Reed (Elizabeth Hoffman) will get proposed to by Judge Truman Ventner (Philip Sterling) on Saturday, April 25.

BOCHCO BACK, BUT DEY GONE

More changes in L.A. Law land

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It sounds like a rerun. Susan Dey is leaving. The show may lose other cast members.

Same problems but a different season for NBC's L.A. Law.

Closing its sixth year, the legal drama has foundered in the Nielsen rankings and suffered the loss of various cast members, writers and producers.

Dey, who plays Grace Van Owen, is really leaving this season because she has signed a series deal with CBS for Love Is Hell, a romantic comedy co-starring Jay Thomas. She said she was leaving last season, too, but then changed her mind.

The series suffered a mass exodus in 1991, including male heartthrobs Jimmy Smits and Harry Hamlin, actress Michele Green and executive producer David Kelley.

Writer and co-producer William Finkelstein had left the season before. Co-creator, executive producer and writer Steven Bochco had left before Finkelstein.

Despite the show's revolving door of on-and off-camera talent, the series had managed to earn good ratings and four consecutive Emmys for best drama series.

This year, however, it looked as if the fate of L.A. Law finally had been written in ink.

Critics hated the 1991-92 season. The spark was gone. The fun was gone. Half the cast was gone.

Patricia Green was suckered into taking a job she didn't want — executive producer — and abruptly

quit earlier this year. Bochco has said she was just fed up.

Green was a supervising producer before Kelley left last season to do his own series for CBS. A lawyer with a twisted sense of humor, Kelley was the driving force of L.A. Law's bizarre plot twists.

Under Green, this season started out as a dry, court-bound vehicle void of the events that made L.A. Law famous — shootings, sex, passing gas, gorilla suits, philandering attorneys and lesbian kisses.

Last year, the series ranked 22nd at season end. This year, it ranks 29th, with viewership down by three percentage points.

Green's departure has put Bochco back in control, after two-and-a-half years of being gone from the series' day-to-day operation.

The man who also created Hill Street Blues had plenty of other work.

As part of his 10-series, \$50 million US production deal with ABC, Bochco also oversees Doogie Howser, M.D., Capitol Critters, Civil Wars and the upcoming NYPD Blues.

Contractually, he had to finish

up those projects before he could come back to L.A. Law.

Beginning last Thursday, the NBC program began a six-episode run of original scripts overseen by Bochco. He even has restored his old credit line of executive producer.

Two previous installments in March left little doubt that Bochco's influence was back. In them, Arnie Becker's testicle was twisted and Van Owen defended a baseball player accused of rape.

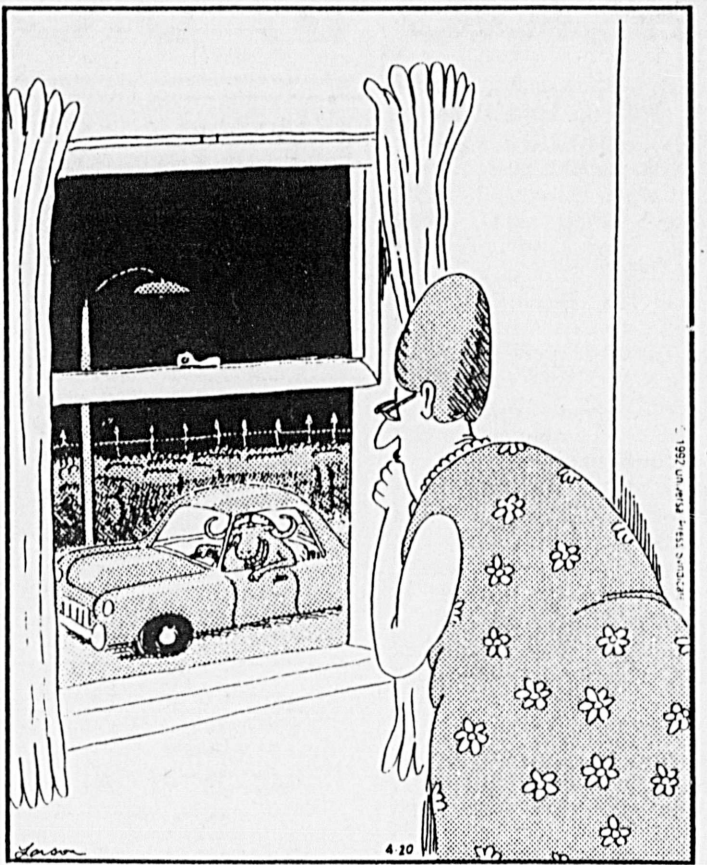
Bochco also will trim the show's ensemble cast, which now numbers 16, before next fall's season, but which characters will get axed has yet to be decided.

A spokeswoman said, however, that Dey's character will be written out by bringing back Smits for another guest appearance. Smits left with barely a word last season after marrying and impregnating Van Owen.

As for the future of L.A. Law, it most assuredly will return for the 1992-93 season, an NBC spokeswoman said. An official pickup is expected within the next few weeks.

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



Scene from "Cape Buffalo Fear"

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PEANUTS
WHAT DID SHE SAY?
SHE WANTS TO KNOW IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS
YES MA'AM
I HAVE A MUFFIN HERE FOR MY LUNCH...YOU DON'T HAPPEN TO HAVE ANY GRAPE JELLY IN YOUR DESK, DO YOU, MA'AM?
MAYBE SHE LIKES EASIER QUESTIONS
DON'T MAKE ME GO TO SCHOOL! PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME! HELP!
LEGGO! ON! STOP! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! MY HOROSCOPE SAYS I'M IRRESISTIBLE TO GIRLS TODAY! I'M TOO POPULAR! I'M GOING TO GET BIG DIVIDENDS! AUGHHH!
WHAT IF SUSIE KISSES ME? I DON'T WANT ROMANCE! I HATE SUSIE! CALL ME IN SICK! HELP!
DEAR, I GOT HIM! GRAB HIS FEET WHILE I PRY HIS FINGERS LOOSE!
PUH-LEEZE!
I WONDER WHAT IT WOULD COST TO RENT A PLACE IN TOWN.
B.C.
NO LITTERING
OH, OH.
LOOK, THOR, ... A CAT-O-NINE-TAILS.
TIGER
MY ROOM'S A MESS, HUGO. WE GOTTA DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT
HOW 'BOUT STARTING ANOTHER PILE?
CATHY
THE TERM "WHITE-COLLAR WORKER" ORIGINATED IN A 1940 MOVIE WHERE GINGER ROGERS PLAYED A SECRETARY WHO WORE A LITTLE WHITE COLLAR
IT STARTED A FAD AND FEMALE SECRETARIES OF THE DAY BECAME KNOWN AS "WHITE-COLLAR GIRLS".
HOW IRONIC THAT, 52 YEARS LATER, MEN HAVE CLAIMED THE TITLE "WHITE-COLLAR WORKER" AS A SIGN OF PRESTIGE AND HIGH INCOME... WHILE SECRETARIES--THE ORIGINAL WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS--ARE STILL PLEADING FOR RESPECT AND DECENT PAY!
WHAT'S SHE TALKING ABOUT?
CLOTHES. TYPICAL WOMAN.
I GIVE UP.
HAPPY SECRETARIES' WEEK
BLONDIE
BUMSTEAD!! YOU KNOCKED MY COFFEE OVER!!
CLEAN THAT MESS UP!
VERNON, GET ME ANOTHER COFFEE!
SETTLE DOWN, BOSS... WE'RE COMING
JEEZ, YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT HE'LL DO NEXT
JULIET
HOW LONG DO YOU IMAGINE WE CAN SURVIVE ON THIS ABSURD EXCUSE FOR AN ISLAND, CAPTAIN?
WITHOUT THE HELP OF PETER HAWKINS--NOT LONG, LADY DIANA...
...BUT I'M THANKFUL THAT HE KNOWS HIS WAY AROUND A WILDERNESS. JUST DO WHAT HE SAYS... AND TRY TO KEEP YOUR COMPLAINTS TO A MINIMUM!
FOR BETTER
GA-GA-GA-AHHH-WAAAAHHHHHHH
DEE-DEE-DEEEEEE AAAAAHHHHHHH
BA-BA-BA-BAAA AAAAAHHHHH
MUM-MUM-MUMM MA-MAAAAAA!
...IT'S FOR YOU.