

Now it's time to say goodbye

After two years, SFM cancels 'New Mickey Mouse Club,' citing higher production costs and threat of FTC children's ad ban

Rising production costs coupled with an uncertain regulatory climate have driven Mickey Mouse off television.

SFM Media Service Corp., the New York-based syndicator that convinced Walt Disney Productions to stage a comeback with *The New Mickey Mouse Club* in 1976, has informed stations to expect no more episodes after Jan. 12.

According to Stan Moger, SFM executive vice president, who put the half-hour strip together, station clearance played no role in the decision. He cited successful ratings for the 73 stations (or 74% clearance) where the revival plays.

Rather, he explained, union contracts have forced production costs up 75% over the past two years and escape clauses have now been written into advertising contracts should the Federal Trade Commission ban sugared-product advertising to children.

When the show began in June 1976, Mr. Moger said, typical production costs for the six new minutes per episode (the rest of the program is recycled from earlier *Mickey* shows) ran about \$10,000 per minute. Today, he added, costs were expected to increase to \$17,500 per minute. Disney's costs are about \$12,000 in residuals per episode.

Although Mr. Moger said he wouldn't expect any FTC ban to take effect before 1980-81, if then, he explained that it would be too chancey to go ahead with the show.

Firm orders worth "a couple of million dollars" already had come through until mid-1979 from General Foods, Kellogg, Mars and Nestle, he said. However, the contracts would be "null and void" if the FTC acted against advertising their products to children. He said going back into production would mean not "knowing my firm contracts are firm . . . I can't afford to

produce unless I know I have the revenue."

As for further recycling of what's already been recycled, Mr. Moger turned thumbs down. "I'd rather take it off on a high," he said, explaining that the first revival package of 130 episodes had been run twice, then re-edited for another two plays.

The New Mickey Mouse Club had been met not only with ratings success but also with citizen-group approval. The program had been honored by Boston-based Action for Children's Television.

Russians offer program bits to U.S. radio stations

Twelve different services are being made available, from commentary to information

Radio Moscow is offering English-language programs to American radio stations in an attempt to provide "first-hand information for people interested in the Soviet Union."

Letters have gone out to U.S. radio stations from Gheli A. Shakhov, editor-in-chief of Radio Moscow's English service, offering them 12 different programs—ranging from *Moscow Mailbag*, a 15-minute program featuring Joe Adamov answering questions sent in by listeners, to *Science and Technology in the USSR*. According to Yuri Solton, Washington correspondent for Moscow radio and television, the offer has been made to "about 1,000" stations in the U.S. He said the service was being offered primarily to university-supported stations.

One commercial station that has received Mr. Shakhov's letter and intends to take him up on his free offer is WSDR(AM) Sterling-Rock Falls, Ill.—an all-news station serving a predominantly rural market.

According to Carey Davis, station manager, WSDR will be carrying *Soviet Press Review*, a weekly 15-minute program featuring editorial and other comment on international and domestic affairs, and

Moscow Meridian, a weekly three-minute commentary by Radio Moscow's Vladimir Pozner on "issues of domestic and foreign policy . . . and whatever else may come to his mind." WSDR will also carry a 10-minute biweekly feature, *Soviet-American Relations Today*.

The tapes of the programs are being offered free of charge. Radio Moscow is asking the U.S. stations to return the tapes after use, however, and also for copies of the stations' monthly program guides.

A similar offer made by Radio Moscow in 1969 was accepted less enthusiastically after the Department of Justice concluded that stations carrying such programs might be required to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act as publicity agents for a foreign principal (BROADCASTING, Aug. 4, 1969). Various attorneys consulted on the matter, however, have discounted the possibility of a station having to register under the act. It was also suggested that such a requirement would likely be overturned if ever taken to the courts.

A Justice Department spokesman said that the opinion expressed in the 1969 letter could, possibly, still be applicable. In situations involving editorial commentaries, he suggested, stations that do not exercise sufficient editorial control could have troubles. "It's a judgmental call on a case-by-case basis," he said.

Program Briefs

More Oscars for ABC. ABC-TV lengthened its agreement with Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to televise Oscar awards ceremonies through 1982, representing two-year extension of five-year contract signed in 1976.

Olympic preview. Viacom is pursuing feasibility of distributing *Sportscade '79*, pre-Olympic international games in Moscow July 21-Aug. 5, 1979. If contract for barter syndication is signed, Viacom would join rights-negotiator Lothar Bock, producer Pyramid Productions (Robert Wussler) and representative William Morris Agency in project. Taped events would be presented same-day; number of hours still is being worked out but Mr. Bock last week ventured it would be in 46-hour range. Three commercial networks were offered *Sportscade* earlier but declined.

Broker feature. Bache Halsey Stuart Shields Inc., New York-based investment and brokerage firm, has launched radio *Wall Street Commentary*, thrice daily, three-minute-15-second financial report. While Bache and others previously have tailored reports to individual stations, *Commentary* is claimed to be first nationally syndicated feature by brokerage firm. It's barter, with half-minute for Bache and half-minute for local sales. About 11 stations are using and 30 are expected on board by Jan. 1. McCann-Erickson, New York, affiliate, Local Communications, is handling placement.

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