

on the way, TBS stands to be one of the bigger suppliers in the coming years. Jack Petrik, executive vice president and general manager of WTBS, said the station has "advised" the producers of *Down to Earth* and *Safe at Home* to go ahead and make 130 episodes of each series. To date, each has been produced at the rate of about 45 per year. Turner produces *Safe at Home* in association with Los Angeles-based The Arthur Co.

TBS has also joined with The Arthur Co. to produce *Rocky Road*, a new sitcom set to premiere next fall. Although only the first cycle of 13 episodes has been ordered, Petrick expressed the hope that it would also go to a minimum of 130 episodes. "We obviously would look toward syndicating our own series," Petrick said, "if the demand was there." But he emphasized that "the main reason for making these was WTBS. We weren't making these for an investment in the syndicated sitcom business." The final decision on whether to syndicate will depend on "the value as an exclusive to TBS versus the value in syndication."

But one WTBS series definitely headed the syndication route is *Down to Earth*, the syndication rights to which are held by co-producer Procter & Gamble Productions. (P&G is not involved in the other two WTBS series.) Jack Wishard, executive vice president, P & G Productions, said, "We are in negotiation right now with a distributor and should be on our way selling these episodes in the next couple of months." He declined to fix a definite date when the series would be available, but said the fall of 1987 could be considered "at the earliest."

Randy Reiss, president of Paramount Television Domestic Distribution, said that Paramount all along has had an eye at eventually syndicating *Brothers*, the Showtime series about three brothers, one an acknowledged homosexual. And he said he doesn't expect any serious objections from stations about the subject matter. "I think it gives people who haven't seen it a different insight into homosexuality." Reiss hopes the program could have the same impact on attitudes about homosexuality as *All in the Family* did on racial prejudice and stereotypes. "There's nothing risqué about *Brothers*," Reiss asserted.

He said he is "bullish" on the ratings, noting—like other distributors who are sitting on potential off-cable series—that the series is still a "new" show to many audiences because of Showtime's limited penetration of the total national television audience. "Once we sell this and pave some ground, the next people coming along will have it a lot easier," he predicted. As to what it might cost stations, Reiss said *Brothers* would fetch "normal half-hour sitcom prices."

One snag some distributors face is waiting until the cable service is finished with the series—often license agreements say the series cannot be syndicated to stations until the cable service has stopped airing the series or consents to a simultaneous window. Alan Courtney, executive vice president of Gaylord Productions and co-producer of *Fairie Tale Theater* for Showtime, said Gaylord is anxious to syndicate the series but can't until Showtime is finished with it. Showtime to

date has ordered 29 episodes, he said, and has an "open end" agreement for 23 more—hence the syndication release date keeps getting pushed back until Showtime has stopped ordering additional series or opted out of the open-end agreement.

A distributor's syndication plans can also be put on hold if a service drops a series. Charles Engel, president of Universal Pay Television, said he is now in negotiation with several outlets—including pay, basic and even network—to pick up *Still The Beaver*, of which 26 episodes were made for The Disney Channel. He mentioned that first-run syndication was even a possibility and that several stations that have run *Leave It To Beaver* have inquired about its availability. "This show will continue," he vowed.

Even those who have just gotten their foot in the door with a limited number of episodes picked up by a cable service have hopes their series will make it off-cable to syndication. Kenneth Kaufman, executive vice president of Telecom Entertainment, which is producing *Washington* for Showtime, sees cable as increasingly becoming a breeding ground for new series in syndication. Showtime has ordered six episodes, he said, and in the next two weeks will let Telecom know if it wants to pick up the second cycle of six. After a dozen episodes run, he said, Showtime will be able to make a long-term evaluation to determine whether it wants to pick up the series for the long term. However, unlike Paramount's deal with Showtime, Telecom does not have the after market syndication rights—it sold them to Showtime along with the license agreement. (Although Showtime does not yet have a syndication arm, two of its owners, Viacom International and Warner Communications Inc., have television distribution subsidiaries.) Said Kaufman: "The *Brothers* experience is the road we're going to have to follow in some way or the other." □

HBO: looking in new directions

Cable network explores secondary revenue sources, including new channel offering, HBO Plus

A little more than a month ago, Home Box Office Inc. chairman and chief executive officer, Michael Fuchs, in an address before the Southern California Cable Club, had some harsh and skeptical words for pay-per-view and its potential as a business. He called P-P-V the latest "gimmick" drummed up by the filmmaking community to squeeze more revenue out of the cable market while claiming that P-P-V is the best defense against the home video market. In effect, argued Fuchs, the Hollywood studio line on P-P-V is "let us save you from us." But, warnings aside, HBO has by no means written off P-P-V, and is in fact providing about a dozen film titles for which it holds P-P-V rights to cable systems experimenting with P-P-V on a stand-alone basis.

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