Stu Martin makes it a believable science

Stu Martin puttered into the KVDO studio, eyes cast to the bare concrete floor, a sheaf of papers grasped firmly under one arm.

Martin is a short man, perhaps 5'6". And if he has a physical trademark, it is his balding head with Peter Lorre eyes which seem to peer from the top of his forehead.

Not much preparation goes into a Stu Martin Theatre of the Golden Hits Show, and on this particular evening the late night news was running long and Stu was in a hurry to meet the 11 p.m. starting time.

He talked with the two SALT reporters while waiting in the control room for the single studio to clear.

Eight year veteran

"I've been in this business for over eight years," he explained, "I worked for a while in Eugene, then did the late night movie in Seattle for five years. I've been in Salem for about 13 months now. When I first came, it was for just eight weeks, but things have just kept me here."

Martin fingered the papers under his arm, picked out a cue sheet and laid it on the director's desk.

"I was probably the first television performer to lose his whole audience," he chuckled. "In Seattle we used to get all the airplane workers on the swing shift watching the show. Well when the employment situation got rough the swing shift was the first to go, and I lost nearly my entire audience."

Walking quickly into the studio, Martin chatted briefly with a few of his guests for the evening—a state legislator and his family, a used car salesman and a mobile home dealer.

Martin's show, while ostensibly featuring old-time movies, depends on its commercials for entertainment. Some commercials last as long as half an hour. Martin employs an old-time medicine salesman approach, interviews with his sponsors, demonstrations and examples of folksy, good-humored, and occasionally sick fun.

Easter wig show

On tap for this night was an Easter wig style show, a "guess the melody contest," interviews with the legislator, car and mobile home dealer, and an interview with a young couple destined to be married on Martin's show in the near future.

"We appeal to all types of people," Martin continued. "The adults like us because we show old nostalgic movies. The kids like us because we're campy. Everything we do is designed to keep people awake, to entertain them. It's a science."

Among the scientific methods of entertainment Martin has developed, perhaps the most unusual is the "Wedding of the Month."

Sponsored by Bridal Exclusives of Albany, the wedding takes place in the KVDO studio.

"We can fit in maybe fifty or sixty guests, plus the flowers and music," Martin insists. "It's all done very tastefully. We've received no complaints and lots of compliments."

Hurrying over to the set, one desk, a few pastel colored walls and posters of a few movie greats, Stu greeted his SRO girls (more science?) and went over the opening shots with the single cameraman.

The SRO girls (means "standing room only" Stu says) are an integral part of the Theatre of Golden Hits. Cuddles Kendall and Captivating Katie (Stu believes in alliteration), answer the ever-ringing phones during the course of the show.

Most calls are in response to Martin's commercials and promotions ("Call collect, call direct, but call right away," but many calls are from regulars or lonely people who just want someone to talk to.

This night, both Cuddles and Captivating were wearing their mod outfits, leather fringed vests, purple bells and pink blouses. Often, they'll model wedding gowns, hot pants or whatever else Stu thinks will boost the ratings.

Cuddles works during the day as a music teacher, while Captivating is a clerk at Lipman Wolfe's department store. Both have become something approaching local celebrities. Both graduated from the Cinderella modeling school.

Martin finishes his instructions to the cameraman, takes his place near the prop desk, and awaits his cue.

"This is Stu Martin, star of the world . . ."

Martin doesn't work with a script. The lines roll off his tongue from years of experience, and he has a way of making the most casual reference a complicated exercise in linguistics.

First order of business is the reading of fan letters (he gets hundreds).

Letter from Drain

"Here's a letter from Drain, Oregon. I'm considered very big in Drain you know."

Correspondents are referred to Cuddles who mails a number of promotional items, including bumper stickers (either "I hate" or "I love Stu Martin," buttons, newsletters, publicity photos).

Following the letters, Stu launches into a quickie interview with the royal court of the Newport Loyalty Days festival. Right at home with the interview, he takes the offensive.

"Tell me, what are the Loyalty Days all about?"

The movie hasn't started yet, though it's almost 11:30. So Stu wraps up the interview, and breaks to the film.

"We're showing films from the late Thirties and early Forties," he said between commercials. "We buy them in packages from the big studios. Our most popular movies are John Wayne movies—adventure movies. I wish we could show a John Wayne movie every night."

Sadly for Stu, the package he's working on now doesn't have John Wayne.

Back to the Studio

After fifteen minutes of movie, it's back to the studio, and Stu hosts a fashion how of Easter wigs from a local beauty salon. The show lasts for another 20 minutes, then it's back to the flick.

Maybe ten minutes later Stu is back, and he and an Albany legislator chat about the state of the Legislature, while the official's family sits proudly by.

The pace slows down. Portions of the movie become increasingly shorter in length, the commercials seemingly longer. But no less interesting.

The future bridal couple is introduced, a pair of 19-year-old aspiring hairdressers—she from Lebanon, he from Scio. They're nervous despite Stu's assurances that, "I've never lost a guest yet."

The car salesman peddles a 1938 Austin roadster during another segment. The car belongs to him, but he'll sacrifice it for a mere $1,488.

Stu sincerely agrees it's a great buy.

"Call collect, call direct, but call right away."

Next break. Time for the SALT staff to make its appearance. The interview is mercifully brief, and as a token of his appreciation Stu presents the rugged SALT writers with two record albums, "Roy Smeck and his All-Star Serenaders" and "Soupy Sales Sez Do the Mouse."

A science, Stu Says.

The SALT staff tends to agree.