

Students view soap opera as a happy hour

By BECKY ANSHUTZ
Of the Emerald

The lights dim at 2 p.m., the room quiets and the bartender tunes in Luke and Laura on the big screen before a captivated audience.

About 70 students gather daily in Duffy's tavern for "General Hospital Happy Hour," a promotion tavern manager Bill Rose implemented last week.

At the suggestion of several employees and patrons, Rose put the top-rated soap opera on the big screen, usually reserved for sports events, and offered half-price glasses of beer and wine.

While the venture draws customers during the tavern's slow hours, it also brings attention to a growing social phenomenon in colleges — watching soaps.

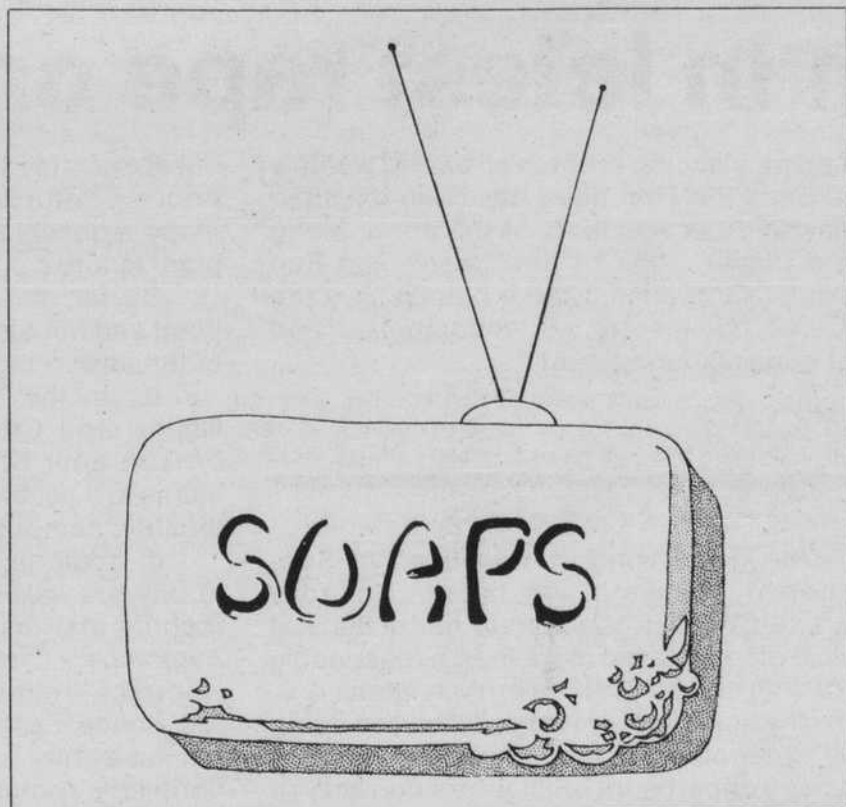
"There's a great difference between sitting and watching a soap opera alone as a habitual practice, and sharing it as a social experience," says telecommunications Prof. Ronald Sherriffs, who teaches a unit on soaps in his drama criticism class.

"As a social experience, you are using the soap opera... you're not being victimized by it," Sherriffs says. But the "solo drinker" — the viewer who habitually watches soaps alone — can be a different story, he adds.

A 1941 study of radio listeners, the ancestors of today's soap viewer, lists emotional release, escape and advice as the major reasons for watching.

However, a 1976 cross-section poll of 200 Eugene residents showed entertainment, habit and convenience as the top motivations. Those respondents list advice and escape last. Sherriffs says most students who watch soaps in groups are using the soaps as "social currency."

"You have to know what's going on — or be left out."



Graphic by Sioux Anderson

Finance major Scott Drummond says he began watching soaps more than a year ago because three friends often discussed them.

"I got sucked right in."

Drummond is one of the few men who now goes to Duffy's to catch the latest sordid goings-on in Port Charles, the mythical location for General Hospital.

Sorority girls compose the largest part of the audience, the tavern's manager says.

According to Kari Rosenberg, who lives in the Alpha Chi Omega house, more than half the house members gather to watch General Hospital in their TV room and have done so for years.

"It's kind of a fun social thing and you can chit-chat with everybody," she says.

Why is General Hospital, Soap Opera Digest's highest-rated serial, so popular with college students?

The soap has more qualities of evening TV drama than most soaps, Sherriffs says. "Action and adventure... fights are staged and weapons appear, like on nighttime television."

Many students became General Hospital fans last summer when Luke — the witty anti-hero who managed a Mafia-controlled disco — ran off to decode a mobster's black book with Laura — the goodie-goodie who manages to mess up everyone else's lives but walks away clean herself.

The couple slept in barns, battled hit-men and searched for gold bricks. Though that kind of drama couldn't compete in prime-time, Sherriffs says it adds a bit more sophistication to daytime drama.

Soaps portray women differently than evening television, Sherriffs says. Evenings offer the Angie Dickinson type character. Though the policewoman works in a male-dominated field, police ulti-

mately use her as villain bait.

In soaps, however, women are often essential problem solvers.

"Love it, and it will correct itself" is the prescription most often used, Sherriffs says.

Dr. Leslie Webber, Laura's kind-hearted mother, is General Hospital's reliable problem solver.

When Heather, who is faking insanity, wants to leave the sanitarium for the holidays, Leslie takes her in. When Diana needs a godparent for her adopted son, who is Heather's natural child, Leslie is the obvious choice.

"Women are allowed to be needed, effective and in control, and men are bumbling around. I think the 51 percent of the population likes that," says Sherriffs, who isn't surprised that many women take advantage of General Hospital Happy Hour.

And he also is not surprised that some men are attracted to soaps. Daytime television offers a greater range of human emotions than night-time television viewing, he says.

Characters deal with divorce, rape, drug addiction and impotence as well as simple rejection

and stress. As men feel freer to express emotions, they may be more attracted to the emotionalism of daytime serials, Sherriffs says.

Drummond agrees.

"Guys feel freer now to watch (soaps) than they did 10 years ago. I only started using a blow drier five years ago."

Of course not everyone at the happy hour watches the screen. Gene Mowery and Tony Roberts say they come in for the half-price beer.

Joe Close watches the screen because he was with two female General Hospital fans. He says he was reluctant because "every time I watch, I'm hooked for an hour."

Not everyone finds soaps addicting, however.

"When I was ill and had to stay home from school, I got chicken noodle soup," Sherriffs explains. "And all day long, I heard soaps. Now, whenever I smell chicken soup or hear soaps, I feel sick."

But more specifically, Sherriffs says he is frustrated by "programs populated by people who seem unable to make a rational decision."

"They just fuss around."

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Assembly debates pay raises

University Assembly members will consider biology Prof. Bayard McConnaughey's two faculty-related motions today at 3:30 p.m. in Room 150 Geology.

Last week, Senate members defeated McConnaughey's first motion on faculty raises 20-8, and his second motion on faculty layoff procedures 27-1.

McConnaughey's first motion asks that the administration give faculty members equal dollar raises instead of percentage increases when giving "across-the-board" raises.

McConnaughey says his motion would equalize gaps between professorial ranks so "people who need the money most get as much as those who don't need it as badly."

This would encourage assistant professors to stay at the University, he adds.

Senate members criticized the motion, however, arguing that faculty salary trends show assistant professor salaries are highly competitive with other schools while full professor salaries aren't as competitive.

McConnaughey has slightly revised his second motion for the Assembly because some Senate members misunderstood the language of the measure.

The motion recommends that the administration lower each employee's pay by the same percentage before laying off

anyone during a financial emergency.

McConnaughey also attributes the motion's failure in the Senate to the "tendency to fear rocking the boat during times of stress."

In other business, Assembly members will consider chemistry department head Robert Mazo's motion supporting a National Academy of Sciences proposal to change federal Office of Management and Budget regulations.

The regulations require faculty members to report "unnecessary" information on grant reports. Senate members approved Mazo's motion.

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