

Network Signs Bing But Faces Dilemma

By EVE STARR

HOLLYWOOD — STARR REPORT: There's nothing more frustrating than a dyed in the wool dilemma, especially when it involves millions of dollars.

It would appear this week that ABC is sitting on the horns of as tough a one as has been encountered in the broadcasting business in many an optionless year.

In something of a surprise coup, ABC has gone and swiped Bing Crosby right from under the nose of CBS, tying him up to a five-year contract calling for two spectaculars a year at a personal fee of \$150,000 to Bing per show.

Additionally, he will work with the network in developing two test films a year for series, each film to be budgeted at \$50,000. And just what that means, nobody seems to know. The important thing, so far as ABC is concerned, is that they've got Crosby.

That's where the dilemma enters the picture. They've got him, what do they do with him? There was a good deal of trumpeting out of the ABC camp a year ago when they signed Frank Sinatra to a \$3,000,000 contract and some more trumpeting when they collared Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca.

Unfortunately for Sinatra, Caesar, Coca and the viewers, the network didn't know what to do with them. And on that record, there's no guarantee they'll know what to do with Crosby, either.

The immediate general idea is to put Crosby and Sinatra together in two spectaculars this season, which is an obvious idea and a very good one.

It would be an even better idea to turn the whole project over to Bill Morrow, writer-producer of last fall's outstanding Edsel show and Crosby's old and good friend, and let him handle it in his own way without any interference from the network or whatever sponsor is lucky enough to latch onto such a bonanza.

With a total of \$5,000,000 already invested in Crosby and Sinatra, it wouldn't hurt in the slightest to throw in a little more and tie Morrow up to a contract of his own.

I would call it the cheapest kind of mortgage insurance, and mortgage insurance is what ABC needs in rather large doses.

SPEAKING OF SPONSORS, MGM has just concluded a rather unusual deal with General Foods which not only allows but specifically states, in writing, that the sponsor (meaning the advertising agency representing him) will have an active hand in creating and developing a film series based on the studio's successful picture of a few years back, "Father of The Bride."

This could be a case of joining 'em before they even start to lick you and it might not be a bad idea at that. Brought in at the very beginning and fully exposed to all the terrors and frustrations of putting a series together, the agency people just might have their eyes opened and decide they want no further part of it. If it works out that way, the rest of the TV film industry should get together and strike off a medal for MGM.

WHEN "SPOTLIGHT PLAYHOUSE" (a rerun of 13 Loretta Young shows without Loretta) starts as Red Skelton's replacement July 1, take a good look at Anita Louise in the hostess spot. She made the 13 one-minute spots in one day's shooting on a schedule that called for no fewer than 24 — count 'em, 24 — costume changes. Actually, she wears only 12 gowns, wearing one of them in two different spots, but the way the long shots and closeups were scheduled, she had to climb in and out of each dress twice. When was the last time you had to change your clothes 24 times in a single day?

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Bishop Consecrated

CANTERBURY, England (AP) —The Rev. Roland Peck-Chiang Kohn is the first Chinese national ever consecrated a bishop in Canterbury Cathedral. He is vicar of the Chinese Anglican church in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, and was made assistant bishop of Singapore in a ceremony here.

Top favorite among the scripts is "Auntie Mame," with five troupes on circuit. "No Time for Sergeants" is another recent comedy in demand.

And by some whim, "Much Ado About Nothing" has suddenly become Shakespeare's most popular play. It is being given at three of the five cross-country festivals dedicated to the Bard's dramas.

In the tune division, such old standbys as "Die Fledermaus" and "Merry Widow" are being augmented by the just-released scores of "Fanny," "Most Happy Fella," "Happy Hunting," "Damn Yankees" and "New Girl in Town."

They'll see such name players as Don Ameche, Shirley Booth, Joseph Cotton, Brian Donlevy, Bert Lahr, Dorothy Lamour, Gypsy Rose Lee, Jeanette MacDonald, Groucho Marx, Basil Rathbone, Margaret Sullivan, Mae West and Shelley Winters.

Dody Goodman, of recent TV note, will be testing her dramatic skills, and so will veteran air announcer Don Wilson.

Tallulah Bankhead is tempering "House on the Rocks," one of a half dozen scripts being tried for later Broadway showing.

James Mason, his wife Pamela Kelline and their daughter Portland are teaming in "Midsummer."

Two husband-wife teams, Jessica Tandy-Hume Cronyn and Marge and Gower Champion are testing new packages.

Helen Hayes is doing an off-beat bit, appearing in a minor role on opening night to help launch a new Nyack, N.Y., theater.

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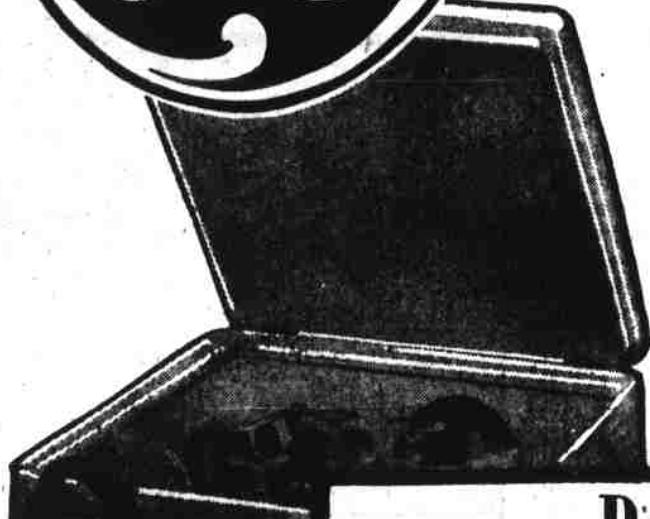
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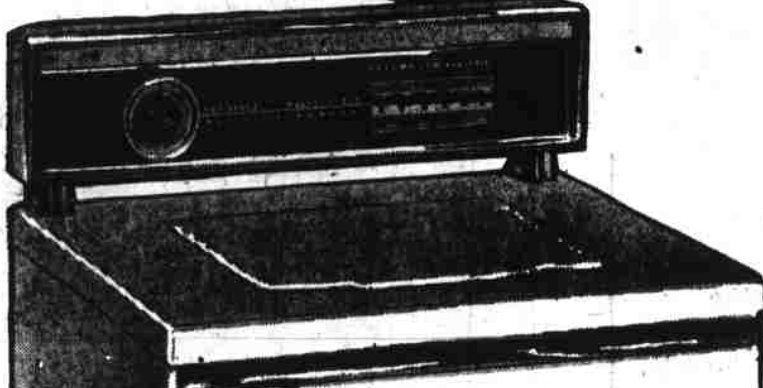
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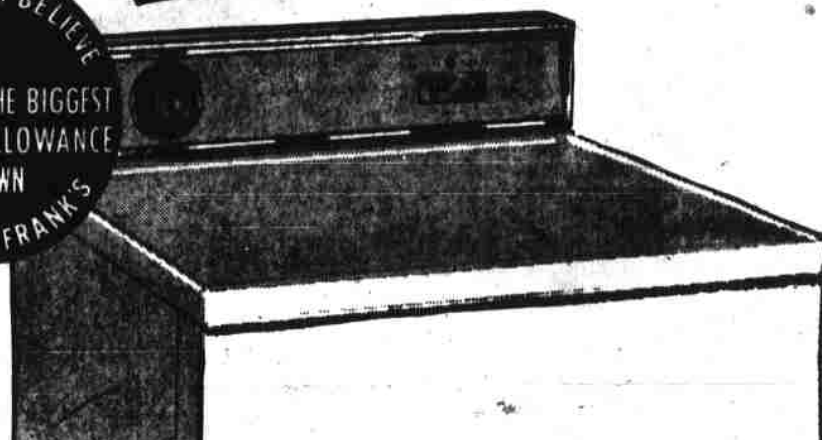
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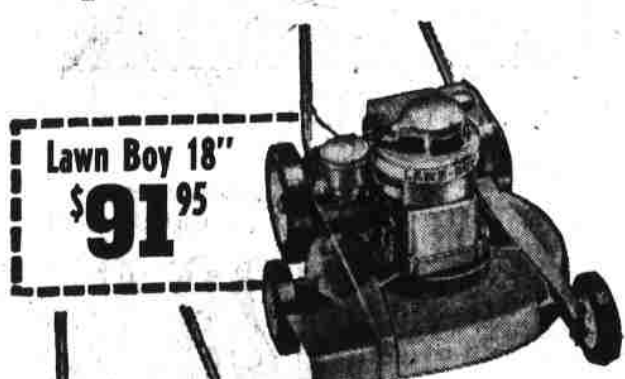
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