

R.E.4 - BC-DEEB ADV21-2TAKES - TF--N[PA]

GARY DEEB V RELEASE ON RECEIPT/DISPATCHED 1/21/81 BY GARY DEEB[PA]

When CBS adapted the motion picture ``M-A-S-H`` into a weekly television series in 1972, a lot of smart people got very worried.[PA]

After all, the very tradition of TV is to soft-pedal anything remotely controversial _ and the 1970 movie version of ``M-A-S-H`` as directed by the inimitable Robert Altman was downright vicious in its assault on war on the military, on American ``imperialism`` and on just about everything that smacked of authoritarianism. Most observers figured that the CBS rendition of ``M A-S-H`` would be cute and funny, but also rather toothless.[PA]

Even Alan Alda, the star of the TV show, had heavy doubts. ``I was afraid that they'd treat the war as a backdrop for lighthearted humor at the front,`` he said. ``I didn't want it to be 'Martin & Lewis Go to Korea' or a remake of 'McHale's Navy.'``[PA]

As it turned out, all that nail-biting was unnecessary. Now midway through its ninth season, ``M-A-S-H`` just might be TV's finest (half) hour. Since its premiere, it's been a magnificent creation _ a weekly comedy-drama that trumpets brotherhood and human decency, and celebrates the differences among us.[PA]

And for 90 minutes this week WTTW-TV in Chicago and PBS stations around the country are presenting what amounts to an unprecedented salute to a TV show. It's called ``Making ``M-A-S-H,```` and it's a superb behind-the-scenes peek at the men and women who have transformed ``M-A-S-H`` into a watchword for great TV.[PA]

(NOTE TO EDITORS: CHECK LOCAL PBS STATION FOR DATE AND TIME.)[PA]

Produced, written and reported by WTTW's Michael Hirsh, ``Making ``M A-S-H```` offers interviews with the stars, producers, writers and other creative

(MORE)

(MORE)

SLUG: UZ197221

PAGE: 2

personnel involved with the program; highlights of some of the more important episodes; an inside look at the writing sessions that result in the actual stories, and lots of footage of the show being filmed at the 20th Century Fox Studios in Los Angeles. [PA]

"When you go back and look at the so-called Golden Age of TV in the 1950s you find that much of the gold has tarnished," Hirsh explained. "It isn't as good as we remember it. But I don't think we'll ever say that about 'M-A-S-H.' Everything about the show is gilt-edged. It's one of the best, most consistently thought-provoking programs ever on TV." [PA]

Or as Wayne Rogers, a co-star during the show's first three seasons, puts it: "We don't do cah-cah, poo-poo jokes." [PA]

On the PBS special, viewers get the distinct and accurate impression that the major forces who kept "M-A-S-H" from degenerating into mildly amusing entertainment devoid of social value were the original producers, Larry Gelbart and Gene Reynolds. [PA]

Gelbart was responsible for the wondrous scripts which focused on the human condition. Reynolds was responsible for the crisp visual and technical style that made "M-A-S-H" so pleasing to the eyes and ears of millions. [PA]

But besides their abundance of natural talent, Gelbart and Reynolds also sported the guts to fight CBS whenever the network tried to soften the show. Reynolds tells of one CBS executive who in 1973 told the producers: "Some day I'll tell you guys how you screwed up 'M-A-S-H.'" [PA]

Both men also realized as the program premiered in the fall of '72, that a lot of their storylines, although set in the Korean War of 1950-53, were easily applicable to the Vietnam War that still was raging. "It was more about Vietnam than many people realized," Reynold recalled. [PA]

Reynolds and Gelbart also won a few battles against the stupid CBS policy

(MORE)

of injecting laughtrack into ``M-A-S-H.'' For instance, they absolutely refused to allow any canned giggles in scenes that took place in the operating tent. [PA]

One ``M-A-S-H'' episode took place (SET ITAL) entirely (END ITAL) in the operating tent, which insured that there would be no laughtrack during the full 30-minute program. CBS wasn't very amused. Later, inspired by an old Edward R. Murrow documentary on the Korean War, Gelbart and Reynolds created an episode called ``The Interview,'' in which the characters told a newsreel reporter about their fears, hopes and frustrations. [PA] ``There was no laughtrack'' Gelbart gloated ``just as in the actual war where there also was no laughtrack.'' [PA]

Then came the most controversial ``M-A-S-H'' segment of all. McLean Stevenson decided to quit the show in search of his own weekly series. So Gelbart and Reynolds came up with an episode where Stevenson's character, Col. Henry Blake, got transferred back state-side. It was a sweet, tender program . . . until the very end, when Henry died as his chopper got shot down. (more)

[L]
<BO>-----[QC]

upi 01-21-81 3:39 pcs [QC]

<RO>R,E,4 - BC-DEEB,ADV21-1STADD - TF--N [PA]

[PA]

``The network despised it,'' Reynolds said. ``You know, on any given night you can turn on your TV set and watch 15 people get knocked off. But it's (SET ITAL) unfelt (END ITAL) violence; it's (SET ITAL) unfelt (END ITAL) trauma and that's not good. If there is such a thing as the loss of life, then there should be a connection (so that viewers feel properly grieved by the death A]

In the case of Henry Blake's demise, ``M-A-S-H'' certainly achieved that goal. It may have been the only instance in which the death of a fictitious TV

(MORE)

goal. It may have been the only instance in which the death of a fictitious TV

(MORE)

SLUG: UZ197221

PAGE: 4

character triggered nationwide bereavement on the part of millions. [PA]

One of the more delightful developments over the last nine seasons of ``M-A-S-H`` has been the evolution of Hot Lips Houlihan, played by Loretta Swit from a single-dimensional, robotized bitch into a normal decent sympathetic human being. [PA]

The switch has been gradual, but it gained momentum during one particular episode written by Mary Kay Place (who later went on to stardom in ``Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman``) and Linda Bloodworth. [PA]

Interviewed by Hirsh on ``Making ``M-A-S-H```` Swit's own passion for the breakthrough in her role is obvious. She credits that 1974 episode with finally allowing Hot Lips ``to reveal what a lonely woman she is and how difficult it is to be in charge and to be in command ... and we are allowed to see for the first time that she was really a very lonely vulnerable woman.`` [PA]

Ever since that ``M-A-S-H`` segment Swit's character has been known much more as Margaret than as Hot Lips. [PA]

Some other delightful nuggets from ``Making ``M-A-S-H````: [PA]

The Klinger transvestite character portrayed by gifted comedy performer Jamie Farr originally was to have been played as a swishy mincing stereotypical sissy. But after checking out the early rough footage producers Gelbart and Reynolds instructed Farr simply to play the role ``straight`` thus creating a much funnier whipsaw effect. Within a year of his first appearance in a ``guest starring role`` Farr was a ``M-A-S-H`` regular. (He shed the women's clothes last season when Klinger moved up to the more responsible post of company clerk.) [PA]

Henry Morgan does a beautiful job as Col Potter the ``M-A-S-H`` commander. But his (SET ITAL) first (END ITAL) appearance on the series was in a guest role as a mentally deranged general who muttered nasty things about

(MORE)

``darkies`` and, in the climax to that episode, asked a black GI to entertain him with a dance number. [PA]

Larry Linville, another fine actor, seems terribly pained by his former ``M-A-S-H`` role as the dim-witted Maj. Frank Burns. The effect is stunning when WTTW interviews him about his old part. A deeply serious (and somewhat drained-looking) Linville declared: ``To a very large degree, my character was a technical contrivance. Frank Burns was never allowed to grow. If he suddenly became liberalized or humanized or acquired a genuine sense of humor, the character would dissolve and change into what is no longer a technical comedic contrivance.`` He's dead right; it's just a shock to see and hear him say so in such a seemingly beaten manner. [PA]

Gary Burhoff was the only major ``M-A-S-H`` performer past or present, who declined to take part in ``Making ``M-A-S-H````. But he's still a big part of this special, appearing in many of the program's more memorable segments. [PA]

Although 90 minutes is a trifle long (and the final half-hour drags just a tad), ``Making ``M-A-S-H```` stands as both a remarkable tribute and a knowledgeable record of one of the most popular and important programs ever to grace that living room tube. [PA]

It almost makes you forget that the last two seasons of ``M-A-S-H`` have been a couple of cuts below the previous seven. Too often these days, ``M-A-S-H`` seems to have been fashioned from a very funny jokebook as the characters continually top each other with sparkling wit and elegant repartee. [PA]

Only the relatively recent addition of the estimable David Ogden Stiers as Maj. Charles Winchester III eases the sometimes manic spirit of the one-liners that ``M-A-S-H`` recently has been shot full of [PA]

But even in its present slightly diminished stature ``M-A-S-H`` ranks in

(MORE)

seen a couple of cuts below the previous seven. Too often these days. M-A-S-H'' seems to have been fashioned from a very funny jokebook as the characters continually top each other with sparkling wit and elegant repartee. [PA] Only the relatively recent addition of the estimable David Ogden Stiers as Maj. Charles Winchester III eases the sometimes manic spirit of the one-liners that M-A-S-H'' recently has been shot full of. [PA] grieved by the death

But even in its present slightly diminished stature M-A-S-H'' rank in

In the case of Henry Blake (MORE) M-A-S-H'' certainly achieved that goal. It may have been the only instance in which the death of a fictional TV

(M027)

SLUG: UZ197221

PAGE: 6

the top echelon of 1980s TV at its best. And Hirsh's special is a fitting eulogy. Patterson Denny directed the program; Rod Nordberg was film editor and director of photography; the associate producer was Marianne Duarte and Tom Engel was the administrative official in charge of the project. [PA]

I suppose the final word on M-A-S-H'' ought to belong to Alan Alda:

"It's hard enough to write a good joke. But to write a joke that allows people to (SET ITAL) feel (END ITAL) something to recognize their own lives in it is about five times harder. I get a lot of letters from people thanking us for making them laugh and cry at the same time. To me, that's the best kind of drama." [PA]

COPYRIGHT 1981 FIELD ENTERPRISES INC. [QL] she is and how difficult it

<BO> [QC] and to be in command... and we are allowed to see for the

upi 01-21-81 03:43 pcs [QC] ally a very lonely vulnerable woman. [PA]

<RO> [BX] since that M-A-S-H'' segment. Swit's character has been known much more as Margaret than as Hot Lip. (END) [PA]

Some other delightful nuggets from Making M-A-S-H'' [PA]

The Klin er transvestite character portrayed by gifted comedy performer Jamie Farr originally was to have been played as a swishy miming stereotypical sissy. But after checking out the early rough footage producers Gelbart and Reynolds instructed Farr simply to play the role "straight" thus