



Bozo's wife, Suzy, is the off-camera ringmaster and helps keep the behind-the-scenes action moving smoothly.



Mr. Whoodini and Bozo perform one of the many spontaneous tricks they do together during the half hour Bozo Show

Staff photos

by

Harry G. Mauthe



The stars of Bozo's Big Top are the kids. Bozo and Mr. Whoodini keep the show entertaining, while at the same time always teaching kids something new.



As another Big Top Show ends, Bozo bids farewell to all his "little pals" and leaves them with a laugh.

Bozo's Big Top

Why clown concentrates on fun and games

By RON GARBINSKI

Mix a group of kids, a magician and a clown together for a half hour of educational fun and you have the all-new Bozo Big Top every morning at 7 a.m. on Channel 2.

The concept of Bozo, the world's greatest clown, has taken on a new look this year after switching to WJBK-TV2 in Southfield.

For more than a decade, the program operated on Channel 9 in Canada. But when the station was taken over by the Canadian government, Bozo was told that the program no longer fit into the station's concept of children's programming.

So Art Cervi of Farmington Hills, the man who fills Bozo's size 84 shoes, began talking with local television stations in an attempt to bring Bozo back to area kids. Finally in November, Bozo signed with Channel 2.

Bozo's Big Top now is developed around an entertaining and educational theme for school-aged children. Mr. Whoodini (Larry Thompson), Bozo's sidekick, stresses these themes and also does magic tricks.

Thompson, also of Farmington Hills, has been working with Bozo for the past six years and emphasizes his teaching experience in his role as Mr. Whoodini.

"The concept of Bozo has been changing ever since I first took over as Bozo 10 years ago," says Cervi. "As the concept of Bozo changed, our ideas of what to stress on the show has been changing along with it."

"We try to keep our shows current because as kids change, so does the need for programming change. Kids now-a-days are much more advanced for their age than the kids of the past. So to keep up with these kids, I feel our show should be more entertaining as opposed to educational."

"I don't believe in 100 per cent education. Our program is geared for kids five and older and they must be that age to even sit in the audience," he continues.

Bozo, the only children's participation show in the morning while kids are getting ready for school. "Our program is geared to kids who are already in school and know how to read and write. I think they get enough education in school and at home, and they really don't want the programs they watch to be filled with more of it," Cervi says.

"Kids can't have education all the time, so we cater to kids in school who don't want just education in their programs. I think if we offered just education without the entertaining we do, our little pals would quickly tire of us and leave the tube," he says.

According to Cervi, when Bozo first appeared on television, the program was strictly entertaining. There were cartoons without audiences. But now there are audiences without cartoons.

The program also features a series of short films called "Friends" which highlight children and how they live.

In the new show, Bozo takes on a more serious role, but in doing so he does not talk down to the kids. Probably the key to Bozo's success is that the kids can relate to him because he respects them and is their friend.

"We never put anyone down on the show," says Cervi. "And there never is a loser in any of the games we play. Everyone always wins. That way the kids have a good time and stay interested because they always win."

"Being Bozo has never been a job for me, and I think if it was, I probably would look for something else to do. I guess you could just call it a labor of love," he explains.

"It really is a spontaneous show. We may follow the master plan, but everything else is whatever happens. We just go out there and bounce with the kids," he says. "It's probably one of the most spontaneous shows on television."

Since the show is only one-half hour, Cervi says it has to be kept spontaneous. They have to keep it light, while keeping the educational and entertaining concepts of the program in mind.

During the program, Bozo and Mr. Whoodini go over common sense concepts and just touch on the main points. That way they are always teaching the kids something while having fun doing it.

"DURING THE SHOW we also watch for opportunities that provide us with a spontaneous adventure," says Thompson. "We look for certain kids in the audience who might be a little more responsive to the things we do."

"Sometimes it works, but sometimes it can really backfire and the kid will just stand there and not say a word. But that's the fun of the whole program," Mr. Whoodini says.

Cervi feels that the most important aspect of being Bozo is that he must be a "good example."

"When I'm out there before the kids, I have to do everything right because a character like Bozo can be very influential on these youngsters," he explains. "And the better example I am, the more the kids will benefit."

The Bozo Show is a family operation and is produced by Cervi and his wife, Suzy, through A&S Productions Inc. Suzy helps ringmaster John Cummings with the off-camera action and directs the flow of kids that attend the taping sessions.

Cervi and Thompson tape their show on weekends at the Channel 2 studios. Each half hour segment is attended by about 60 children and each group gets to sit through two shows.

According to Cummings, Bozo's fan mail has been unreal. There has been such a request for tickets, that it has been difficult to meet the demand.

"Everyone really wants to be on the show and when they get here they are really excited and up for it because they want to see Bozo," says Cummings. "It's really something for these kids to be so close to their idol."

Keeping in mind the philosophy of the show, Bozo always leaves his pals with his favorite expression: "Keep laughing."



For the past 10 years, Art Cervi has put on his clown face, size 84 shoes and orange hair and went before television cameras in Canada. But now, Bozo has found a new home at Channel 2 in Southfield and is back entertaining youngsters.