

Movie trivia key for durable matinee host

By C.J. RISAK

What is it that has attracted Detroit viewers for nearly three decades—the man or the movie?

Certainly, the answer is both. For without one, the other could not enjoy the success it has obtained.

Since 1952, Bill Kennedy has been Detroit's afternoon movie host. His show's love affair with Detroiters began with Channel 4. He then moved to Channel 9 in Windsor in 1956, before switching to Channel 50, where he has remained for the past 10 years.

Despite efforts of the rival stations throughout the area, Kennedy has survived the test of time. His Sunday afternoon program draws a 30-35 share

of the market, which means 30-35 percent of the televisions are tuned in. (Networks are satisfied if their prime time shows get a 30-33 share).

The Sunday show has remained successful through the challenges of pro football and movies carried by other stations.

"I own Sunday (afternoon), especially when football isn't on. . . I'm a virtual powerhouse," Kennedy claimed with a dramatic wave of his hand during an interview Monday. With that he was off, out of the studio and back to his office to search for one of his 250,000 photographs.

THAT IS Bill Kennedy, on screen and off, theatrical in speech and action. It's

not contrived or forced or fake in any way—it's just Kennedy.

His early career had its ups and downs. He started in Detroit in 1936, working as a sportscaster and Hollywood reporter for WWJ radio.

"I worked with Ty Tyson (former Detroit Tiger broadcaster) and did a gossip-type show on Hollywood," he recalled. "And I used to do some spots (commercial), too." Without hesitation, he started singing one of the shorts he had done some 40 years earlier.

In 1939 or '40 ("It's hard to keep dates accurate"), Kennedy moved to Hollywood to seek his fortune and fame. He signed a five-year contract with Warner Bros. with an option clause for seven years. But Warner's didn't pick up the option, so Kennedy went into free-lance work at other studios.

His biggest disappointment came in 1945, when the movie he produced and starred in, "The People's Choice," bombed out. It was such a disaster that Kennedy was forced into bankruptcy.

Seven years later, the movie was bought out of bankruptcy by Adrian Weiss. At the time, movie studios refused to sell films to television because it "threatened their future." That made Kennedy's film a hot commodity—Weiss bought it for \$7,000 and sold it to television for \$1 million.

Kennedy ended up showing the film he had produced and starred in on his show when he was at Channel 4. "Isn't that a quirk of fate?" he said.

He wasn't down for long, however. His free-lance work continued until he "was saved by television."

He returned to Detroit in 1952 to host the afternoon movie for Channel 4, called "The Afternoon Movie, with your Hollywood Host Bill Kennedy." But Kennedy tired of it, and after two years, he went back to Hollywood to give it one more shot.

He made a number of television appearances, including several on the "Circus Kid" series and also voiced the introduction to the "Superman" program. He became a news anchorman for a local California television station, but lacking sufficient background to become a "news analyst," he lost the job and finally returned to Detroit in 1956.

SINCE THEN, he has been a mainstay on afternoon television, shown six times a week—seven since September. His jump from Channel 9 to Channel 50 in 1968 proved that it's his analysis and comments on the films he shows that drew the audiences. The switch never affected his ratings.

"I research every movie and try to



Bill Kennedy

respond to what the public wants," Kennedy explained, sitting in his chair but still showing the same dramatic flair he had shown in front of the camera minutes before.

These stills are an integral part of the show. And my question and answer period is dynamic. As far as I know, we're the only ones in the country to do it—and I just stumbled across it five years ago."

He was up and off again, back down the hallway to the studio, holding a number of pictures to help answer viewers' questions.

"See this?" he asked, pointing to a photo he had just pinned on his bulletin board of himself and some obscure singer from the 1950s, who had been the object of a question the day before.

"Who would remember this guy? Well, I do, because of my collection of

stills. They really make the phone calls segment work."

"Now what was that hit song this guy did?" he questioned himself, then, in an attempt to answer it, sang, "You got me singin' the blues. . . ."

Moments later, he was on the air responding to the inquiry about the singer. As soon as they cut back to the movie, he was gone again, back to his office.

Though he sometimes appears lost in his own thoughts, Kennedy remains an engaging personality. His easygoing manner makes it easy on the people around him.

Things haven't always gone so well, however. Kennedy in January was involved in a celebrated Grosse Pointe traffic accident. He said his erratic behavior was caused by medication he was taking. He pleaded guilty to impaired driving, and a separate charge of leaving the scene of an accident will be in court later this month.

"HE'S A GEM to work with," says Ruth Whitmore, a former Channel 50 staffer now with WHIP radio. "He's never late, never sick. He forgets a few things, but rarely. And he's no egomaniac."

"The only time he balks about doing anything is if it threatens the quality of his show."

That quality has led Kennedy into minor disagreements with the management concerning the length of his program and the movies he shows.

"I'm always pressing for more time," he said. "You tend to alienate people from a picture if you cut it so you can make comments about it. So my air time is usually shortened."

The movies he shows used to bring

criticism from viewers because they were shown over and over again. Kennedy explained he does not choose the films but is consulted when a package is bought.

"We go over it together," he said. "Sometimes a package of 26 or 27 films only has three or four good ones. So they always get my opinion."

As for TV movies of the future, Kennedy cannot see any film holding out for long before being shown on television.

"Gone With the Wind" was the last big one to fall," he said, then, once again, adding dramatically, "It finally succumbed to the lure of gold, which we all do at some time."

Then it was back down to finish Monday's live show. His Sunday through Wednesday programs are all live, with Thursday through Saturday taped. During a five-hour period Monday, Kennedy taped Thursday's show, took phone calls for Monday's show (part of the telephone question period is taped, allowing Kennedy time to get a picture to answer the question. The picture is then cut into the tape), and taped promos for the 8 p.m. movie.

"I'm very lucky to be doing what I like and getting paid for it," he said about his future. "And I know it. I wouldn't know what else to do. As long as the public enjoys it, I'll keep doing it."

He got some things together for Tuesday's show, put on his overcoat and a blue cap, and headed for his car to drive to his Grosse Pointe home. On his way out, Kennedy was stopped by Channel 50 program director David Simon, who complimented him on his black velvet suit.

Baseball fan wins bonanza

Rod McKnight and 3,999 of his closest friends can see the Detroit Tigers play the White Sox in Chicago's Comisky Park this summer.

McKnight, a regional sales manager for Eaton Corp.'s Industrial Truck Division in Farmington Hills won 4,000 tickets to a Tiger-White Sox game at a recent Good Sports Foundation banquet in Detroit.

Now, depending on the opinion of his accountant, he'll either give away most of the tickets or use them as a business promotion for Eaton's Chicago area dealerships.

If Uncle Sam dips too far into his winnings, McKnight says he'll treat his members of Chicago area Boys Clubs or Catholic Youth Organizations (CYO) to a night at the ball park.

McKnight's windfall came at the end of the banquet at which White Sox owner Bill Veeck raffled off several sets of baseball tickets for games in Detroit. Before the last drawing, of originally four tickets, Veeck added a few zeroes to the total and suggested he give away 400 tickets.

When banquet goers groaned in response, Veeck added yet another zero to the figure and gave away 4,000 tickets.

"I'M NO PIKER," he said to the audience. But at the last minute he added the stipulation that the tickets gave the winner access to a game in Chicago instead of Detroit.

Although he plans to give away the bulk of his winnings, McKnight intends

to take a couple of friends down to Chicago for the freebie.

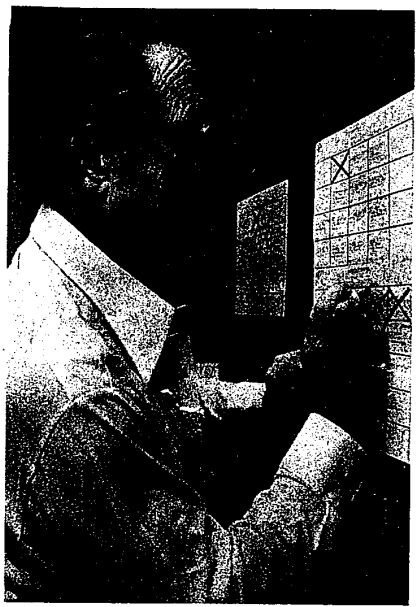
With his 4,000 free tickets he might even help Veeck set a record at the White Sox gate.

"Nobody wants to drive to Chicago for a Chicago game," he said of the team which limped out of last season in final place.

"They have trouble getting people from Chicago to go to White Sox games," he said.

Even Veeck, who has yet to hand over the 4,000 tickets to McKnight, admits that the winnings will help Comisky Park attendance records.

"I'll be our biggest count of the season," McKnight said the baseball owner joked.



Known for his prowess in motion picture trivia, Channel 50's Bill Kennedy checks off yet another film he has shown on his 1 o'clock show. (Staff photo by Gary Friedman)

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

MAKING BEAUTIFUL MUSIC together is the way the Farmington Hills Senior Adult Band spent the past weekend. Sunday, they went to Carmel Hall in Detroit to entertain the residents, who will be displaced when the hall closes. Band members Betty Bloom, Herman Castova, Bill Ellison, Arthur Krause, Al Salecicoli and Ray Williamson were invited by the hall to brighten a sad time for the residents.

NOW'S THE TIME to help out another group of music makers. The North Farmington Band and Orchestra Boosters annual sale of Texas grapefruit and oranges will continue until Feb. 23. The proceeds from the sale will go toward the replacement of band uniforms. The present band uniforms are the original ones and have been in use since the school opened in 1961. North Farmington instrumental music students will be canvassing their neighborhoods for orders. A small box of oranges or grapefruit weighs 20 pounds and is priced at \$7 while a large box of 40 pounds of oranges costs \$11. The fruit is scheduled to arrive at the school on March 2 and will be delivered by students. Orders may be placed with any North Farmington music student by calling the music department at 626-8380 or by mail addressed to North Farmington Music Department, 32900 Thirteen Mile, Farmington Hills, 48018.

SPEAKING OF FOOD, Angles had its ear to the ground recently. Fortunately, it was able to avoid frostbite when it heard this hot item. The Farmington business strip along Grand River will pick up another restaurant in the next few months. It seems the new owners of the old Danish Inn will be revamping the fire-damaged place into an Irish style pub and eatery, complete with dart board. Between this new development and Dunleavy's, an Irish style pub, Angles can't help but wonder if Farmington's slated to become Dublin West. A has a great suggestion where they can install the Blarney Stone. In fact, Angles can name two great places for the Stone. It would be pretty busy in an election year.

TWO AUTHORITIES ON WILLS, trusts and estate planning will share their expertise at a free estate planning seminar, at 7:15 p.m. Feb. 20 at Madonna College. The seminar will feature John Raymond, attorney and Gordon Wright, vice-president and trust officer of Manufacturers National Bank. In the last two years, both federal and state laws have changed requiring a review of virtually all estate plans. The seminar is scheduled for College's Residence Hall at 14221 Levan, north of Schoolcraft in Livonia. Reservations are suggested. Contact the Madonna Office of Development at 591-1211.

CBERS WHO WANT to donate some time and expertise can join the Farmington Community Observation Patrol Service, a formal network for

concerned and willing citizens to report emergency problems to the city of Farmington Public Safety Department. Members of COPS should be at least 18 years old. Each member is licensed by the FCC and receives formal training in such areas as first aid, CPR, an spotting and reporting suspicious persons and vehicles. COPS need members who can man the base station during the weekends. For information, visit the Farmington Department of Public Safety at 23600 Liberty.

THE YOUNG ADULT DEPARTMENT at the Farmington Community Library is sponsoring a program on beer collecting for all interested from 7 p.m.-9 p.m., Feb. 27 at the Hills branch, 32737 Twelve Mile. The guest speaker will be Don Bessler, a collector and dealer in the Detroit area. After the speaker, there will be a trading session. This free program is open to the public. For further information call Lauren Bowman, 553-0300.

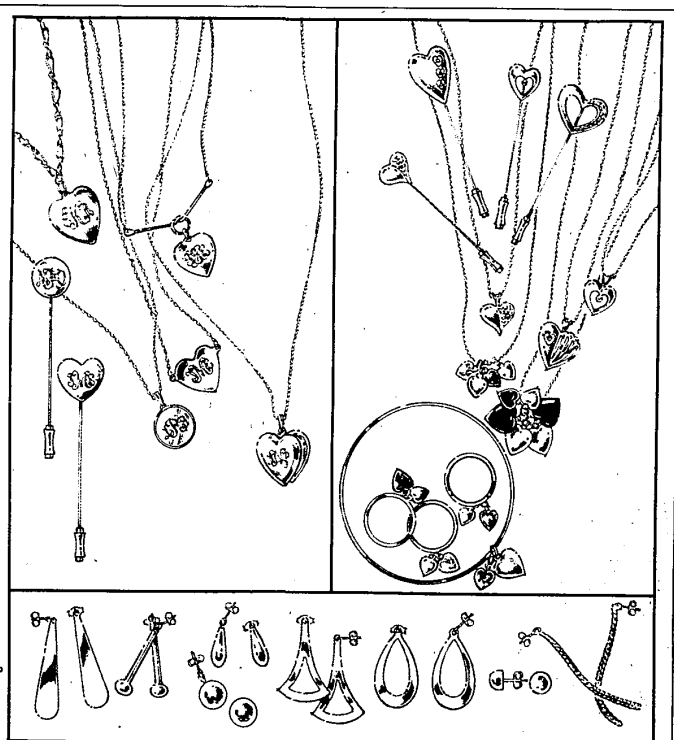
THE FARMINGTON COMMUNITY BAND is featuring Prof. Ed Siela, saxophone soloist and teacher from the University of Michigan at 8 p.m., Feb. 22 in Harrison High School auditorium. Tickets are required for the free performance. For tickets, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department, 31555 Eleven Mile, Farmington Hills, 48018.

DAVID MARK of Warner Junior High School, was among the eighth graders who won the Junior High School Mathematics Invitational on Feb. 5.

WOMEN ARE INVITED to attend a 10-week study, "The Promises of God," at the Fellowship Hall Building of the First Church of the Nazarene, 30523 Twelve Mile, east of Orchard Lake Road, Carolyn Lunn, of Farmington Hills, a teacher and retreat speaker who served as chairperson of the Women's Group of the recent Billy Graham Crusade in the Silverdome will teach the class. The Bible background for this series is 1 Thessalonians and the Book of Philippians (Hope and Joy). The study begins at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 11:15 a.m. on Feb. 7. A nursery will be provided for pre-school children and coffee will be served. For further information, call 477-2525 or Mrs. Lunn at 851-1370.

DEADLINE

Material submitted for the Inside Angles, 22170 Nine Mile, Southfield, 48034, should include the name and phone number of the sender and should be typewritten if possible. Items should be received at least one week before publication and photographs can't be used. All materials become the property of the Farmington Observer but any laughs will be open to the community.



Love notes composed in gleaming goldtones

For romantics only. ROMAN jewelry in disc and heart shapes to make personally hers. We'll engrave it with her monogram while you shop, at no extra charge. Pendants, lockets, bracelets and stickpins. \$5 to 135.00 from Hudson's Costume Jewelry.

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