

## CBS offers another really big Sullivan special

### Series archives virtual treasure trove

By Dan Rice

To paraphrase George Orwell's axiom from his "1984," who controls the syndication rights to television of the past controls television of the future.

Network television occasionally produces a series that shines like a gem among the dull stones of its bleak wasteland, and these exceptions are granted an indefinite afterlife in syndicated reruns, sometimes earning a sad reunion special or even an anniversary resurrection.

In late November 1991, CBS falls back on its brighter moments for a three-day Classic Weekend, offering "Bob Newhart" and "M\*A\*S\*H" anniversaries, plus "The Very Best of The Ed Sullivan Show II," which airs Sunday, Nov. 24.

Ed Sullivan's "very best" was the best of television in general. For the 23-year run of his show, between

1948 and 1971, Sullivan owned Sunday night. His was the definitive variety show, a cornucopia of acts which brought the family together by providing entertainment for all tastes and ages.

Although Sullivan's wooden mannerisms and awkward delivery make him the antithesis of the modern television host, he was the greatest showman since P.T. Barnum. He introduced American audiences to foreign performers they otherwise would not have seen. And many a Hollywood star took his or her first televised bow on Sullivan's stage: Bob Hope, Walt Disney, Dinah Shore, Eddie Fisher, and the meteoric comedy team of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

Elvis Presley had appeared on television before, but it was his Sullivan appearance (shot from his waist up for reasons of propriety) that opened the door for

superstardom and cult worship. And there is an entire generation that vividly remembers where they were on the night of Feb. 9, 1964 — tuned in to the Sullivan show for the TV debut of The Beatles.

"The Very Best of The Ed Sullivan Show II" was produced by one of the industry's best guides for archival journeys, Andrew Solt, whose impressive list of credits includes "Imagine: John Lennon," "Remembering Marilyn," "This Is Elvis" and "It Came From Hollywood," as well as many of the Jacques Cousteau specials.

Solt's involvement with the Sullivan special goes far beyond that of producer/director, for he has purchased the entire Sullivan library for an undisclosed amount of money. The volume of material in the collection is staggering: around 1,100 hours of footage specially housed in a climate-controlled environment. Solt says there is more than enough to make up a third and fourth highlights special, but he plans to precede that with a syndicated release of the show in a re-edited, half-hour format.

In the Nov. 24 special, about 65 performers are featured in clips averaging one minute in length. Besides a few headliners like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Presley, who appeared in the first special, this edition carries an "all-new" lineup.

Enjoy once again musical greats Nat King Cole, Johnny Mathis, The Fifth Dimension, The Byrds, Lovin' Spoonful, Credence Clearwater Revival, Roy Orbison and Jackie Wilson; comedians such as Jack Benny and Phyllis Diller; and specialty acts including animal trainer Clyde Beatty, whose loss of control over his big cats drove Sullivan into the audience.

Solt believes "people remember some of the oddest stuff best, like the plate spinner, or Senor Wences... and Topo Gigio." He attributes the popularity of Sullivan's show to its diversity. "Parents watched for one reason, the kids for another; teenagers for another, everybody liked the comedy. It was a very interesting evolution of vaudeville that he had."



(Clockwise from top left) Dick Anthony Williams, Hattie Winston and Sterling Macer Jr. are part of the ensemble in the postwar drama *Homefront*, Tuesdays on ABC.