

It's a wonderful week for holiday TV

Fun, music, parade in store for family

By Dan Rice

Traditionally, too much Christmas TV programming has "borrowed" a moralistic theme from one of three sources: Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi* or Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. Many viewers understandably dread the season with its plethora of sitcom characters visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past or struggling with the question of what life would have been like had they never been born. Fortunately, the Yuletube has some worthy offerings as well.

There are two big network holiday specials for the week beginning Sunday, Dec. 20. CBS' *Holiday Greetings From Ed Sullivan*, airing in prime time Sunday, is a collection of holiday-themed performances from the 20-year span of the late showman's variety series. Bob Newhart serves as host of the two-hour special. ABC offers the best bet for Christmas morning (Friday, Dec. 25) with its Walt Disney *World Very Merry Christmas*

Parade. Hosts Joan Lunden and Regis Philbin welcome *Golden Palace* stars Betty White and Cheech Marin.

Several network series features new episodes related to the holidays this week. On Sunday, Fox presents "The Dysfunctional Family Christmas" on *In Living Color*, followed by a holiday baptism on *Roc* and an episode of *Married...With Children* that finds Al working as a shopping mall Santa. Tuesday, Dec. 22, on CBS, a paramedic dressed as Santa Claus delivers a baby on *Rescue: 911*.

Children will enjoy the CBS rebroadcasts of two animated specials Thursday, Dec. 24. *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, a musical adaptation of Clement Moore's poem, is followed by *A Wish for Wings That Work*, in which Bloom County's Bill the Cat helps Opus the penguin contact Santa Claus with his special request.

As always, The Disney Channel can be depended on for a full slate of holiday programs for the kids, including *Babes in Toyland*, starring Annette Bening, on Sunday and Thursday.

Children and adults alike will appreciate two documentaries airing

Friday on The Discovery Channel. First, the people of the Finnish village of Santa Claus can be seen caring for their reindeer herds in *The Daughter of Santa Claus*. Then holiday dessert is the subject of the lighthearted special *Fruitcake*.

Both traditional and contemporary holiday music brighten the week. Tuesday on *A&E Stage*, the 250th anniversary of Handel's *Messiah* is honored with a gala performance in Dublin, Ireland, featuring world-class soloists. The Learning Channel goes to Oxford, England, on Friday morning for *Carols From Christ Church*. The Nashville Network's *The Twelve Videos of Christmas* airs Thursday and Friday, while VH-1 offers *The Soul of Christmas*, with host Vanessa Williams, on the same days. *New Vision Christmas*, airing Friday on VH-1, features the music of Leon Redbone and Joan Baez.

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