

Gibbons glows over hot new daytime show

By Scott White

"This is a giant shark," says Leeza Gibbons with an uncharacteristically tired note in her usually effervescent voice. She is referring to the workload involved in launching her new daytime talk show, "John & Leeza From Hollywood."

"I'm operating on almost no sleep," she says, "because I most especially don't want to shortchange anything or anybody."

The moment of melancholy is quickly replaced by the enthusiasm her viewers have come to know and love from her long tenure on the syndicated program "Entertainment Tonight." Her voice warms again when she begins to speak of "John & Leeza."

"John (Tesh, her co-host) and I are bouncing off the walls," she says. "Somebody's going to have to rein us in."

The new show, which presents an hour of variety entertainment before a studio audience each weekday, premieres Monday, June 14, on NBC. Obvious comparisons will be drawn not only to the highly successful "Entertainment

Tonight," but also to the syndicated morning favorite, "Live With Regis & Kathie Lee," the program with which "John & Leeza" will share a friendly competition.

"John and I are both big fans of what Regis and Kathie Lee do," says Gibbons. "I've filled in for Kathie Lee many times. When it looked like (John & Leeza) was even the spark of an idea, I wrote to them and said, 'If it happens, it will be because of you guys, because you've been so incredibly successful.' They have both been real supportive and very gracious. In a lot of markets, we're actually companions, so I think there's certainly plenty of room for everybody."

The new program is as different from "Entertainment Tonight" as it is similar to "Live With Regis & Kathie Lee."

"There will be virtually no similarities between this show and 'Entertainment Tonight,'" Gibbons promises, "except for the fact that we will have a heavy dose of celebrity guests. 'ET' is a format-driven show that's not very personality intensive. What we hope for 'John & Leeza' is that it will be

just the reverse of that. We want this show to be very spontaneous, very freewheeling, with a sense of surprise and a little bit of irreverence, but not to the point of exclusion. It's going to have almost a dishy aspect to it."

Gibbons expects the show's Hollywood location will give it easy access to some of the hottest celebrities and gossip in the show business industry.

"We'll be the only West Coast-based talk show, other than 'Arsenio,'" she remarks. "We're going to play up the fact that we're on the Paramount lot. I mean, right now the Coneheads are running around, the Addams Family is running around, as are all the people who load in to perform on 'Arsenio.'"

In addition, Gibbons and Tesh both have the name recognition necessary to rustle the big stars in.

"Everybody I've mentioned it to has said 'yes,'" Gibbons proudly proclaims. "I was on the set of (the upcoming film) 'Demolition Man' the other day and said, 'Sly (Stallone), you gonna do our show?' and he said 'Absolutely. Tell me when you want me.' And I interviewed Richard Marx for a radio special recently. I said, 'you know you want to perform on this show,' and he said, 'Definitely.' Let's face it, this is the most favorable environment you could appear in for a personality. I think we're probably gonna have startups pains for the show, but I don't think that finding guests will be one of them."

