Networks unveil new fall programs

By Frank Sanello

HOLLYWOOD (NEA) -- This fall's TV season will not be remembered for its vanguard of innovative and strong programming. In fact, many of the new shows are rather weak and seem to be awaiting their inevitable midseason replacements.

But a few gems, like "Frank's Place" (CBS), "The 'Slap' Maxwell Story" (ABC) and "J.J. Starbuck" (NBC), have managed to sparkle amid a vast wasteland of nighttime programming.

TV's zeal for re-creating the sanitized nuclear family - sparked by "Cosby" and spread like wildfire to "Growing Pains" - has dimmed. Instead, this season's crop offers a skewed interpretation of family dynamics in "Mama's Boy" (NBC), "My Two Dads" (NBC), "Full House" (ABC) and "Everything's Relative" (CBS). Confused paternity, slap-together family units and unusual mother-son relationships seem to be the abnormal norm this season.

No one network comes out on top with this season's offerings, either. Each of the big three has a handful of strong - but not guaranteed -- shows and a balance of largely mediocre programs.

Comedy is supposed to be king these days, but the fall lineup offers almost as many new police/detective ny" for behind him as he takes on the dramas (seven, most of which hail title role in the hightly touted ABC sefrom CBS) as it does sitcoms (eight), ries "Hooperman." with two hybrids that offer both bullets and belly laughs.

Kudos should go to CBS for even sweet kids. *55 airing "Tour of Duty." Even though [Married Dora (Friday) Comedy the show's topic - Vietnam - will about an architect who marries his probably keep away viewers looking. Salvadoran maid so she won't be defor the upbeat viewers, CBS is the ported. From a creator of "The Cosby first network to give the controversial. Show." Unavailable for review war more significant attention than a Once a Rero (Saturday) Captain passing documentary or TV movie.

"Hooperman," which is either a sit- world in order to pep up the bored com with pathos or a drama with cartoonist who draws him. The hero pense. Almost. ★★% laughs. It's from the creative team also fights crime with the aid of felthat gave us last year's class act, low cartoon character Detective "LA Law."

The worst? The competition is too strong to single out a top stinker.

ABC

to become the Carol Burnett of the Evigan and Paul Reiser both had sex-'80s. Conventional wisdom says vari- ual relationships with a woman. She ety shows have been killed off by the dies and leaves them her 12-year-old talk show, which is cheaper to pro- daughter. The dubious laughs come duce. Parton promises her show will from each man trying to prove that be zany and break the old variety he's the biological father. "Lolita" mold. Unavailable for review.

Buck James (Sunday). Dennis ★15 Weaver is a crack trauma surgeon at a major Southwestern hospital. A TV Western star Dale Robertson regood-ole-boy rancher, Dr. Buck ropes turns to portray an eccentric Texas cattle and sews up emergency-room billionaire who travels the country patients with equal unbelievability, helping people and solving murder; Buck's personality is more obnoxious cases that stump the local police. Prothan flinty. *

pic soap opera about two married mystery with a lot of heart. * * * 14 couples and their unmarried friends. all pushing 30. Self-absorbed like Last year's miniseries returns as a most yuppies, they all take themselves too seriously, especially since the pilot's hig dramatic question is Saint, and the producers killed her off whether or not one couple can find a in the first episode! The miniseries baby sitter in order to take a camping was a pretentious soap opera. Maybe trip. Tedious and hard to watch. *44 the series will be better. Unavailable

Hooperman (Wednesday). The new for review. show to beat. The first episode has an hour's worth of grim humor and fullblown pathos a la "Hill Street Blues" and "L.A. Law," compacted into a fast half-hour. John Ritter is Harry Hooperman, a San Francisco police detective who inherits an apartment building full of eccentric tenants after his lovable landlady is brutally murdered. Great ensemble cast headed by Ritter's police boss, Barbara Bosson (Fay Furillo on "Hill Street").

*** The 'Slap' Maxwell Story (Wednesday): Dabney Coleman is the title's newspaper sportswriter. The pilot wasn't available for review, but the fifst two scripts were hysterical. In the opening scene, Coleman asks a golf pro if it's true that "a bunch of homosexual coke freaks have infiltrated occurs when Cosby makes a cameo professional golf" and gets beaten up telephone appearance. But maybe for his effort. *** 1/4 (based on new producer Ann Beatts ("Square scripts)

Full House (Friday): A recent wid- petus, ★★ ower raises three young daughters with the help of two live-in friends the creator of "Miami Vice," "Private who are so immature you wouldn't Eye" ends up looking and sounding trust them with your pets, much less like a parody of it, with interminable

JOHN RITTER puts "Three's Compa-

friends is a standup comic) with icky-

Justice jumps off the pages of his fail-The best of this fall's crop is ABC's ing comic strip and enters the real Gumshoe. Unavailable for review.

NBC

My Two Dads (Sunday). Another sitcom with a weird, rather distasteful Dolly (Sunday): Dolly Parton tries premise. Thirteen years ago, Greg without sex - or much intelligence.

J.J. Starbuck (Tuesday): Veteran ducer Stephen J. Cannell ("The A-Thirtysomething (Tuesday): A yup- Team") brings us a witty, touching

> A Year in the Life (Wednesday): weekly show. The best role and performer in the original was Eva Marie

Beverly Hills Buntz (Thursday): Of all the colorful, wonderful characters on "Hill Street Blues," why did the network decide to spin off two of the creepiest - crooked cop Norman Buntz (Dennis Franz) and his stoolie, Sid Thurston (Peter Jurasik)? On *Hill Street," Norm and Sid were fun in small doses as supporting characters. but they're not strong enough to carry their own show, **

A Different World (Thursday): Denise Huxtable (Lisa Bonet) goes to college in a spinoff from "The Cosby Show." NBC could probably air a dramatization of my computer manual in the time slot after "Cosby" and get as good a ratings share. My computer manual, however, is slightly more entertaining. The only spark in the pilot Pegs") will give this series fresh im-

Private Eye (Friday): Written by your children. Lame gags tone of the MTV-style sequences and brooding

method-acting by stars Michael Woods, who plays an ex-cop thrown off the force for a crime he didn't commit, and his sidekick (Josh Brolin, James' son). It's even more violent than "Crime Story" and the pilot is convoluted beyond comprehension. Set in corrupt 1950s Los Angeles, "Private Eye" tries hard for a Raymond Chandler flavor, but instead offers only pseudo-tough-guy dialogue and world-weary cynicism. *

Mama's Boy (Saturday): A weird comedy with Oedlpal overtones. Nancy Walker moves in with her newspaper-columnist son (Bruce Weltz) and wreaks havoc with his sex life. Embarrassing rather than amusing to watch. The show airs only once a month, like "Beverly Hills Buntz." NBC calls it a "designated hitter," but it sounds as if the network feels "Mama's Boy" isn't strong enough to run weekly. They're right. * 15

Everything's Relative (Monday): Two bachelor brothers - one a hunk, the other a toad - share a New York apartment and a nagging mother who constantly asks the stale question, "When are you getting married?" Nice performances all around can't rescue a hoary premise. * *

Jake and the Fotman (Tuesday): Veteran TV detective William Conrad ("Cannon") is wonderful as a slob of a district attorney who not only convicts criminals but chases them too. The two-hour pilot is a "Columbo"style mystery. Joe Penny will give Don Johnson competition as the fashion-plate detective who works for the roly-poly D.A. ★★★

The Law and Harry McGraw (Tuesday) A spinoff of "Murder, She Wrote," but not as clever. The chemistry between Jerry Orbach's low-life detective and Barbara Babcock's ("Hill Street Blues") socialite lawyer almost makes up for the lack of sus-

The Oldest Rookle (Wednesday): Paul Sorvino is the head of public relations for a hig-city police department who decides to chuck it all and become a beat cop. The gimmicky premise is quickly dumped after Sorvino and his handsome young sidekick are promoted to detectives, and the series turns into a routine cops 'n' robbers show with a few nice gags. **

Tour of Duty (Thursday): Experiencing the Vietnam War once was one time too many, but the war is doing boffo box office these days, and CBS hopes to duplicate the success on the small screen. But do we really want to see the war refought every week in our living room? So as not to offend liberals or conservatives, the series refuses to take a moral stand. Instead, It substitutes endless battle scenes Sanitized for the family hour. *-



LISA BONET spins off from the Cosby clan in the NBC sitcom "A Different World."

Wiseguy (Thursday): In this Stephen J. Cannell production, a good-looking cop goes undercover to infiltrate an organized-crime family as a "wiseguy," or low-level employee of the organization. Even though they're Anglo-Saxon Protestants, the gangsters are attractive in a "Godfather" sort of way. The undercover cop (Ken Wahl) is sympathetic as a man cut off from family and friends because he can't tell them he hasn't really become a erook. ★★%

Beauty and the Beast (Friday): Despite some surprisingly touching moments, the ridiculous premise that a half-man, half-beast (Ron Perlman) lives in the sewers of New York and

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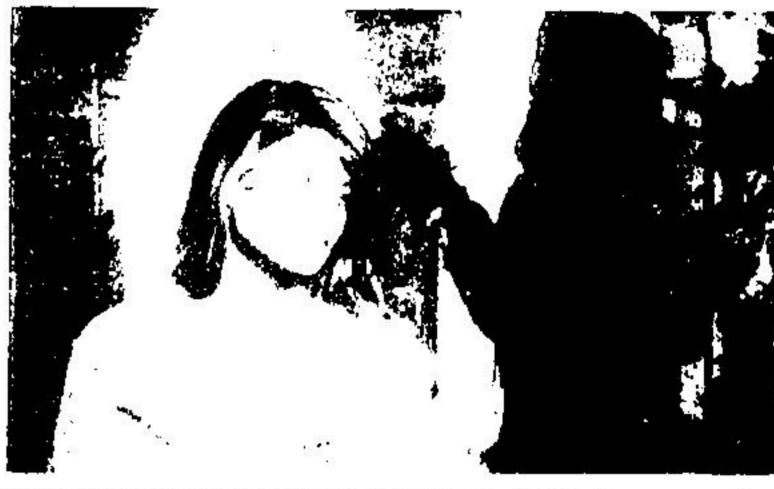
THE SMALL SCREEN tackles the Vietnam War in CBS's "Tour of Duty" starring Stan Foster (foreground) and Kevin Conroy, among others.

rescues citizens in distress makes it predictable weekly derring-do. **

and has to deal with its wonderfully, with bad guys. * 14 cantakerous staff - plus a beautiful mortician! The humor may be too gentle for some. **14

Leg Work (Saturday): Will New hard to take this dramatic show seri- Yorker Claire McCarron ever find a ously. The show has garnered praise steady boyfriend? Will she ever catch from many TV critics, but it remains the hitman out to kill her? This curito be seen if the plot will regress into ous hybrid mixes "Molly Dodd" angst with formula detective fare. McCar-Frank's Place (Saturday): A gentle ron (Margaret Colin) quits her humcharacter comedy from the creator of drum job as an assitant attorney for "WKRP in Cincinnati." A New En- the more glamorous life of a gumgland college professor (Tim Reid) in- shoe? The plot gives equal imporherits a restaurant in New Orleans tance to her arid love life and battles

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LINDA HAMILTON is an attractive district atttorney who becomes emotionally involved with a strange man/beast that lives under the streets of New York City in the new CBS series "Beauty and the Beast."

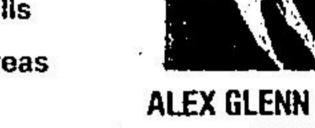


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