

Paramount folds Arsenio Hall Show

'The Newz' and 'Last Call' boosted by opening; Paramount may launch replacement

By Steve Coe

With Paramount's announcement last week that it was pulling the plug on *The Arsenio Hall Show* May 27, the biggest winners at first glance appear to be Columbia's *The Newz* and MCA TV's *Last Call*.

The two syndicated half-hours, targeted primarily to younger viewers, are set to debut this fall and would be the natural heirs to the *Arsenio* audience.

Columbia and MCA TV can't assume, however, that the audience will be there for the taking come September. Sources indicate that Paramount is planning to launch another late-night vehicle to avoid losing the time slot on many stations. According to one source, the studio is in discussions with Jon Stewart, host of MTV's *The Jon Stewart Show*. Paramount and MTV executives were unavailable for comment.

"We think this is natural speculation," says Matt Labov, a spokesman for Stewart, "because Jon would be a natural fit given the demos of the show. But they are just rumors. He has not even been approached."

At the very least, Columbia and MCA may benefit by getting better

time slots for their shows. According to Barry Thurston, president, Columbia TriStar Television Distribution, 19 of the top-50-market stations that have signed to carry *The Newz* are *Arsenio* stations, and approximately a third of the stations clearing *The Newz* have been carrying the talk show.

"I think we anticipated going into the markets with *The Newz* that one of two things was going to happen with *Arsenio*," said Thurston. "Either it would be canceled or it would continue to be downgraded."

Thurston said Paramount and Hall's decision would move some medium- and small-market stations to make late-night programming decisions earlier than usual. "Typically, the medium and smaller markets wait until the summer to make their programming decisions, but since [*Arsenio*] will stop production in May,



Ted Danson, Whoopi Goldberg and Arsenio Hall do the "night thing." Goldberg was among several would-be syndicated talkers unable to unseat Hall during his five-plus year run.

those stations won't wait as long." Following the *Arsenio* announcement, Thurston said, "four or five markets that had been on the fence have cleared *The Newz*."

Shelly Schwab, MCA TV president, commented on the news: "We planned our marketing philosophy with the idea of Hall going on indefinitely," he said, adding that the announcement of Hall's departure would not have a great impact on the selling of *Last Call*. However, Schwab said that MCA had received at least 20 calls from stations asking if *Last Call* was still available. The show already is cleared in 62% of the country, with an expected final clearance of 85%, said Schwab.

The Arsenio Hall Show debuted in syndication on Jan. 3, 1989, and almost immediately established itself as the younger viewer's alternative to *The Tonight Show*. Hall, a former stand-up comedian who had a brief stint as host of Fox's late-night show, became a multimillionaire in the process. "Paramount's proposals for a seventh year and new contract, combined with my love affair for this vehicle and my late-night team, made this the most complicated decision of my life...but everything must change, and it's time," said Hall in a Paramount statement.

Arsenio outlasted a number of competitors that came to the daypart since

Case closed for 'LA Law'

After eight seasons, 173 episodes and 15 Emmy Awards, NBC's *L.A. Law* will air its series finale on Thursday, May 19. NBC will end the show's run with four original episodes beginning April 28. However, sources confirm reports that the network and Twentieth TV are discussing the possibility of producing a two-hour movie for next season that would wrap up the series. In the just-completed season, the show averaged an 11.8 rating and 20 share, up from last season when its numbers hit a series low. After taking over the Thursday time slot from *Hill Street Blues* during the 1986-87 season, the show won its 10 p.m. slot in homes and demos through the 1991-92 season. However, cast defections and changes in executive producers have contributed to a steady viewership drop. The show was created by Steven Bochco and Terry Louise Fisher and before moving to Thursdays originally aired following *Miami Vice* on Friday nights at 10-11 p.m. The show was named outstanding drama for four consecutive years (1987-91), tying the mark set by *Hill Street*. A replacement won't be known until NBC announces its fall schedule next month, but a probable candidate is *Homicide: Life on the Streets*, which had a successful four-week test run in January.

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