

# TELEVISION

by TONY GRUNER

## BBC TO INCREASE ITS OUTPUT OF 'AUDIENCE-CATCHERS'

THE BBC has plans for a large-scale increase in its production of tv serials. By April, 1964, the Corporation will be producing nearly five hours of this type of programme for BBC 1 and BBC 2.

And the man in charge of these projects is Donald Wilson, ex-Rank film production man and former head of scripts for BBC Television. Wilson will have working under him between six and 13 directors.

This week he told me that for BBC 1 there would be the continuation of the twice-weekly "Compact," plus another bi-weekly serial which will run alongside it. Thus there would be a serial show on four out of the five weekdays.

Early on Saturday evening there is the new "Dr. Who" science-fiction series, made up of a number of separate serials, which made its debut last weekend. On Sunday afternoon there would be the costume serials with two new ones planned for the future: "The Count of Monte Cristo" and "Martin Chuzzlewit."

### Late evening

There will be two late evening serials for BBC 2. The first will be a series of "hard-hitting thriller crime and adventure serials" on Saturday night. Writers for these six-part programmes will include Victor Canning, Ken Hughes, Nigel Balchin and Nigel Kneale. On Sunday night there will be 45-minute serials dramatised from great novels, including "Madame Bovary," "The Brothers Karamazov," "Germinal" and "Mary Barton."

Because of the shortage of studio space at Television Centre, the BBC 2 series will be produced from Glasgow on 625 lines. They are unlikely to be seen anywhere else except London and the South of England during the major part of 1964.

Wilson believes that serials are great audience-catchers and are the form used by some of the best story-tellers in the world.

"In television we have proved that they build up viewers' loyalty not only in this country but overseas," he said. "And we have great hopes that many of these programmes will be eagerly bought in the British Commonwealth and in the USA."

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FACED with the need to keep its wholly-owned film production subsidiary, ITC, in business and capable of fulfilling its commitments, ATV will pay up to £12,000 per episode for the one-hour British film series.

At these prices, ITC can assume that the UK fee (plus repeats) coupled with sales to the British Commonwealth should make the tv series capable of being a viable production activity in the near future. And with the new tv tax striking at the direct revenue obtained from advertising, it is a smart financial move for ATV to pay bigger prices to ITC rather than have its profits taxed at source.

This appears to be the background to the

statement issued by Low Grade last week in which the managing director declared his intention of financing at least two British series during 1964. The first is "Danger Man," to star Patrick McGeehan and to be produced by Ralph Smart at MGM's Boreham Wood studios; the second, a further batch of "The Saint" films, with Roger Moore, produced by Bob Baker and Monty Berman at Associated British Elstree studios.

Both projects would consist of 26 one-hour episodes and with budgets, said Grade, around £30,000.

There was one aspect of his statement which caused some comment in the industry. According to Grade: "Faced with the prospect of no more film series, the Independent Television contractors have agreed to pay substantially increased fees for UK rights."

Despite careful enquiries before the week-end, none of the companies I contacted appeared to be aware that they or their colleagues had committed themselves to pay more for British film programmes. Perhaps this is not so important as long as ATV and, say, ABC with their film production links are prepared to pay prices which can stimulate the making of British tv film series.

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ONE of the most successful producers of British films heads a syndicate which is applying for a London week-day ITV franchise. And as he wishes to eschew publicity at the present moment, I will simply state that he is associated in one way or another with at least five of the most experienced feature film makers in the business.

The syndicate is only one of five applications now being considered by the Independent Television Authority for the London Region. In addition to Associated Rediffusion the current holders of the licence, Associated Television and one of the major regional companies have also applied for this, the most lucrative station in the ITV network.

Most of the applicants are not seriously hoping to take over the AR franchise during the next three years; they are staking their claim for ITA 2 which is expected to come into operation towards the beginning of 1967.

By November 18, the closing date for ITA applications, there had been 22 formal applications for stations of which eight were from new groups.

All existing programme companies applied for contracts, four of them for more than one area: two companies applied for a total of five contracts, one for four contracts and one for two contracts.

Thus the final list of applications received by ITA read as follows: London 5, North week-days (existing contractor Granada) 3, London week-ends and Midlands week-days (ATV) 3, North and Midlands week-ends (ABC) 3, Southern England (Southern Television) 3, Central Scotland (Scottish Television) 2, North-East Eng-

land (Tyne and Tees) 2, Wales and the West of England (TWW) 2, East Anglia (Anglia Television) 2, South-West Television (Westward TV) 4, Northern Ireland (Ulster TV) 1, North East Scotland (Grampian) 1, The Borders (Border Television) 1, and Channel Islands (Channel Island TV) 2.

All applicants for contracts will be interviewed by the ITA whose final selection will be announced early in the New Year.

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**News in Brief:** As this column was among the first to indicate the early demise of TW3, it seems only fair to state that its cessation after December is not primarily due to the success of "The Avengers," as stated by ABC's programme controller, Brian Tesler, but simply because the BBC show had become riddled with its own contradictions... The biggest television film success in this country for ITC has not been "Sir Francis Drake," "The Saint," or "Man of the World," but "Sentimental Agent," which has consistently remained in the top twenty programmes since its first transmission, and which last week occupied number 10 position. "Sentimental Agent," starring Carlos Thompson, is produced by Harry Fine, with Ian Stuart Black as story editor. Executive producer is Leslie Harris, head of production for ITC in this country... Some newspapers have denied a story which appeared in this column recently stating that the Beaverbrook Press and the Boulting Brothers were applying for an ITV station. Now that the application has gone in, I can state the area which the syndicate fancies most: Central Scotland, now occupied by the Roy Thomson's Scottish TV Company... In addition to "The Human Jungle," which Julian Wintle and Leskie Parkyn will make in January at Associated British Elstree Studios, Wintle is believed to be involved with another important tv film project which will begin shooting later in 1964.

George Kerr, executive in charge of drama for ABC Television, has three of the best writers for the BBC's "Z Cars" series working for him: Allan Prior, who is writing a new series, "Scandal," which will follow "The Avengers"; John Hopkins, script editor of "Z Cars," who has a three-play commitment for "Armchair Theatre," and Alan Plater, another "Z Cars" contributor, under contract to write for Armchair Theatre... Southern Television is the first programme contractor to transmit a series of half-hour adult educational programmes during peak hour viewing at 7 p.m., starting on January 14. Devised by Professor David Daiches, Dean at the University of Sussex, the series is entitled "A Full Man," and is being shown in co-operation with the Ministry of Education. It will be linked up with more than 30 classes organised by various educational bodies and authorities in Southern England. It will last for twelve weeks and cover poetry, drama and the stage, the novel and non-fiction prose, history, biography, journalism and essays, and will show the diverse uses to which the English language can be applied.

According to TAM, there are 41.42 million people in 12.81 million homes who can watch both the BBC and ITV programmes. There are nearly 3½ million people receiving BBC tv only, making a total of 44.88 million who watch television of any sort. The figures are based on TAM's September, 1963, survey, and the Registrar General's estimates of population. The Channel Islands are excluded.