

# New BBC outlet on US cable

THE BBC once again has an outlet for its programmes on US cable television through The Arts and Entertainment Network (A & E), launched in New York this week by a merger between Hearst/ABC's ARTS cable channel and RCA/Rockefeller Center's presently dark The Entertainment Channel, writes Alex Sutherland.

The new venture has been in negotiation for several months (*Screen International*, July 23) and is now set for a February 1984 launch, when ARTS will

discontinue its normal broadcasting schedule.

The Entertainment Channel folded in March this year (*Screen International*, Feb 26), losing a reported \$34 million for RCA and the Rockefeller Center, and leaving the BBC without an American cable partner.

A & E will carry up to 20 hours of programming per day that will include a great number of BBC-produced programmes to which The Entertainment Channel held

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exclusive rights before it went off air.

It was known that while the BBC's deal with TEC was good financially, its exclusive nature made it very restrictive. Unlike the BBC/Entertainment Channel deal, the new network will only hold the rights to the BBC programmes it selects for one year. BBC material not selected by A & E will be available for general distribution on other US cable outlets.

In a joint statement issued in New York this week by Hearst Cable Communications' president Raymond E Joslin, ABC Video Enterprises' president Herbert A Granath and executive vp, RCA Corporation Herbert S Schlosser, A & E welcomed the involvement of the BBC and pledged its commitment to "quality programming".

The network will inherit from The Entertainment Channel several taped versions of Broadway plays, such as "Sweeney Todd", which won several ACE (Award for Cable Excellence) Awards including Best Actress for a musical programme, carried off

by Angela Lansbury.

The schedule will also include, says A & E, "a host of American and internationally produced dramatic and comedy shows, classic films and performing arts programmes that will appeal to audiences of all ages".

Despite the failure of the BBC's earlier US cable arrangements with The Entertainment Channel, which underlined the difficulties of selling a cultural channel to US cable viewers, BBC Enterprises' md Brian Parkin was this week "extremely optimistic" about the success of A & E, especially, he said, in view of the wide penetration already enjoyed by ARTS in the US.

ARTS currently serves about 12 million homes and is offered as a free basic service. The new A & E network will also be offered as a basic service, but cable operators will be assessed five cents per subscriber, which, it is estimated, will reduce the homes served to about nine million.

**Ron Krueger adds:** It is also understood that the BBC shortly will announce a major pact with Lionheart Television International to distribute its product in the US after the new A & E network rights expire. Lionheart handles the US distribution of programming such as "Fawlty Towers", "The Duchess of Duke Street", "Doctor Who" and many more UK productions.