

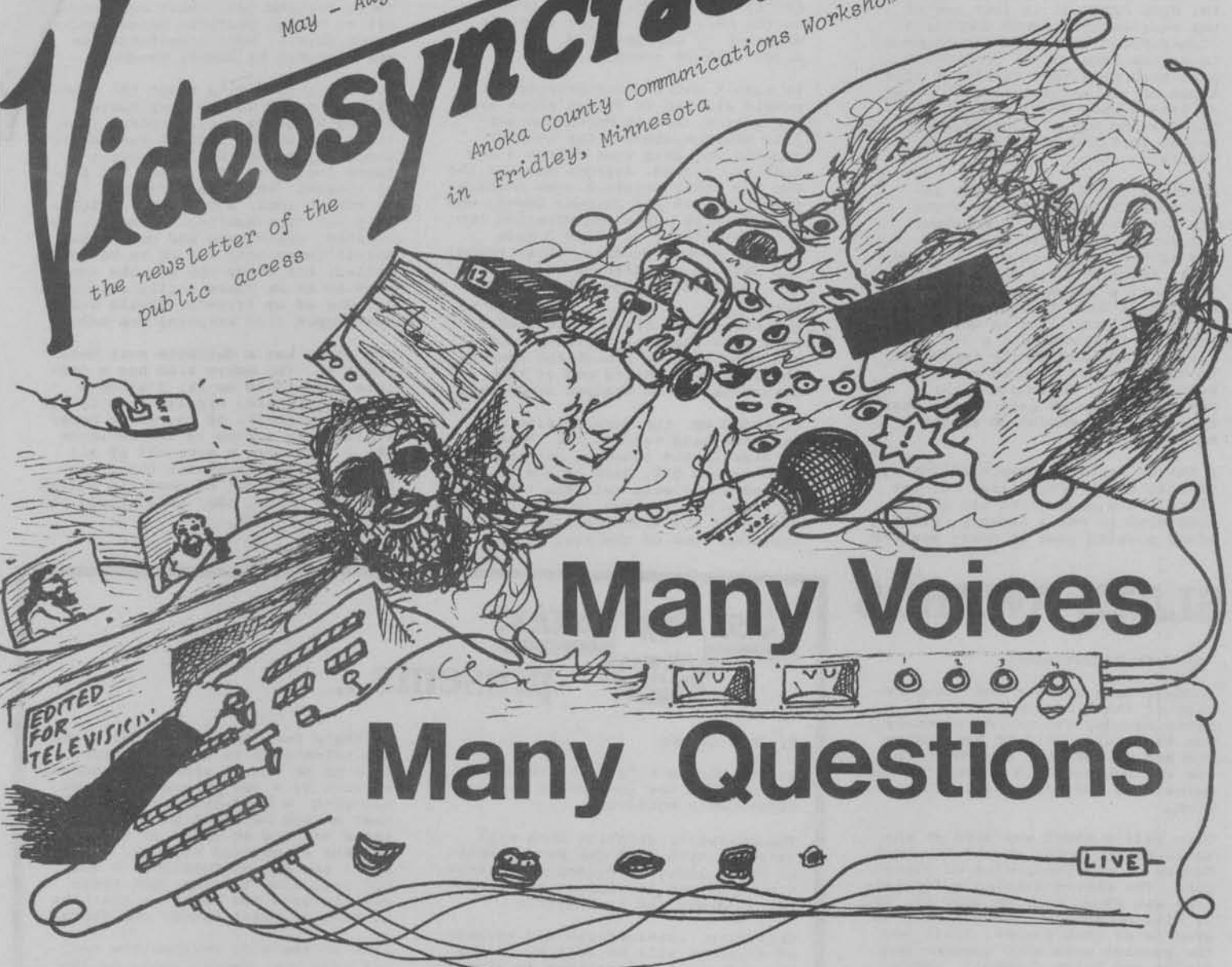
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Videosyncrasies

Anoka County Communications Workshop
in Fridley, Minnesota

the newsletter of the
public access



Many Voices

Many Questions

By Mark Neuman-Scott

During the last couple of years I have been fortunate to work with two brothers from Viet Nam, Vinh and Van. Now, I have been involved with access programming for over twelve years. I gave spoken about the most important facet of access many times, freedom of speech. But Vinh and Van have an appreciation for this element of access that many of us sometimes take for granted as our birthright. Both found it amazing that not only can you come into an access center and use the equipment free and make television programs that the community sees, but no one can tell you what you can say; that there are laws that protect this right.

Content of access programs, at times, is the subject of controversy. Sometimes this controversy

is the subject matter of a program and other times it is the manner in which it is presented. But I don't believe any of us want anyone telling us what we can read, write or view. We shouldn't use the powers of government, the cloth of religion or our own personal beliefs to try and suppress the ideas of others.

But what about responsibility? Responsibility in our presentation, responsibility in consideration of our audience, and responsibility in our choice of subject. As access producers we have to make these decisions. Are we using responsibility in exercising our right to freedom of expression or are we putting forward a test; a challenge? Are we testing the community to see how far we can push them, to see if we can get a reaction; and then wrap ourselves up in our birthright? Should the community be challenged?

What is important? Challenging the community for the sake of challenging our right to freedom of speech or presenting an issue of importance that may offend? Questions, questions, questions! And what about freedom of expression in art?

There are many questions, many decisions we must contemplate as access producers. When do we use self censorship? There are numerous issues that need to be presented. And one of these issues is freedom of speech. Access is one of the best ways to present these issues to the community and involve the community.

But do we test? Do we challenge our communities just for the sake of challenge? The bottom line is of course the on/off switch or change the channel or best-make an access show with a different point of view

IT'S ALL IN "KING MIND"

page two

By Jason Ruhland

In October 1986 we started filming for KING MIND. It is just one of the stories from GROUP COMPANY'S "Creepshow." GROUP COMPANY happens to be the name of the production team that developed CROSSFIRE (for those of you unfamiliar with Jason Ruhland's work, CROSSFIRE was the third Rambo epic; an unofficial sequel to FIRST BLOOD's sequel. -editor's note).

3 out of the 8 crew members involved with GROUP COMPANY wrote the screenplays for "Creepshow." The longest and most expensive was KING MIND (which wasn't named until December.). I thought about the story a lot before I started writing. I didn't want the script to be too long (like in the instance of "Centennial," a 114 page script which was nearly impossible to duplicate in a movie version-budgetwise!). Fortunately, it turned out the 10 page script lead to a very successful 30 minute movie.

A lot of problems developed during this 10 month production. For one thing, this production was to be completed in early January. Problem after problem came up every weekend

when it was time to get the cast and crew together. It's hard to try and get 10 people together every Friday and Saturday. So we resorted to the next step: to get together whenever it was possible, which was about 5 hours a month in all.

It wasn't until about February when people started to forget about the production. And in March the project was abandoned. Due to peer support and help from others a new crew was formed. Besides keeping the the two other original crew members (Kelly Bennet and Jacques Lewis, who incidentally wrote and directed two other stories), we added 3 more people, Rodney Goodsky, Chris Nathe, and Jeff Rose. Although we couldn't get the leading lady, Christy Suttell, back, we were lucky enough to get one of the stars, Matt Rucker, back into the cast. Christy would not come back to finish the movie; therefore the entire end of the script had to be changed completely.

It ended up, the heroine dies getting her head smacked off. Matt also dies in the scene by getting his head ripped off. Much of the de-tailed shots were cut from the final video due to time reasons and the length of the transformation (Jason includes some of the most extror-

dinary special effects in his video ventures. Over the years he's become quite talented at making tortured victims tear their own faces off to reveal horrific beasts under latex skin.). This transformation was designed by Rodney Goodsky.

I'm not complaining about the transformation; I worked many hours making Rodney's hellish ideas into living breathing form. I was really suprised. Rodney had some great ideas for me to work with. The final monster (which was designed by my makeup idol, Rob Bottin, originally for "The Howling.") which I re-created, could have had more mechanical components for me to be satisfied. But those who saw the sneak preview at my house really enjoyed it. One of my friends, Sheila Gibson jumped from watching one scene.

The movie has a definate evil feel about it. The movie also has a certain gory taste to it. I'm not a big fan of gore, myself (He's lying. -editor's note). Of course it never really gets across to the audience why I turn into a werewolf of all things. But I think for those who like a little bit of gore and action in their drink, then this should be their cup of tea.

SLATE AWARDS

By Mark Neuman-Scott

Monday, July 13, was the inauguration of the First Annual Video Slate Awards. The Awards ceremony was the brain child of Ron Jenson and Bob Cooper, the co-producers. Ron and Bob are both members of the Burnsville and Eagan Cable Commission.

This year's event was held at the Earle Brown Center on the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota. The entire evening's festivities was shown live on WCCO II. ETC 12 will be showing the entire program later this summer. Hosts for the evening were WCCO newsman Don Shelby and Ralph Campbell, executive director of the Burnsville and Eagan Commission.

There were twenty-four awards presented to participants from the seven county area. This was a wonderful occasion for access. An evening of celebration.

One of those celebrating was Tim Baty. Tim is a member of the Workshop and recent intern. Tim's program "Ban Vanai - People, Problems, Programs" about the Hmong community in the Twin Cities won the local culture category. You could tell from Tim's reaction that he was very proud and surprised.

The slate awards are a great idea both Ron and Bob are to be congratulated along with all the committee members, judges, supporters and video crew. Next year's plans call for state wide competition. Once again Minnesota and the Twin Cities are in the forefront of access.



By Joel Larson

Martha Mingle's "Body Express" is taking on a new look and a new name: EVERYBODY'S WORKOUT.

The bi-weekly aerobics show will carry on with much the same format of multi-level exercises demonstrating high and low impact aerobics set to music and instruction.

Beginning, intermediate and advanced students will be able to follow the different intensities as always. Now there will be modifications such as a safety first emphasis. This is designed to protect the student with a trick knee, a bad back, or other problems.

The new show will be produced every two weeks. Single programs are to be repeated four times. This will give students at home a chance to zero in on levels of intensities they feel comfortable with.

Another new feature of EVERYBODY'S WORKOUT involves the leadership of the show. The spotlight will burn for everyone at Class Action Fitness (the Fridley-based aerobics team that sponsors the show) where each of the seven certified instructors lead classes of their own. Martha Mingle, who was the only instructor to lead the aerobics on "Body Express," will be taking periodic breaks from the new program, as suggested by the title.

Martha's busy these days exploring her talents as an anchor-person. Soon to be biking around the access network is a new program she's developing, a Good News show. People hear enough bad news on TV, Martha tells us, and so she's on a quest for the cheery and hopeful. We'll still see her on EVERYBODY'S WORKOUT from time to time, but there will be some new faces on the tube to make us sweat Monday and Friday.

Fans of the old, welcome the new and keep your tennis shoes by the set.

VIDEOSYNCRASIES is the quarterly newsletter for the Anoka County Communications Workshop, a non-profit corporation that owns and operates the public access television station ETC-12; Fridley, MN.

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L O W BUDGET HERO!

By Jerome Weeks
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"Basically, anything you can do in film or video for 15 bucks I'm for," says Walter Williams, creator of Mr. Bill, everybody's favorite victimized toy from the old "Saturday Night Live" shows. "My idea of state-of-the-art was Super-8 and Play-Do."

Williams is explaining why he became involved with Visions of U.S., the touring compilation of winning tapes from the American Film Institute's home video contest sponsored by Sony (as seen on ETC-12; watch our schedule for details - editor's note). In addition to his belief in supporting low-budget film and videomakin, Williams says, "I like to encourage people to use all those discarded cameras their parents bought them for Christmas."

As for how he became involved with judging and hosting the competition, Williams says, "Oh, I was very active. I was sitting on the edge of my couch, nodding off watching cable TV, when the phone rang. And the American Film Institute wanted to know if I'd judge these home videotapes with Francis Ford Coppola and Jim Henson - you know, all these unknowns? I said sure. And it was a lot of fun."

Williams' own work with Mr. Bill provides hope for home videomakers: "The Mr. Bill Show" actually began as a home movie Williams sent to Saturday Night Live, after the show requested submissions from viewers in 1976. "I was basically the kid from New Orleans who got the break," he recalls. It also provides hope for home video makers who never get anything right. When "The Mr. Bill Show" became a regular feature on SNL, Williams quit his accounting job, the budgets went up from \$20 to \$5,000 and the characters of Mr. Bill, Spot and Sluggo became national Play-Doh personalities. Yet the show never changed its hopelessly infantile production values.

"People tell me how much they like the old, crude look to the shows," says Williams, "but what they didn't know was that I was always struggling to do the best I could. I mean, it wasn't like I was Coppola or Warhol trying to get that look. That's all I knew." In fact, the original idea behind Mr. Bill's inept-looking antics was that professional animation had been going downhill for so long, becoming so cheap-looking, "that eventually you'd see these hand-drawn onscreen, moving the characters around, because they just didn't care anymore."



Mr. Bill is our buddy. Here he is with his dog, Spot, anxiously anticipating being invited for dinner. He, of course, hasn't foreseen his role as the main course.

Thus the birth of Mr. Bill, an animated character so minimalist-simpl, his universe is like something out of a Samuel Beckett play: the eternally tortured toy meets an implacable fate. Mr. Bill continually enters some innocuous activity generally at the prodding of the god-like "Mr. Hands," only to find - "Ooooh Noooooo!" - that his premonitions of disaster were absolutely right: the projector cuts off his arm, Sluggo makes mud pies out of him, the blender turns him into a Mr. Bill milkshake. The "Mr. Bill Show" is not only a wicked parody of amateurish TV animation, it is an endearing send-up of home movies, an obsessive repetition of our own nervous innocence being lost. It is also a little sick.

"Yes," says Williams agreeably, "Gumby (a similar animated figure from the fifties) was probably an influence on my work. So were the Kennedy assassinations."

Parody of television's brain-damaged naivete is a major technique of Williams and of many of the winning tapes in the Visions of U.S. contest. Williams explains from personal experience: "Parody gives beginning filmmakers a useful head-start. Rather than starting from scratch with some whole new thing, you've got this already-established format to mock." To set the tone for the touring show, Williams will introduce various tapes, after showing some of his own Mr. Bill work - "for those people who weren't able to stay up late."

As for Mr. Bill, the show has recently moved to NIGHT FLIGHT on the USA network - "and he's hot again"

as an established TV personality, hosting programs like "Cooking with Mr. Bill" and "Mr. Bill's Heavy Metal Report." Nowadays, Williams notes, he is in a position to deal with reputable companies to help him Market the long-suffering toy.

In its promotion of Mr. Bill for NIGHT FLIGHT, the USA Network recently mailed out Mr. Bill "credit cards" to reporters - cards that smilingly ask the storeowner, over Mr. Bill's wimpy signature, to "please give the bearer of this card anything they want, and I promise I'll pay you back later." When informed that presenting this card only gets one - in typical Mr. Bill fashion - laughed at and physically ejected from stores, Williams replies, "Oh good. Glad to hear the cards are working."

Is there nothing, then, that Williams does that isn't about some sort of victimization? Well, he notes, he has worked with the rock group, the dBs, on music videos, and he also hopes to make a film about "a small town getting a toxic waste dump."

And fighting back?

"Well, no, they get excited and start selling T-shirts."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article originally appeared in the Houston Post, March 30, 1985. Since then Mr. Bill has successfully made the leap into the commercial world only to get steam rolled by a can of Pringles. Let this be a warning to those of you with high hopes.

The Politics of Access

By Audrey D. Johnson

This year, the ACCW initiated a new series of programs designed to keep the viewers of Channel 12 more in touch with the local and state political process. During the Telethon, the pilot program was launched successfully and the shows have been going strong ever since.

On March 24th, the state legislators representing Fridley in the Capitol in St. Paul appeared live in a one hour cablecast where they discussed events, bills and newly enacted laws. Viewers were able to call in questions to their legislators and talk directly with Senator

Don Frank, Representative Wayne Simoneau and Representative Alice Johnson. April marked the mid-point in the 1987 legislative session. Several bills were being hotly contested at that time. Johnson, Simoneau and Frank helped to explain what these bills meant to the residents of Fridley. The '87 session ended in mid-May. On June 11, the three again appeared live on ETC-12 to talk about the entire session and to give a projection of the '88 session to come.

NOTABLE NOTES

Congratulations to Dayton, Ohio; they picked up the 1987 Community Communications Award at the NFLCP convention in Chicago this July. So Channel 12 is no longer the best in the universe. Having won the award last year, we thought it only fair to let someone else pick it up this year.

In other congratulatory notes: Tim Baty won the local culture category of the Video Slate Awards for his video "Ban Vanai - People, Problems, Programs." Tim was one of our Anoka-Ramsey interns this fall. Check the Channel 12 schedule for details; we'll be showing his award-winning piece a lot this month.

The NFLCP Hometown Video festival awarded Larry Hutchinson and Mark Neuman-Scott for the "eXXtra" series and Mark also picked up a finalist selection for his "Talk Is Cheap" show. Nice work, everyone.

Special thanks to our major Telethon contributor: Burlington Northern. Our 13th annual Telethon is coming up in the Spring of '88. That should

be just about the time the would-be presidents start picking up speed (god help us.).

For future and near-future reference: the 4th Annual Visions of U.S. Video Contest is calling for entries. Deadline: December 31st, 1987. The 10th Tokyo Video Festival deadline is September 10, 1987. We're talking possible bucks here(\$\$\$). Contact the ACCW office for details.

There will be a public hearing, tentatively scheduled for August 24th, on the cable services in Fridley. The franchise negotiations have not yet been worked out with NORTEL, our newest landlord, even though they've been in town for over a year now. If you care at all for community programming in our fair city, we'll see your smiling face at city hall. All we've ever really had is your support and anyway, it's all we really need.

Sometime in October/November there will be another big meeting on cable. Stay tuned for details.

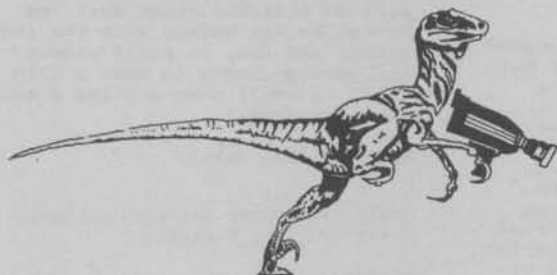
Also watch for ex-pres.: Gerald Ford on ETC-12. He's bopping through town this month and we're working with the city Channel 13 for a joint interview venture. We're always pulling for you. Aren't you glad you live in Fridley?

In addition to the State Legislators, Channel 12 hosted the first in an ongoing series with the Mayor and City Council Members. Again, viewers were able to call in with their questions about the city. From this pilot program, 2 shows have emerged. "City Council Review" airs on Tuesday evenings, 7-8pm, following the second monthly City Council Meeting. Produced by access coordinators, Audrey Johnson or Joel Larson, and hosted by Mark Neuman-Scott, this show features 3 or more members of the City Council and viewers are urged to call in and talk with their local officials. On the Tuesdays following the first monthly City Council Meeting, "Call on the Council" appears from 7-7:30 pm. This program is produced by Municipal Channel 13 in the capable hands of Angela Forrest-Brown and is cablecast from Channel 3's studio.

Both programs rely on volunteers to crew for the effort to be successful. Many Channel 12 members have helped and without their assistance where would we be? If you would like to crew for any of these shows call the Workshop at 571-9144 and let us know. The Workshop will be continuing these programs indefinitely throughout the fall. If you have a question for your political representatives, tune in, and find out what is happening in your state and local governments.

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