

# MCA buys into Brillstein-Grey

Pays \$90 million for half interest in producer

By Cynthia Littleton

**M**CA finalized a deal last week to purchase half of Brillstein-Grey Entertainment for an estimated \$90 million (BROADCASTING & CABLE, March 11).

BGE is a leading producer of network fare, with seven new and returning series headed for prime time slots this fall. MCA's investment in the movie and TV production company comes at a time when the studio's new owner, beverage giant Seagram Co., has said it is determined to make MCA a major player in the worldwide TV market.

"This strategic relationship presents a tremendous growth opportunity for our television and motion picture businesses," says Ron Meyer, MCA's president.

BGE's TV credits have included *Alf*, *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd* and *The Larry Sanders Show*. Its 1996-97 pickups include NBC's *Just Shoot Me*, ABC's *It's Good to Be King* and the WB Network's *The Steve Harvey Show*.

MCA's purchase does not affect Brillstein-Grey's production venture with ABC or its talent management unit, but BGE Chairman Brad Grey has signed a long-term pact with the studio. After turning over management duties to Grey last October, BGE co-founder Bernie Brillstein sold his interests in BGE and related Brillstein-Grey ventures to Grey.

Those ventures include Brillstein-Grey Communications, a production company the partners formed in 1994 with Capital Cities/ABC. To date, BGC has produced NBC's *NewsRadio*, ABC's *The Naked Truth* and *The Jeff*

*Foxworthy Show*, which will move from ABC to NBC in the fall. On the management side, Brillstein-Grey Enterprises represents such talents as actor Brad Pitt and producer Lorne Michaels.

In spite of its partnerships with MCA and ABC, off-network distribution rights to much of Brillstein-Grey's TV product is still up for grabs. Brillstein-Grey's prior distribution deal with Columbia TriStar Television Dis-

tribution, covering *NewsRadio* and *The Larry Sanders Show*, expired in March. Nonetheless, MCA's equity stake in BGE means it will share in any back-end profits from BGE shows.

Brillstein-Grey's alliance with MCA creates "a potent combination for the growth" of BGE, particularly in the feature film area, Grey says. BGE's latest theatrical, the Jim Carrey comedy "The Cable Guy," is due out next month. ■

## 'Walker,' 'Sister, Sister' head for off-net runs

Family comedy, rising tide for off-net dramas could put distributors in driver's seat

By Cynthia Littleton

**T**he off-network market heated up last week as programmers took a look at a fresh family sitcom and a Texas Ranger with a black belt.

Paramount Domestic Television began pitching broadcasters on the WB Network's *Sister, Sister*, while Columbia TriStar Television Distribution tested the waters for a dual cable/broadcast off-network launch of *Walker, Texas Ranger*.

In both cases, industry observers say, the laws of supply and demand are working in the distributor's favor.

*Sister, Sister* may be one of the last



Paramount is pitching 'Sister, Sister'

off-network family comedies available to broadcasters for some time as the networks lean toward more adult fare in the 8 p.m. hour.

The urban-oriented comedy, revolving around the antics of teenage twins played by Tia and Tamera Mowrey, moved around ABC's schedule between April 1994 and June 1995 before settling down at WB last fall. *Sister, Sister* averaged a 3.0 Nielsen household rating and 5 share this season.

Paramount officials declined comment, but station sources say the distributor is offering 97 episodes of the family comedy on a cash-plus-barter basis for a 3 1/4-year license term beginning in fall 1998. Although double runs weren't mentioned in last week's pitch to major station-group buyers, Paramount probably will give stations the option of buying a sixth run for half of the cash license fee.

Paramount is expected to seek hefty license fees for the sitcom in top mar-



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