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'Showtime' not bad, but could be better

Showtime, a premium cable TV network, has rolled out "Showtime Coast to Coast," a show that's mostly good, but still loaded with potential.

The magazine-style show is built around music and comedy and is held together by composer/keyboardist Herbie Hancock.

In the first 90-minute show, Hancock was acceptable, most of the music was great and the comedy was mostly blue.

Let's get what's wrong out of the way first.

Comedians Greg Travis and Robert Schimmel did what we have to assume is part of their nightclub routines. Their bits were funny and imaginative, but I found myself wondering whether it was necessary to have all the R-rated language.

I suspect that a lot of people who otherwise would have found the program acceptable will be turned off by one bit about the male sex organ and all the F-words.

A major disappointment was the signature finale "super-session" with Joni Mitchell, Hancock, Bobby McFerrin, David Sanborn and Wayne Shorter. It could have been magic, but it just didn't click and it continued far too long.

A minor disappointment was the editing on some of the material from the "New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival." I know the lyrics of "Crying in the Chapel" are no great shakes, but it was great seeing the Dixiecup singing and the audience responding. And it was cut too soon for my taste.

On the plus side, though, were plenty of reasons to watch and to hope it will get better as "Showtime Coast to Coast" continues on its occasional schedule.

K.D. Lang was highly entertaining. I'm not certain precisely how you mix new wave and country music, but she does and it works. Lang is an engaging stylist from Canada who calls her music "cow punk."

There was a recording session segment with the Manhattan Transfer, which is blending its music with Brazilian sounds. The result is some marvelous, mellow and melodic jazz.

But the highlight for me was the festival from New Orleans. Not, mind you, that I cared much for all the little cut-ins with people telling us about the festival's importance. The same information could have been summed up by Hancock, who has as much believability on the subject of music as most anyone.

Fewer of those cut-ins and we would have heard more of the music and sampled more of the scene.

The aforementioned Dixiecup, Ernie K. Doe ("Mother-in-law") and the Neville Brothers were featured. The Neville Brothers, who always close the New Orleans show, were simply great. Showtime managed to capture a lot of the energy of the live performance.

Now, if the people who put together "Showtime Coast to Coast" had just had the good sense to make that segment last, and end the show on a real high, Hancock's closing monologue wouldn't have sounded so much like Geraldo Rivera telling us there wasn't anything in Al Capone's vault.

Rivera's specials have improved since that nadir, and "Showtime Coast to Coast" was never anywhere near that low. It needs only a bit of fine-tuning to become a very successful show.

"Showtime Coast to Coast" is on at 10 p.m. today, 11 p.m. Friday and Sept. 16 and 20.

18'S NEW DAYS

Sometimes the best of intentions don't work out very well. For example, the story about Channel 18's new daytime schedule, which I thoughtfully put on my desk and buried under the fall preview material.

New to the Channel 18 lineup are a morning repeat of the previous evening's "Nightly Business Report," at 7:30 a.m., and a 15-minute "Yoga with Priscilla Patrick," which replaces "Hatha Yoga." The new yoga program is broadcast at 7 a.m.

The morning adjustments were necessary because of the demise of "Farm Day" a few months back. Program director Jack Glasstetter said he was particularly pleased to air repeats of "Nightly Business Report," because its first showing, at 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, is inconvenient for some viewers.

Next Monday "Reading Rainbow" will be replaced by "Square One TV," a top-flight children's math program, in the 4:30 p.m. time slot.

The complete Channel 18 daytime lineup is available each Sunday in The Bee's TV Week magazine.

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