An original script by Peabody Award-winner Jane Wagner incorporates the works of noted video artists into a new dramatic format. Page 7

Over the past several months, the Television Laboratory has had a particularly active and exciting period. In order to share this with our readers, we have expanded our regular Vision News format into this special edition. Vision News this month becomes almost a scrapbook of clippings, reprints and reviews of one of our most productive periods to date. And looking ahead to what we hope will be an even brighter future, we've included, as usual, a look at some of our upcoming projects.—ed.

The innovative American choreographer explores the television medium and new approaches to dance on television. Page 7

'Chinatown,' 'Giving Birth,' and 'The Police Tapes' were produced at the Lab by several of the country's most outstanding independent video documentarians. Page 2
New Lab Documentaries Get Huge Response

Three innovative and diverse documentary programs produced at the Television Laboratory have generated tremendous viewer response. "Chinatown" took the top honors, all aired within the space of one month, were produced at the Lab by Global Village and have been enormously well-received. The program will be re-broadcast Tuesday night, December 17th, on over 30 PBS stations nationwide. The "Police Tapes" and "Away Any Glamour" will be simultaneously broadcast on PBS at 9:00 p.m., EST.

"Chinatown" was a recent recipient of the prestigous Christopher Award and "Away Any Glamour" has been nominated for the Emmy.

"The Police Tapes" is the latest production of New York's Downtown Community Television, a community television program organized in 1973, and broadcasts on WNET/13, the PBS station in New York City. This program is an extension of the New York City Police Department's "Police Tapes," which has been in production for over 30 years. It was made over three months-in April, May and June 1976-by veteran New York City policemen and their families. The "Police Tapes" were made with a minimum of police involvement, and were sold to the network for a minimum of $100,000, or $1,000 a minute. For the network, the cost of producing the program is $90,000, or approximately $500 a minute.

"Away Any Glamour" is a New York City-based production that has been in production for over three months. The program is being broadcast on PBS stations nationwide on Tuesday, December 17th, at 9:00 p.m., EST.

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New Lab Documentaries Continued

A Fierce Documentary

By James Wolcott

Sirens and flames, a knife-slash, a corpse, a psychotic criminal exploding in a Morale-Slade combustion, screams, and the slamming of jailhouse doors. The opening moments of The Police Tapes (Channel 13: January 3) show a society suffering a nervous breakdown. The Police Tapes—originally, and more accurately titled High Crime—is a documentary videotaped by Alan and Susan Raymond in the 4th police precinct of the South Bronx in the summer of 1975, when it looked as if the entire crime-plagued sector would be reduced to blackened rubble. The last shot is of buildings gutted by fire, rising from the ground like rotten teeth. In the South Bronx, The Fire Next Time has arrived with a vengeance.

During the documentary, Chief Tony Bouza remarks that one of the seamy pleasures of police work is that "you're in on every secret of society." The police here have the hagbard, battle-worn, stonily companionable faces of Vietnam veterans—if men who have seen it all. Riding with the police in their nightly rounds, the Raymonds vividly bring back the secrets that have robbed those faces of youthful animation, making it clear that every summer for these men is a war in itself. A gang member is assaulted by a rival gang, as if carved on his back; a 48-year-old woman, leaning indolently upon a cane, is arrested for hitting her daughter square in the face with an ax ("Her face was split right down the middle"); a fireman is shot in the head; a cop is shot in the stomach, and the assailant, his body decorates with a satan's-head tattoo, awaits his fate with the calm of someone killing time in a women's prison block. Though there is violence in The Police Tapes as intense as a Scorsese rampage, the presence of cameras clearly exacerbates an already crazed-with-terror and tight-sensitive camerawork that allowed them to capture the essence of police life at night, from April to June of 1975, when crime rates were at their highest.

At its best, The Police Tapes has a brutal, gritty phosphorescent reality. It reminds one, not only of Wiseman's Welfare and Law and Order, but of Mean Streets and Las Olas. Indeed, it's a two-fisted, head-on attack on all the genre cliches. When the camera turns to a street scene (when the police are battering down a door), the presence of cameras clearly exacerbates an already crazed-with-tension confrontation. There are also moments when the Raymonds (whose most famous previous work was on An American Family) come perilously close to the slick-the-terms into-the-victim's-wound technique of documentation. Those misgivings aside, The Police Tapes is a work of daring and intelligence.

But will it do any good? Near the end, Chief Bouza acknowledges the sorrowful irony that if he's good at his job, the plight may actually worsen—that by keeping cool, he's deflecting attention from the ravenous needs of the South Bronx. I think the situation may even be more grievous than that. At one point, a policeman says that he's protecting society "from the animals out there," and that's what the Dirty Harrys and Starsky-and-Hutchers and Popeye Doyle stand for, too: The belief that without them, we'd all be cannibalizing each other. What's horrifying about The Police Tapes is that there is such blood-hungry hopelessness in the air that a lot of people who don't know the blaring tenements and think to themselves "Let it burn."
The viewing days wretched with holly

By John Cashman

In case you didn’t know, there are eight viewing days until Christmas. That means that television in on the last leg of its month-long reminder that Christmas wouldn’t be Christmas without buying a lot of things you wouldn’t ordinarily buy if it weren’t Christmas.

It also is a time when television goes heavily into the brotherhood of man, dewy-eyed remembrances, in which the writer and producer try to remind us of our common humanity as we prepare to exchange ouraniel families and friends. It is a time when the networks remind us of the beauty of those miraculous moments that are captured in the documentary film “Giving Birth” on Channel 28.

In the documentary, a couple who have chosen a different delivery method than the others. Kay and Dave are doing a delivery at home with local anesthesia, while Mark and Margaret are delivering their baby by the Lamaze method. Still others are choosing a traditional hospital birth with local anesthesia. Eleanor is delivering her baby at the hospital, and the heated debate outside the delivery room is intense.

The documentary focuses on four couples and the different methods of childbirth they choose. These include a standard hospital delivery, a Caesarean section, and a midwife-assisted delivery.

The documentary shows the beauty and the horror of giving birth, and it raises important questions about the role of medication during childbirth. It is a powerful and emotional film that will leave a lasting impression on its viewers.

TODAY

Meanwhile, over at the medium alternative, WNET in New York, is a documentary that focuses on the Lamaze method. This documentary, “Giving Birth,” is a solid piece of work that will leave a lasting impression on its viewers.

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The Village Voice

'TEL EVISION

‘Giving Birth’: Graphic video documentation on a very different childbearing experience, ranging from traditional hospital delivery to natural childbirth. Interviews with Frederick Leboyer (Birth Without Violence) and Margaret Mead. (Channel 13, December 13, 8:30 p.m.)

The Village Voice
Dear Julie and John,

"Hung Birth" was warm, sensitive, intelligent, and beautiful. A project worth doing and done very well.

[Nancy Thurner's signature]

Bob and I watched "Hung Birth" together tonight. We both laughed, cried, hoped and, maybe even cried a little. It was a lovely, warm, caring and life affirmative. Thanks for making it and doing it so well.

[Nancy Thurner's signature]

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22 December 1976

Ms. Julie Gustafson
GLOBAL VILLAGE
454 Broome St.
New York City, New York 10012

Dear Ms. Gustafson:

Great film!!! Could we borrow a copy to study with our research group?

Sincerely,

[Marshall H. Klaus's signature]

Marshall H. Klaus, M.D.
Professor of Pediatrics
Inside 'Chinatown'—A Startling Documentary

Last year, 20,000 Chinese immigrants arrived in New York from Vietnam and Hong Kong. Few spoke any English, but all knew one word: Chinatown.

"Tourism is the major industry, but beneath the veneer of paper dragons and firework-filled celebrations is a people struggling to make a living against the language and cultural barriers of the city around them. Poverty is everywhere. The dilapidated housing is dotted along the streets. The tuberculosis and diabetes rate is three times the national average.

"Chinatown," a 90-minute videotape documentary, is a revealing, often startling look at New York's Chinese community. It will be shown locally Dec. 10, WETA-26, 9 p.m. Produced by a group of young video documentarians living in Chinatown, they have gained access to areas and aspects rarely seen on television."

"Chinatown" examines many aspects of life in this community: the plight of illegal aliens; the elderly living in crowded and narrow quarters with their children and grandchildren; the Chinese Family Association, which loans money at interest; the Alpert Group; the "exorbitant prices"; Chinese heroin doctors; Chinese opera; changing Chinatown attitudes toward Communist China; even the New Jersey Chinese truck farmers who supply the exotic vegetables for Chinatown's stores and restaurants.

The Washington Star

China Daily News
Lily Tomlin to Star in upcoming Lab Co-Production

Actress and comedienne Lily Tomlin will star in the forthcoming 90-minute PBS special tentatively titled Collisions, co-produced by David Loxton of the Television Laboratory and Fred Barzyk of WGBH in Boston.

Collisions is an original screenplay written by Peabody Award-winning writer Jane Wagner, and stars Gilda Radner and Danny Ackroyd of NBC's Saturday Night Live, Irwin Corey and Charles White.

The program, shot in the studios of WGBH and in Ms. Tomlin's hometown of Paducah, Kentucky, experiments with the standard dramatic narrative format by incorporating various short original pieces by video artists into the story line. Ron Hays, Ed Emshwiller, Peter Campus, William Wegman, Stan Vanderbeek and choreographer Louis Falco are among those artists who contributed to the program.

In her original script, writer Wagner imagines that the Earth is on a collision course with an unseen planet, Zlymus, which sends a representative to Earth, (Lily), in the guise of a television newscaster. Lily's job is to determine whether or not the Earth is worth saving from inevitable destruction. From her unique vantage point, Lily is able to give a visitor's-eye view of the human condition on everything from birth and death to pop culture and politics.

Collisions is expected to air over PBS in the spring. Funds were provided primarily by the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Emshwiller, Noyes, and Other Artists in Final Post Production.

The work of six to eight well-known video makers will become the basis for a new and innovative series produced by the Television Laboratory. Original works by Ed Emshwiller, Eli Noyes, Jr., Arthur Ginsberg, Skip Sweeney and others are nearing completion after nearly a year of research, development, and production.

The result has been the creation of a series of dance sequences each specifically designed by her to explore particular dance/television formats: the high technology at the Lab's Studio 46, TV studio performance before a live audience at WNET/13's Studio 55, location shooting with WNET mini-cam crews, and hand-held verite-documentary shooting with black-and-white portapaks.

Many of these sequences were then reprocessed through WNET's complex post-production facility. From this emerged 20 minutes of original dance for television featuring Twyla Tharp herself and four leading dancers from her company - Shelley Washington, Tom Raw, Jennifer Way, and Christine Uchida. In addition, the entire creative process was recorded on half-inch black-and-white tape by video documentarian Joel Gold. Over 60 hours of material was obtained and this material, under the supervision of editor Aviva Slesin, is now being woven in and around the dance pieces.

The result, a 60-minute program for national public television broadcast, is a fascinating look at the trials and tribulations of one of America's most innovative artists at work.

Network execs from another planet: Danny Ackroyd, Charles White, Gilda Radner, and Irwin Corey.

New Work by Twyla Tharp Nearing Completion

Twyla Tharp, who has been called the most important American choreographer at work today, was invited by the Lab to work within the television medium. As a result of that invitation, Ms. Tharp, in collaboration with director Don Milscher, has spent between four and five months during the past year both familiarizing herself with and utilizing television's complex visual vocabulary.

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San Francisco-based videomaker Skip Sweeney has completed My Father Sells Studebakers, a mix of fiction and non-fiction elements which form an exploration of the artist's often painful relationship with his father, now deceased. Sweeney composed the piece on locations in San Francisco and New York.

Major funding for the series was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.
Jean Shepherd writes first teleplay for WGBH Venture

Jean Shepherd, famed author and radio personality, collaborated with the TV Lab and the New Television Workshop at WGBH in Boston on the production of his first teleplay, Phantom of the Open Hearth.


Jean Shepherd’s novel, A Christmas Story, has been adapted into a teleplay and is scheduled to air on PBS as part of the Phantom of the Open Hearth series on December 23rd.

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Shepherd’s novel, A Christmas Story, has been adapted into a teleplay and is scheduled to air on PBS as part of the Phantom of the Open Heart...
Jean Shepherd Evokes the ’30s

By CECIL SMITH

Times Television Critic

One criticism that can justifiably be aimed at Vikens and at other enterprises introducing new genres is that the plays are such downers. Young writers always seem to be viewing with alarm; their outlook is jaundiced and jaundiced they've almost no sense of humor.

Visions tonight (Channel 26 at 9) comes up with a decided exception to this rule in "Phantom of the Open Hearth," a fine TV play by the veteran humorist Jean Shepherd, adapted from his book "Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories and Other Disasters."

It's on film, directed by Fred Barry and David Loxton, featuring Family's James Broderick beading an absolutely perfect cast of farceurs, most notably David Elliott and the young Jean Shepherd. The old Jean Shepherd plays himself rolling down a contemporary highway, remembering the past in one of those mid-20th century two-lane towns where you lock the back window when you pass the phantom of the hearth staring out at you in the fiery rearview.

Specifically, he remembers his junior prom and his panting pursuit of the school beauty Sophie (Lori Pittay) while being pursued by Wanda Hickey (Robertetta Wallach), a girl whose glasses were as thick as the bottoms of Coke bottles and who was a shark at bat. Not even the Alaskan salmon swimming upstream to mate, baffling elements and bees and fishermen, was as complex and endangered sex life as a high school junior, according to Shepherd.

Or had. This is a Valentine to the past—to America in the late 30s... when father (Benedict) won a contest from the Nehi pop company and his prize was a lamp in the shape of a woman's shapely leg (the Nehi trademark) which he hastily put in the front window for all to see and which his wife (Barbara Bolten) hated on sight. She was, in turn, an addict of Dinh Night at the movies, even though she couldn't be gross.

There's one priceless sequence when one of Pop's enemies, another nest-mill guilder, buys a do-it-yourself five-room Cape Cod house from Sears-Roebuck which arrives in two box cars, each part coded for construction, and a group of his beer-swilling friends help him unload it. The film is a silly, dull, and absurdly delightful. Moreover, for nostalgia buffs, it precisely evokes the past, even to the starlet who overhears the lyrics to "Star Dust."

Jean Shepherd

Continued

The Televison Laboratory

New York State Council on the Arts


tory at WNET/13, a division of The

The Television Laboratory News

is published by The Television Laboratory at WNET/13, a division of The Educational Communications Corporation, at the corporate address, 356 West 58th Street, New York, New York 10019. Telephone 212-262-4248.

Editor/Writer

Diane English

Design

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The Television Laboratory at WNET/13 is supported by grants from The Rockefeller Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts, with special project support from The National Endowment for the Arts.

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John J. Godfrey

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New NYSCA Artists-in-Residence to Be Announced

For the fourth time in a row, the Television Laboratory at WNET/13 has received a major grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to support New York City artists-in-residence. The grant, which totals $48,000, will be divided among six to eight video and film makers to be chosen shortly by a special panel.

New works will cover a broad range including both video art and non-fiction television pieces.

In the past, the New York City artists-in-residence program has proven to be a valuable source of public television programming.

"It's quintessential Shepherd, captured on film," says Fred Barry, director of the project. "Phantom of the Open Hearth," which airs on Mayrhauser (Channel 28 at 9), comes up with a de-\n
Lab Program

Nominated for Local New York Emmy

The Electronic Couch, a half-hour edition of the Lab's VTR second season, was nominated for a local New York City Emmy award. The program, produced by Philip Perlman, explored the use of video tape equipment in psychotherapy. Mr. Perlman and his Associate Producer Ruth Bonomo, illustrated the various uses of video in therapy by becoming the temporary "patients" of the therapists who participated in the program. Funds were provided by the New York State Council on the Arts.

For information on the Laboratory's current programs, write: The Television Laboratory at WNET/13, 130 West 58th Street, New York City, N.Y. 10019.