

## TOPS ON TV

'Southern Cross,' all-electronic production of drama by Seattle playwright, 9 tonight, Channel 8.

# Behind the Mike Drama viewers offered Seattleite's production

Ask people what they would like to see more of on television, and many are likely to say they want drama.

OK, let's see how many watch a fine one-hour presentation on KGW(8) at 9 p.m. Tuesday — the time is approximate depending on how long it takes the Dodgers to beat the Astros — which is not only drama, but regional drama.

"Southern Cross" is a well-played story of two adults who fear they are missing out on life, and a 16-year-old girl who desperately dreams of a life with more meaning and adventure.

It is an original drama, the work of Randy Paris of Seattle, and was first presented on KING in Seattle.

Words dominate the action because the play was staged entirely in a sound studio, but good camerawork overcomes the limited visual interest. Add the dialogue is fast-paced and sharp.

"Mama" runs a tomato stand in a dying if not dead market area, and operates her business according to precepts established by her late husband, who "could sell with both hands." One rule is that the best tomatoes are hidden under the aging ones. Mama won't challenge that rule even though there are almost no customers and no sales.

Her daughter, Lucy, keeps her company, but sees clearly that the fruit stand continues only because Mama's stubbornness defies reality. The third character is Frank, who runs a neighboring stand, but suddenly comes into a little money. That money threatens to change all three lives, even though Mama doesn't want to let go of her husband's old dreams.

"Southern Cross" — the title refers to the constellation — is intelligent but not particularly heavy drama, and KGW's sister station did well by the playwright. The result is an engaging hour of television.



Peter Farrell

**Special** — "Southern Cross," an electronic production of original drama by Seattle playwright Randy Paris. A story about a woman who sells tomatoes in a rundown public market, her daughter Lucy who dreams of leaving town, and Frank, the market fruit peddler.

# KING Makes Another Nice Dramatic Try

Normally local TV stations just don't pump a lot of money and energy into producing original dramatic programs. They leave that to networks and PBS.

Because it's "different," KING-TV has earned the reputation of the best commercial public TV station in these parts, even among PBS people.

Under the urging of former program director Bob Guy, KING has produced an impressive number of dramas, the most recent being "Galileo" in which Guy starred.

Tonight KING presents two dramatic shows starting with "Song for Louisa" at 8, followed by a one-hour play titled "Southern Cross" at 8:30.

"Louisa" features Guy, Bill Schustik as James F. MacDonald who bought and preserved the beauty of Petiscoe Louisa Island in British Columbia, and former

## SUSAN PAYNTER



Seattle Indian producer Randy Donahut as a Salish Indian named Skatoh.

"Southern Cross" stars well-known local actress Marjorie Nelson and Italian and Empty Space actress Ursula Oswald in a truth-versus-fiction story set in a Mark Tobey-like public market.

In a way, the programs mark the end of an era at KING, but not the finale of original dramas produced by

KING, according to executive producer Don LaCombe, the station's production manager.

In June Bob Guy was ousted, becoming a KING consultant. There were his last two efforts as program director. It was Guy who commissioned award playwright George Mittleman, a local bartender and freelance writer, to write the script for "Song for Louisa." And it was Guy who nurtured the television version of Ruddy A. Pace's "Southern Cross" which had its first production as a staged reading at Drama Theater.

But LaCombe says that under his new boss, Ken Latta, KING will still be in the drama business. KING plans to sponsor a local playwright competition, with the best plays to be produced next June, after the completion of the station's new facilities.

The cash prize for the winning play has not been set, but it'll be something starting with the number five, naturally.

Guy was a major booster of drama at KING, but original productions didn't begin and end with him. LaCombe started a series of children's dramas last June with "Tails of Dawn Mountain" and the other stories will continue this year, possibly with an African story.

Although KING's dramas have been laudable efforts, even award-winners, they haven't been entirely successful. And tonight's entries are no exception.

KING spent a fortune on the half-hour "Song for Louisa" and the production values are exceptional. The whole thing was shot on location in the island and at the Olympic Game Farm and Yallahs Village, and some fine photography results in simply breathtaking scenery.

But the story is along the treading. The project should have started with a strong script. Instead, it was up to LaCombe and crew to make the best of things, which is just what they did.

There's some very nice music, composed by KING's Cliff Lenz. And the budget, which LaCombe claims approached the rumored \$100,000, included expenses for two weeks of on-location filming, rented sailboats, many two-clubbers to prop up the camera people on the sides of cliffs, and airplanes for aerial shots.

The result is a beautiful but wooden program that invites its audience with waterfalls and bright shining water much more than it does with the characters and their story.

The hour-long "Southern Cross" has a much stronger message and much better performances, especially by Marjorie Nelson who plays Frank, a vegetable stall owner who fails to pull "Mama" (Marjorie Nelson) out of her dusty dream life among colorfully springing tourists.

Again, the trouble with "Southern Cross" may be the choice of the script. It's well written, if woefully repetitive, but it just isn't television material. It's too static, talky and unconvincing to hold the audience's attention for a full hour. By the time Frank shows up to breathe some life into the proceedings, the players have already talked us to death and we're too wofe out to care what happens.

LaCombe admits KING is still developing its original

## WEDNESDAY TV FOR NORTHWEST

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## TV Times

## Something new on prime time — a local drama

by John Voorhees  
Times television reporter

Channel 5 is offering viewers something unusual on Wednesday night — it's preempting NBC network repeats to present 90 minutes of new, original, locally-produced drama.

At 8 p.m. Channel 5 will show "A Song for Louisa," a half-hour drama filmed partly on British Columbia's spectacularly beautiful Princess Louisa Inlet. It will be followed at 8:30 p.m. by an hour-long drama called "Southern Cross." Both programs were produced by Don LaCombe and both look expensive and professional.

"A Song for Louisa" was written by George Mammiller and directed by Craig Johnston, who also did the principal photography, together with Bill Everett and Steve Wilson.

"A Song for Louisa" is based on fact. It's the story of James F. MacDonald who, in 1915, sailed from Seattle with his uncle and first saw the three-mile fjord known as Princess Louisa Inlet. He was so impressed with the magnificent scenery that he vowed to earn enough money to purchase the Inlet and make certain it remained in its natural state.

He did indeed purchase the property in 1927 and in 1953 deeded the land to the Princess Louisa International Society, responsible for making certain the area remains unspoiled.

Mammiller's script focuses mainly on young MacDonald's first visit to Princess Louisa Inlet and the effect its beauty had upon him, as well as his fascination with Salish Indian folklore.

Bill Schustik plays young MacDonald; Robert Guy, who also produced the film, portrays MacDonald's uncle. Randall Douthitt (the former "Seattle Today" producer who has left for New York) portrays the Indian, Skookok.

The fact that the performances are pale and that Mammiller's script only suggests the story behind the preservation of Princess Louisa Inlet is balanced by the fact that the photography is absolutely first-rate. If "A Song for Louisa" doesn't necessarily make it as a gripping drama, it does make it as a terrific travelog.

There is also a goodly amount of pleasant music interwoven into the story. Schustik, an actor and



Bill Schustik  
In "Song for Louisa"

## COVER

balladeer from the East Coast, has contributed some of the music and also performs in the film. Cliff Lenz arranged and composed the rest of the music, as well as performing it with Barbara Ireland (harp) and Sylvia Aguilera (vocals).

"Southern Cross," written by Randy Paris, was first presented in a staged reading at Seattle's Irwinman Theater more than a year ago.

Paris has studied playwriting at the University of Washington and has been involved a number of arts organizations in the area, including the Seattle Opera

Association, Pacific Northwest Ballet and Seattle Youth Theater.

In "Southern Cross" he has written about three people whose dreams, illusions and memories are in conflict. The setting is a vegetable stall in a rundown area of a public market.

The three characters are Mama, her daughter, Lucy, and Frank, a man who operates the stall next to Mama's.

Mama clings stubbornly to her tomato stand, even though business has dropped steadily in the 36 years since her husband, Angelo, left her. Lucy wants her mother to leave, as does Frank, who, after winning a small stake at gambling, wants Lucy and her mother to come away with him.

The drama ends where it began, with Mama and Lucy protecting each other from the real world.

In plain truth, "Southern Cross," despite good intentions, is pretty soggy stuff. Paris has been unable to breathe any kind of believability into his three characters. They remain stock figures, chattering on in the kind of "poetic" manner that playwrights too often think "common" people speak. But Mama and Lucy are both tiresome and repetitive, despite the excellent efforts of Marjorie Nelson and Terres Unsoeld as Mama and Lucy.

Any chance to watch Marjorie Nelson work is a welcome one. And Ms. Unsoeld, who has performed at Intiman Theater, Empty Space Theater and Skid Road Theater, as well as Conservatory Theater, is very appealing, despite the fact that her role, like that of Mama's, is dreadfully overwritten. "Southern Cross" would be twice as good if it were half as long.

Alan Manson, whom Seattle playgoers will remember with pleasure as Ludlow Lowell in the Seattle Rep's recent production of "Pal Joey," plays Frank in "Southern Cross." He, too, is good, within the confines the role Paris created.

Dick Warsinske directed "Southern Cross," which has been given a great physical production, including a handsome, realistic set designed by Randy Chase.

Again, Cliff Lenz composed and performed appropriate music for the drama.