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Donahue's still talking

"Donahue: The 25th Anniversary" airs Sunday at 8 p.m. on NBC.

By James Endrst
The Hartford Courant

Sitting down for a chat with Phil Donahue seems a bit unnatural. Wouldn't walking and talking be more like it? After 25 years of "Donahue" shows — dashing up and down studio aisles, mike in hand — it just seems more appropriate.

But on this afternoon, the mood of the 56-year-old talk show host is relaxed. Today's off-the-air topic: "Donahue: The 25th Anniversary," a two-hour special Sunday.

Donahue begins — blue eyes focused like tractor beams behind those famous frames — to reminisce about his groundbreaking syndicated program, the first issue-driven, audience-participation TV talk show.

"We were born in Dayton, Ohio," he begins, "with no band and no desk and no couch with what was essentially a very visually dull show."

That was 1967 and "The Phil Donahue Show" had a two-year contract.

"We had no hype, no main media connection. We didn't even have clout with our own (television) group," he says. "We had no access to stars and were forced to rely on issues."

As it turned out, the now



Johnny Carson (left) was Phil Donahue's guest on Feb. 6, 1970.

much copied town-meeting format of "Donahue" was exactly what viewers were looking for.

"I brought to the experience three or four years of hosting a radio show," says Donahue, "so I knew what lit up the phones."

The topics, the TV memories, come spilling out of him: "Religion; my husband doesn't kiss me anymore; the sex has gone out of our marriage; . . . can the principal search my son's locker; lesbian nuns."

"Our first rating book was through the roof."

And yet success didn't come anywhere near overnight. While the heartland embraced the format, big-city markets weren't buying.

"This has been a snail-like process," says Donahue. "It took us 10 years, for example, to do what Oprah did in less than one."

After 6,000 shows, an aggre-

gate studio audience of 1 million people, 19 Emmy awards, Donahue says, "Twenty-five years later, boy, I'll tell you what — it's been an odyssey."

And he's not through yet, though he says, "I won't do this in my 60s." (He turns 57 in December).

He's got a contract that runs till the end of '94 and he says, he's "more pumped" than ever about the show, happy to be alive and doing so well after 25 years.

So what is his idea of the perfect "Donahue" show? He thinks about it. A wry grin works its way across his face.

"The pope elopes," he answers, "the happy couple on stage."

It's an idea that can only be greeted with laughter.

"Bet you'd watch," he says.

L.A. Times-Washington Post Service

Special re-creates Tom Mather murder

Authorities and KCRG-TV (Channel 9) will work together on a half-hour special next week to try to uncover new evidence in an Eastern Iowa murder.

"Who Killed Tom Mather" will air Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

KCRG was approached by Cedar County authorities to help re-create the murder of Thomas Mather of Springdale, according to Dean Bunting, KCRG news director.

CHANNEL COMMENT

Mather, 32, was killed in September 1991 at his rural Springdale home, allegedly by a mysterious intruder. The only witness, Mather's wife, Dawn, escaped to call the Cedar County sheriff, according to her statement.

"Authorities have a lot of good information on the case, but they don't have any truly credible witnesses," Bunting said. "They're looking to get the case out before the public again and are hoping new witnesses will come forward."

"We're just trying to find a way to solve this case."

New way to order PPV

There's a new way for Cox Cable's Pay-Per-View customers to order programming. Customers now can order pay-per-view programming 24 hours a day by dialing 395-9498 from a touch-tone

phone and following the recorded ordering instructions.

Previously, customers had to call Cox during business hours to order a movie or special event. Customers who do not have a touch-tone phone must still call the office to order.

The new procedure became effective last week.

Perot, talk-show host?

Ross Perot certainly made the recent presidential campaign a lot more entertaining than it might have been. Now, CNBC has offered the former presidential candidate a chance to guest host the cable network's Saturday night "Talk Live."

No word yet if Perot will accept.

Ike's replacement

Charlie Robinson, who played court clerk Mac Robinson on NBC's "Night Court," will become a regular on CBS' "Love & War."

Robinson plays Abe, brother of the departed bartender Ike Johnson. John Hancock, who played Ike, died of a heart attack last month. Brother Abe's temperament is a decided contrast to teddy-bear Ike.

A special "Love & War" episode in remembrance of Johnson is scheduled to air Monday.

Cindy Cullen Chapman
Gazette arts/entertainment editor

'Jacksons': Mini-series ends with 1984 'Victory Tour'

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received a phone call from a singer on Motown named Bobby Taylor," de Passe says. "He said, 'You've got to come down to my apartment and see these kids. They're unbelievable.'"

"It was after hours and I didn't want to go, but I did, and there were these talented young men. They sang a cappella, and I called Berry Gordy that night and said, 'I found this great new act. They're these wonderful kids.' He said, 'I hate kid acts. Forget it.' Eventually, I was able to prevail and he auditioned them, and the rest has brought us to this stage."

The mini-series ends in 1984 with the Jacksons' "Victory Tour," which occurred long before sister La Toya's accusations about their father's disciplinary tactics.



Jermaine Jackson

says de Passe, "and since we dealt with everyone in the family with the exception of La Toya, we are going with the majority version."

Jermaine says that throughout production on "The Jacksons," brother Michael "would monitor what he wanted to have done through Margaret and my mother, and it was very important to make everyone happy, but what you will see is actually how we grew up and how things were."

Despite the creative involvement of the family, de Passe insists that "The Jacksons" doesn't soften their story to the extent that it would "come off as pablum."

"The thing that I find most amazing is the degree to which the reality, as the family understands it, is portrayed. There are tremendous 'teeth' in this, and there is a great deal that I think people will be surprised to discover."

"Joseph may not have been a delight every moment, but certainly, the Jackson Five never would have become what they did, nor would the individual members, if he had not been the way that he was, nor would they ever have been able to capture the attention and the fans that they did."

"Since no one else in the family seems to agree,"

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