

JOHN K. NEWNHAM Incorporated Television Company

British Television encircles the world

If you were Roger Moore on a trip abroad, you would come face to face with yourself more or less wherever you happened to be visiting. Eighty-nine countries have purchased 'The Saint' series, and as this consists of 118 one-hour programmes it is a reasonable bet that, at any given moment, 'The Saint' is being watched by viewers somewhere.

'I'd no idea I was such a fluent linguist!' Roger exclaims, relating how he has heard himself speaking Spanish, French, German, Italian, Arabic, Greek and even Japanese.

Not his own voice, of course, although he can speak several of these languages. Foreign actors 'dub' his dialogue and the astonishing thing about this is that they usually succeed in making themselves sound very much like Roger Moore himself. In other foreign countries, his own voice is heard with subtitled translations.

I cite Roger Moore because he is probably the best-known of all the British TV actors throughout the world, but much the same could be said of other stars of British-made television series. Television has a strong air of familiarity for the travelling Englishman wherever he happens to be and the emigrant to Australia, for example, might well be still at home in England when he switches on his set in his new home.

Much of the credit for this must go to Sir Lew Grade, head of Associated TeleVision. Though television companies export a great deal of their product, the ATV Grade programmes are far and away the most prolific in the international market – a success story without parallel in this particular industry and entirely due to the Grade foresight whose ATV empire has 3 times won the Queen's Award for Industry for exports.



ITC production 'The Persuaders' starring Tony Curtis, Roger Moore, in a scene with Joan Collins and Robert Hutton. A popular programme for export.



'Department S' has already been seen throughout the world. As a result of this series Peter Wyngarde, left, has gained an international reputation.

The production philosophy of these television programmes was clear from the outset. Shows were needed for Britain, but live shows would be dead as soon as transmitted. If filmed or recorded they would have future life and earning power.

A good show is a good show the world over. Reasonably enough, therefore, it was argued that it was worth spending the extra money if there were a chance of recouping the additional outlay. If a show brought in money from foreign sources more could be spent on future productions than having to restrict them to the smaller budgets that would make them economic propositions for home consumption only. Films, in particular, offered export promise.

It was a long-term gamble, but success abroad would mean an ever-expanding demand for British shows. This would also mean that programmes would be a hedge against any financial difficulties the TV companies might face, as indeed has happened. Instead of having to reduce production costs, with a decrease in entertainment value, big-budget shows could still be made, irrespective of any drop in advertising revenue and inflationary tendencies.

Things have worked out as anticipated. Without an export market, it would not have been economically possible to produce such series as 'The Saint', 'Danger Man', 'The Prisoner', 'Department S' and the many other film series which have played such a dominant part in television programming; and without international outlets, taped shows such as 'This is Tom Jones' and other musical series would have been produced on a considerably more modest scale.

Furthermore, as it happens, the TV film series have played a vital part in saving the British motion picture industry from near extinction. Without them, hundreds more technicians would have lost their jobs. Though ATV have their own studios for the making of taped shows, the feature film studios are used for the film series and for several years these have occupied more studio space than pictures made for cinemas. When a film series goes into production, it means a minimum of one year's work for the technicians and, of course, hundreds of actors. This, in turn, is reflected in the amount of work given to the laboratories.

The export side of the ATV business is represented by ITC, an emblem which has a dual meaning: Incorporated Television Company in England and Independent Television Corporation in America.

ITC, in its own turn, has a dual function. It is responsible for setting up the film series and it is the distributing organization for all ATV programmes with overseas sales potential. Even the most indigenous of shows have the possibility of sales somewhere in the world.

In production at the moment are two film series which could certainly never have been contemplated but for the export market. One is 'The Persuaders' which co-stars Tony Curtis and Roger Moore, a costly combination which, until comparatively recently, would have been restricted to feature film production. The other is 'The Shirley MacLaine Show'. In Tony Curtis and Shirley MacLaine are two of the most popular of Hollywood's stars who could not have appeared in the average low budget, or even medium budget, series confined to UK showing.

ITC also have in production 'Jason King', which springs from the world-wide popularity of Peter Wyngarde's portrayal of the title role character in the 'Department S' series. On the taped show side, Des O'Connor is making a further big-budget series, Val Doonican is making his first series to be shown on an American network, and Marty Feldman is also at work on new programmes.

So viewers gain, the producers gain and Britain gains. Export is the lifeline on which Britain depends and the export of television programmes is playing its own very important part.

The film series predominate in this export market, though the taped show is coming more and more into its own. The American market is by far the most profitable, of course, and by the American market I mean the vast networks, with syndication to smaller stations playing a vital though relatively smaller part in these exports.

ITC has enjoyed the unprecedented achievement of having peak hour shows on each of the three main American networks (ABC, CBS and NBC). The ITC programmes have come to play a large part in American networking plans, resulting in the production of such shows as 'The Baron', 'Strange Report', 'Man in a Suitcase' and the taped musicals.

Producing programmes with overseas potential has its own problems, quite apart from production quality. An immediate problem is the differing line and colour systems, which vary considerably between Britain and America.

This was particularly acute when Britain was using only the 405 line system on v.h.f. Although the u.h.f. line system is now in operation, bringing Britain into line with much of the Continent and

various other parts of the world, there are still complications. America and various other countries use 525 lines.

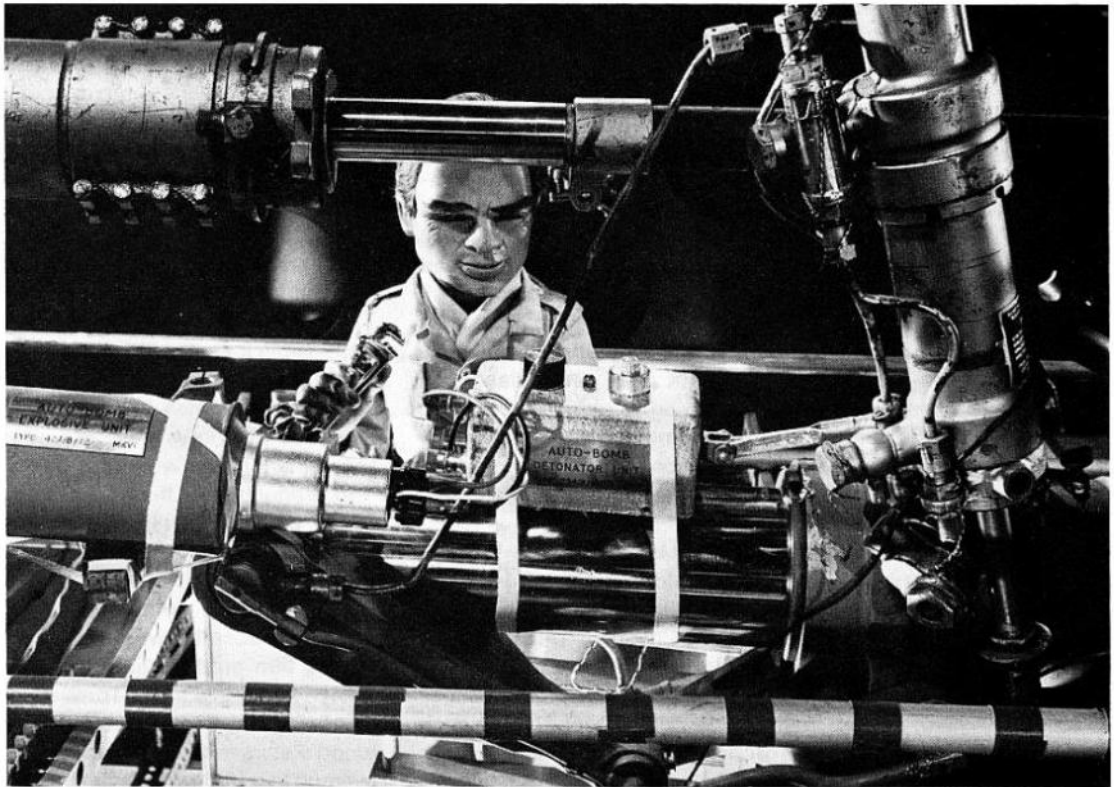
Films are common to all; taped shows have either to be shot in the two different systems or modified. Until quite recently, the American and British versions were recorded separately, but technical improvements have now made it possible to produce on one system and transfer to the other.

Producing the same show twice sometimes had some unexpected results. If you go to the theatre and see the same play several times, you will find that performances differ on each occasion. Not surprisingly, therefore, the two versions of a show produced for television have sometimes shown considerable variations. Thus, on some occasions, English viewers have seen a much better acted production than Americans and *vice versa*.

Another problem: because of the disparity between British and American electrical phasing, the length of a programme varies and films have to be adjusted accordingly. The American phasing of 60Hz per second and the English phasing of 50Hz per second means that a film is run at 24 frames per second in the States and 25 frames per second in England. Thus, an identical film of an hour's duration will take over two minutes longer to show in America than in Britain.

Obviously this has to be taken into account when producing a film which will be shown in America, where the networks demand that a programme must run literally to a split second.

The sort of slip-up that can occur even among experienced technicians was demonstrated when a taped show, timed to the necessary split second,



Some of the complicated machinery in the first major puppet series - 'Thunderbirds'.



'Jason King' a new series currently in production which is expected to achieve world wide popularity. The star is once again Peter Wyngarde, seen here with Hildergard Neil.

was transferred to film for the United States. There were immediate complaints that the length was wrong. Checking of the original tape confirmed that it had, indeed, been edited to the accurate length — until it was realized that when projected on film, the electrical phasing had changed its timing considerably.

Producing television programmes with overseas sales in view is, therefore, not only a matter of devising shows which will have international appeal; and one undoubted reason for the success of ITC in this sphere is that the company has gained so much experience over the years. The overseas potentialities of TV sales were realized right at the beginning of commercial television in Britain.

How did it all begin? One has to go back to 1955 when, at long last, the battle was won to introduce independent television in Great Britain. ATV was one of the programme companies granted a license to transmit from London over weekends and from the Midlands (Birmingham) on weekdays from Monday until Friday — now switched to full-time operation from Birmingham, with London shared between London Week-End and Thames Television.

Commercial television was starting from scratch. There was little time in which to prepare a big stock of programmes and it was obvious that some would have to be imported.

ITC stemmed from the direct integration of American and British interests when ATV linked up with a new American organization. This, on one hand, meant distribution rights in such series as 'Susie', 'The New Adventures of Charlie Chan', 'Hawkeye' and the original series of the 'Last of the Mohicans', 'The Count of Monte Cristo', 'New York Confidential', 'Cannonball', 'Fury', 'Lassie' and many other successful shows.

Simultaneously, the ATV subsidiary was committed to the production of film series for syndication. From co-production deals for the making of such programmes as 'Robin Hood', 'Sir Lancelot' and 'The Buccaneers' came the setting-up of ITC's

own production companies and series including 'The Invisible Man', 'Danger Man', 'Man of the World', 'The Sentimental Agent', 'Ghost Squad', 'Sir Francis Drake' and others.

Television was expanding throughout the world and it had a voracious appetite. ITC was widening its scope almost by the hour. The British product was making its way to TV screens in one country after another.

'An uphill battle at first', says Elkan Kaufman, ITC's Director of Sales (in charge of sales for the whole of the Eastern hemisphere and now a director of the company). 'I was offering something quite new. When I said I was selling television films, the initial reaction was that I meant old movies. I had to educate buyers to the idea that we were making films especially for television'.

Branch offices were created, agents appointed, ways and means evolved for getting the programmes from one station to another and dealing with local problems as they arose.

The business snowballed. 'Danger Man', under the title of 'Secret Agent', made a big breakthrough on American networking. 'The Saint' followed. The knowledge that the American market was now wide open meant that more ambitious productions could be made and, with new confidence in the quality of the British productions, American companies began to buy more and more series, and success in America has meant that the bigger-budget productions have increased the appeal of British shows in practically every country.

Developments all the time. Under Sir Lew Grade's auspices, the puppet films made by Gerry Anderson¹ leapt well ahead of all others, with such outstanding successes as 'Supercar', 'Fireball XL-5', 'Stingray', 'Thunderbirds' and the many others made in this 'Supermarionation' process.

And big-scale 'specials' like 'Male of the Species' and Richard Chamberlain's 'Hamlet'.

There has been another development as well. The old feature films have always been among the most popular TV programmes, but with the decrease in motion picture production for cinemas the future supply will be on a smaller scale, and certainly a lot of the present-day permissive films will be unsuitable for television.

American TV companies are now making their own feature-length movies and ITC has also stepped into this market with the production of full-scale films for showing on the American networks and cinema distribution elsewhere with, of course, their availability for television showing in Britain and elsewhere later on.

Two of these films, 'Mr Jerico' and 'The Firechasers', have already been produced and others are in the pipeline.

Television is always hungry for programmes. A healthy appetite simply has to be fed, and it is good for Britain's prestige and economy that ITC has gone ahead so successfully.

REFERENCE

1 James Preston: *Thunderbirds; Sound and Vision broadcasting*, Vol.7, No.2, Summer 1966.