

## 5 Takeaways at TCA's Halfway Point

Dungey debut, Bloys' baptism by fire offer lessons to nets stepping into Hilton arena

BY DADE HAYES

**T**CA summer press tour is entering an eventful home stretch this week, with CBS, Fox, FX, Showtime and the CW closing out the 2016 edition. The idiosyncratic media gathering doesn't always cast the die for shows and networks. But it often offers a degree of surprise in a carefully choreographed industry.

Here were the five biggest takeaways from the first half of the tour:

**1** Casey Bloys, an accomplished 12-year veteran of HBO who replaced Michael Lombardo as programming chief last spring, wobbled during his first TCA executive session. He was asked repeatedly about sexualized violence against women on a string of HBO shows, including this fall's high-stakes *Westworld* and *Game of Thrones*. After initially stonewalling and then ill-advisedly joking about the subject, Bloys conceded: "Is it something we think about? Yeah, the criticism



ABC's  
Channing  
Dungey

is valid...point taken on it." Despite an overall show of strength by HBO, especially its summer breakout *A Night Of* and the Sarah Jessica Parker dramedy *Divorce*, Bloys also was pressed on the meltdown of *Vinyl* and the upcoming end of *Thrones*.

**2** Channing Dungey, who took the reins at ABC from Paul Lee early this year, appeared to draw on Lee's frictionless TCA appearances during her executive session. She reiterated plans to diversify *The Bachelor* and promote synergy with Marvel



One of Netflix's 13 sessions on Day 1 was a "puppy panel" featuring dogs affiliated with Netflix shows.

and Lucasfilm. And, while she didn't repeat Lee's curiously worded praise of the network's "delicious" shows, Dungey showed similar enthusiasm when praising the much-maligned network procedural. (One such ABC bet is *Conviction*.) "We've moved into a landscape where there is an appetite for serialized dramas," she said, "but I would love to see more close-ended dramas on networks."

**3** Bob Greenblatt, entertainment chairman at NBC, acknowledged that rivals ABC

and CBS have made strides in the OTT space. But he said a big announcement is in the offing once the network gets past the Rio Olympics. "We're in a unique position because our sister company [Comcast] is a cable company, and the OTT strategy is a competitive take from what the cable business is," he said.

**4** Netflix content chief Ted Sarandos said the \$6 billion the company is spending on programming in 2016 will increase in 2017, though he didn't offer any forecasts. While acknowledging viewers face a glut of shows, he said the problem is too many "mediocre" ones. "Our vote is to keep the bar high, and to keep 'em coming," he said.

**5** TNT and TBS chief Kevin Reilly said Turner is still studying the impact of reduced commercial loads for TNT dramas, which have given showrunners roughly 10 more minutes per hour. So far, Reilly said, "the data points in the right direction." ❏



Netflix's  
Ted  
Sarandos



On HBO's *Westworld* panel, (from left) stars Jeffrey Wright and Anthony Hopkins, executive producer/writer Lisa Joy, executive producer/writer/director Jonathan Nolan and stars Evan Rachel Wood, James Marsden, Thandie Newton and Ed Harris.

Eric Charbonneau/Netflix; Jeff Kravitz/FilmMagic; Eric Charbonneau/Netflix; ABC/Image Group LA



## THE WATCHMAN

Deputy Editor Michael Malone's weekly look at the programming scene

# The Arc of Triumph, Critics Pick Program Pantheon

A SPECIAL TV milestone arrives next year, when Triumph the Insult Comic Dog marks 20 years in the business. The wisecracking puppet got his start on *Late Night With Conan O'Brien* in 1997, and stars in *Triumph's Summer Election Special* on Hulu Aug. 11 (see page 16).

The cigar-chomping canine gets away with things that Robert Smigel, who voices him, never could. "I wouldn't have the balls to do an eighth of what I do without a puppet on my hand," says Smigel.

Triumph was born out of a Manhattan furniture store called Mabel's, which had a bunch of animal puppets for sale. Triumph got his

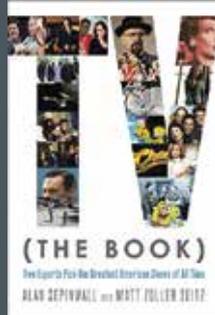
first laugh when Smigel slipped the dog puppet onto his hand and sniffed his wife Michelle's derriere.

"She found that funny," says Smigel, "because she's the perfect woman."

She is, indeed. On his birthday that year, Michelle gave her husband Triumph. "It's the one thing in my career that has consistently gotten the biggest laughs," says Smigel.

Around the time Triumph made his TV debut, Alan Sepinwall and Matt Zoller Seitz were toiling in the

Newark *Star-Ledger* newsroom. Two decades later, the ace TV critics are coauthors of *TV (The Book): Two Experts Pick the Greatest American Shows of All Time*. "We said, 'Why don't we turn those arguments we always had about TV into something you can hold in your hand, something you can keep on your bookshelf?'" says Zoller Seitz.



*TV (The Book)* ranks the top 100 series, based on a scoring system the authors devised. (The top 10 includes *The Simpsons*, *The Wire* and *Cheers*.)

The book is full of fun repartee, sharp critique and valentines to shows you may have forgotten about, such as the late '80s comedy *Frank's Place*.

It's intended to be leafed through more than perused start to finish. "We hope people would read the debate about the No. 1 show, then thumb through to see what we said about *Parks & Recreation*," says Sepinwall.

Zoller Seitz says Sepinwall used "21st century" spreadsheets to keep track of the shows, while he kept things low-tech. "I had all these 3x5 cards taped to my wall," he says. "I looked like Carrie Mathison in *Homeland*."



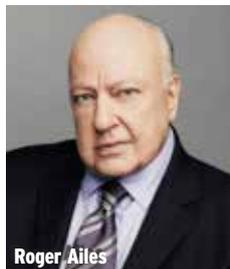
### STAT OF THE WEEK

# \$1.2 BILLION

Number that national ad sales have topped for the Rio Olympic Games, NBC announced Aug. 4. That figure beats the 2012 London Games total by 20%, making Rio the biggest TV event ever, said Seth Winter, NBC Sports Group executive VP of ad sales.



Philippe Dauman



Roger Ailes



Rupert Murdoch

## DOLLARS ARE ONLY PART OF EARNINGS SEASON

### SENIOR EXECS DISCUSS BIG EVENTS AT MEDIA COMPANIES

Numbers were only part of the story as several big media companies reported quarterly earnings last week.

Viacom was expected to report a big drop in earnings, and the company did so on Aug. 4 with net income down 27%. The results led to another salvo in the battle between controlling shareholder **SUMNER REDSTONE** and CEO **PHILIPPE DAUMAN**.

Dauman admitted the Redstone situation was "somewhat distracting" but added that the courts would clear up the ownership issues during trials in October. In a statement, Redstone's National Amusements said Viacom's earnings decline was a sign that a management change was needed at the company.

On 21st Century Fox's earnings call Aug. 2, executive chairman **LACHLAN MURDOCH** addressed Fox News, where chairman **ROGER AILES** was forced to resign in the wake of a sexual harassment suit. Without naming Ailes—and dubbing his father and interim Fox News CEO **RUPERT MURDOCH** as Fox News' founder—Lachlan said that the company had moved quickly to protect the network's business, its employees and its unique voice. No changes in its direction are planned, he added.

Time Warner's Aug. 3 earnings call was dominated by the announcement that the company will buy 10% of Hulu for \$683 million. Time Warner's Turner cable networks will be carried on the new live streaming service Hulu plans to introduce next year. —Jon Lafayette