

Nevins Not Ready to Fold *Circus* Tent

Wildness of campaign pushed Showtime to new unscripted heights

BY JON LAFAYETTE

Until Election Day, Showtime president David Nevins said, politics was one of his favorite topics.

The Circus delivered a concentrated dose of politics, delving into the presidential campaign to produce weekly half-hour documentary episodes that stood out from the punditry and breaking-news graphics elsewhere on the dial. The series sent journalists Mark Halperin and John Heilemann along with political advisor Mark McKinnon out on the trail. It was always going to be a circus, but Donald Trump's starring role turned it into the most unusual and polarizing presidential race in American history.

The show's Nov. 12 finale, upsized to an hour, posted ratings 275% better than its January premiere and the highest of any unscripted show in Showtime's history. The retelling of the Trump surge and Hillary Clinton crumble brought back all of the ups, downs, twists and turns of Election Night, whose outcome wasn't known until after 2 a.m. Eastern time.

One telling moment showed the hosts backstage in the green room at Stephen Colbert's live Election Night broadcast on Showtime (Colbert was bumped from CBS in favor of news coverage) as the votes came in. Florida had not yet been called for Trump, Colbert noted. Even so, "it looks like the lead he has is going to be too much for her to surmount," Heilemann said.



(Left to right) Mark Halperin (seated), Mark McKinnon and John Heilemann in the Showtime original documentary series *The Circus: Inside the Greatest Political Show on Earth*.

Noting Clinton's deficits in Wisconsin and Michigan, Halperin added, "He's ahead in both. If he wins them both, he's president." The audience let out an anguished howl and then fell silent.

Though the epic campaign has ended, *The Circus* might not have entirely folded its tent.

With the footage assembled over 11 months on the road, Showtime is consid-

ering putting together a documentary-length show on the 2016 election. "As a historical document, I think it's a pretty incredible accomplishment," Nevins said of the series.

Beyond that, Nevins said, "I definitely remain interested in continuing to be in business with those guys and we're beginning to talk about what that might look like." (That might be easier to arrange now that Bloomberg has canceled Halperin and Heilemann's *With All Due Respect*.) But Nevins is not quite ready to greenlight an encore for 2020. "No one plans four years in advance," he said.

While Showtime has not been known for the kind of news coverage or political commentary that Bill Maher and John Oliver deliver on HBO, some of the network's biggest hits deal with topical issues. *Homeland* dramatizes the fight against terrorism and *Billions* features Wall Street and the financial markets.

"*The Circus* has made us matter in those sort of political-current events circles," Nevins said, calling it a "zeitgeist show." Viewership was particularly strong on Showtime's streaming platforms—not surprising considering the political operatives and the press

covering the campaign lived their lives on the road.

And speaking of timely, Showtime aired the documentary *Weiner* the weekend that FBI director James Comey announced he was taking a look at additional Hillary Clinton emails found on disgraced former Rep. Andrew Weiner's phone—a turning point in the race.

Showtime has beefed up its documentary unit, hiring former CNN original programming head Vinnie Malhotra, who oversaw production of *The Circus*. "I just loved the process of getting a rough cut around Friday at midnight, getting a fine cut Saturday afternoon and getting a final cut Saturday night. The rhythm of it was intense and taxing for the people who were making it, but fascinating for me," Nevins said.

The Circus was designed to offer a view of the campaign different from the network newscasts. Nevins said he thinks the show was successful because "week after week, it delivered those fly-on-the-wall moments of what it's like to run a U.S. presidential campaign. Mark, Mark and John, they have this *Zelig*-like quality of always being in the right place at the right time, so they got a ton of access."

Fred Davis, a top advertising consultant to candidates including Sen. John McCain, appeared on the show and was a fan.

"To me the biggest difference is that network and cable news is so incredibly slanted. The voter isn't getting news, they are getting some talking head's interpretation of the news," Davis said. "John and the two Marks wisely let the viewer get into the game themselves. [They] showed all sides, let the voters hear from the actual candidates and their teams behind the scenes, unscripted. They let the voters decide for themselves."

One of Nevins' favorite moments came after the New Hampshire primary. Halperin got a ride on Trump's plane and used an iPhone to film the billionaire as he won an election for the first time in his life.

"And I also thought this show did better than almost any of the news networks at kind of giving you a sense of the mood of the voting public. You could see the enthusiasm gap in this show in a way that the studio-based media missed," Nevins added. ■



Democratic ticket toppers Tim Kaine and Hillary Clinton along the campaign trail in *The Circus*.

Trump Presidency Spells Opportunity For Launches of Opposition Media

New political networks often rise from ashes of nasty elections

BY MICHAEL MALONE

As recent history has shown, a bitter election—and let’s face it, they’re all bitter at this point—frequently gives rise to a new media player focused on broadcasting to the losing side. With the GOP holding the White House, Senate and House, a left-leaning outlet—likely digital and millennial-focused—may emerge in the near term. Amid so much talk of “fake news” and its nefarious role in Election 2016 and beyond, the fledgling channel would likely aim to set itself apart with rigorous fact-checking.

Jonathan Klein, former CNN U.S. president and founder of digital outfit Tapp, mentions the “gulf” between millennial voters and President-elect Trump, along with a disconnect between that group and traditional media. “There’s a real opportunity to over-deliver what this audience wants—reliable information that holds the administration accountable,” he says.

Fox News Channel was launched 20

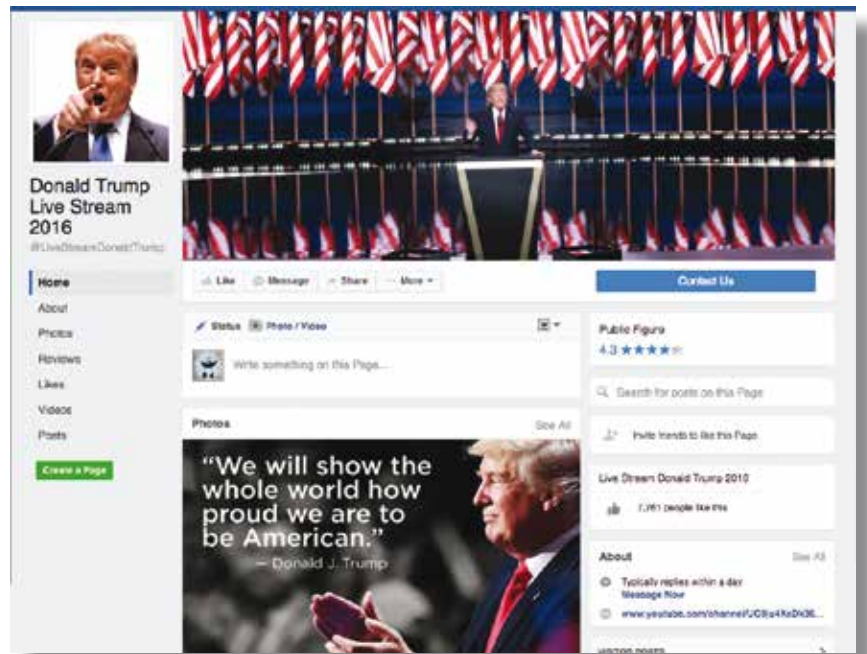
years ago, a month before Bill Clinton was re-elected, announcing itself as a willing thorn in Clinton’s side. Drudge Report was birthed around the same time, and it embarrassed traditional news crews when it broke the story of Clinton’s Monica Lewinsky liaison.

‘Left’ to Their Own Devices

Left-leaning media also has launched amid GOP strongholds at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Radio network Air America was born in 2004, months before George W. Bush won reelection, while Current TV was hatched in 2005. The latter, a user-generated-content cable network created by former VP Al Gore, featured an eclectic mix of programming, political and other, much of it featuring a progressive bent.

“You always get the birth of new media after one of these kinds of elections,” Bill Hemmer, Fox News anchor, told *B&C* before Election Day.

To be sure, a variety of media entities, from network news shops to Vice to *Full Frontal With Samantha Bee*, aim to keep President Trump something close to honest. But with MSNBC shifting to straight news at the expense of lefty punditry, there is an opportunity for a new entity to become the progressive playroom. “It’s still early days, but I could see someone doing something like that—a subscription-based, left-leaning programming thing,” says one prominent network chief who requested anonymity. “I just



Trump has many channels available if he wants to bypass traditional media and address the public directly.

don’t know how quickly, and who is putting up the capital.”

That exec notes the short tenures of Air America, Current and its cable successor, Al Jazeera America, looming in any potential backer’s due diligence.

Yet Klein, whose Tapp group builds video channels around prominent personalities, says the barriers of entry are modest. “Digital is the currency of modern media,” he says, “and the good thing is, anybody can create it as long as they have a cellphone.”

With fake news dominating much of the media discussion—President Barack Obama, for one, decried the impact of bogus rumors Nov. 17—enterprise reporting and dogged fact-checking

are expensive missions that can’t be overlooked for a serious player.

With a new president hatched from reality television and a chief strategist, Stephen Bannon, from alt-right news site Breitbart, the GOP is hardly unfamiliar with media operations. Trump’s win may put to rest talk of Trump TV, but a president-elect who can’t seem to stay off Twitter—and is deeply mistrustful of journalists—will almost surely avail himself of the various digital broadcasting options available, be it Facebook Live or streaming from WhiteHouse.gov.

“He takes to that naturally,” says Klein. “He has a lot of things to say, and a lot of ways to do it.”



Samantha Bee has a prominent platform for political humor.

SIZING UP A HALF-CENTURY OF HISPANIC TV

The rich and under-appreciated history of Hispanic television takes center stage in Kenton T.



Wilkinson’s Spanish-language *Television in the United States: Fifty Years of Development*. Published by Routledge, the book brings an academic thoroughness to the story but remains accessible and fascinating for readers both inside and outside the industry.

Wilkinson, a professor in Hispanic and international communication at Texas Tech University, traces the roots of Hispanic TV’s dozens of channels, SVODs and stations back to Mexican theater and cinema in the early 20th century. It got traction, he shows, with the development of high-powered stations like KMEX Los Angeles and KCOR in San Antonio, Texas. KCOR was bought

in 1960 by *B&C* Hall of Famer Emilio Azcárraga, who went on to run Univision, Televisa and Galavisión and also owned the short-lived sports newspaper *The National*.

The narrative is more than worthy of book-length treatment, and Wilkinson delivers it cogently and with evident care. One hopes, in the telenovela tradition, there are future episodes of the saga to look forward to. —Dade Hayes



Myles Aronowitz



THE WATCHMAN

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

Hirst Liking New *Vikings*; Many More Trump Jokes Cumming

LET'S GIVE IT UP for the original immigrants—*Vikings* is back for season four on History Nov. 30, and creator Michael Hirst said it's the most emotional season yet. We knew that Vikings can kick serious butt, but we didn't quite know about their softer sides.

"We still have the epic battle scenes, but at the same time, the new season has moving and intimate and compelling story lines," said Hirst.

Vikings is an Irish-Canadian coproduction. Hirst initially envisioned the series ending with a Viking ship, its inhabitants starved, thirsty and half-dead, rolling up to North America. But now he wants to explore what happens after they make land. With 20 episodes for seasons four and five alike, he may be looking at as many as 90 hours of *Vikings* when it's all said and done. "I might be the one crawling up to the beach when I get there,"



History's *Vikings*

Hirst said. "But I want to get there."

Of course, History will have to sign off on anything beyond season five. "No one has approved this," Hirst, a Yorkshire man, conceded. "But that's my dream."

Sticking with the British guests, we're enjoying *The Traffickers* on Fusion, hosted by Briton-by-way-of-Afghanistan Nel Hedayat. The globe-trotting host enjoys her trips to America for, among other things, the

thought-provoking Netflix documentaries she can't get back home, including *Dear Zachary* and *Poverty, Inc.*

And some other unscripted fare: "I loooove the Kardashians," Hedayat said. A little sugar, she suggested, is OK for one's diet. "I'm a 28-year-old woman of the world...I can do that," she said. "It's OK."

Finally, we salute another citizen of the world, Alan Cumming, ebullient host of the International Emmy Awards in New York. Not two weeks before the starry event, the same New York Hilton ballroom hosted Donald Trump and his supporters as they cheered election results.

"I feel it's my moral obligation to inform you that, on Nov. 8, this hall was the venue for one of the darkest, most negative and utterly destructive moments in the history of this country!" thundered Cumming, formerly of

The Good Wife.

A mixture of industrial-strength sage burning and the consultations of various gurus, said Cumming, had cleansed the air. "We do not have to breathe the same foul, ignorant and bigoted air so recently exhaled by the Cheeto Jesus," quipped the Scotsman.

The election informed many—nay, most—of the jokes throughout the Emmys presentation. Nick Sandow, who plays the prison administrator on *Orange Is the New Black*, quipped about how the president-elect complimented him on his performance, then offered him a post heading up the U.S. prison system.

Cumming, meanwhile, credited Ernst & Young for delivering Emmy ballots free of hacking or rigging. He gushed: "Even WikiLeaks cannot crack our firewall!" —Michael Malone

STAT OF THE WEEK

4%

Dip in C3 primetime ratings in October for broadcast and cable TV, according to an analysis by Michael Nathanson of MoffettNathanson Research.

THEY SAID IT

"It's times like this that I'm reminded how big a reach television has. It's likely the most powerful source of communication in the world. We sit with you in your homes. You spend more hours with many of my characters than you do with your own family. You see their faces. I tell their stories and you care."



—Shonda Rhimes on Nov. 21, while taking the podium for a special award at the 44th Annual International Emmys.

FATES AND FORTUNES

EXEC MOVES OF THE WEEK

■ **(1) JAMES CORDEN** will host the 59th Annual Grammy Awards, to air on CBS Feb. 12 live from the Staples Center in Los Angeles. This will be *The Late Late Show* host's first time emceeding the awards show.

■ **(2) JEFFREY EISENACH** has been named to the FCC transition team for President-elect Donald Trump.

The free market economist had been overseeing the telecom/tech transition.

■ **(3) RICHARD DYER** has been tapped as president and general manager of WUSA in Washington, D.C. Dyer joins the Tegna-owned CBS affiliate from Hearst's WLWT Cincinnati, where he was president and general manager of the NBC affiliate

■ **(4) KIM HART** is exiting her post as press secretary to FCC chairman Tom Wheeler. Hart is heading to the new media venture from Politico cofounders Jim VandeHei, Mike Allen and Roy Schwartz.



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Terence Patrick/CBS, WLWT-TV



PROGRAMMING UPDATE:

SHOW CAROUSEL

Cartoon Network's *The Powerpuff Girls* is heading to Hulu in a multiyear agreement that includes SVOD rights to the original library and the revamped series. Legendary Entertainment has nabbed the film and television rights to science fiction novel *Dune*. VH1 has picked up a second season of *Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party*. To prime viewers for the *Twin Peaks* (1) reboot in 2017, Showtime will offer the entire original series to subscribers starting Dec. 26.



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UNIVISION'S SALINAS, FOX'S GUILFOYLE AND WILLIAMS JOIN DIVERSITY DISCUSSION LINEUP

Univision anchor María Elena Salinas and Fox News Channel's Kimberly Guilfoyle and Juan Williams have joined the lineup for NewBay Media's Diversity Discussion on Dec. 5.

Salinas, who has coanchored *Noticiero Univision* since 1987, will participate in the opening keynote Q&A. B&C and

Multichannel News editorial director Mark Robichaux will moderate the session, which will cover the topic of television news' importance to diverse segments.

Guilfoyle and Williams, cohosts of *The Five* on FNC, will keynote the luncheon discussion, which will be moderated by *Multichannel News* editor Tom Umstead

and will look at diversity on TV in post-election America.

Also among the highlights for the event are the Diversity in TV & Video Awards. The recipients include the teams behind WGN America's *Underground*, ESPN Films' *30 for 30, O.J.: Made in America* and FX's *The People v. O.J.*

Simpson: American Crime Story. Also being feted are execs from Comcast Cable, MediaCom, HBO, Showtime Sports and more.

For more on the Diversity Discussion event, which takes place at New York's Convene Conference Center Dec. 5, go to thediversitydiscussion.com. —B&C staff