

AWARDS

Continued from Page 23

erent news-based quiz program "Wait, Wait ... Don't Tell Me!"

AMC's "Mad Men," a drama set in the advertising world of the 1960s, and Showtime's "Dexter," about a serial killer who channels his efforts into killing psychopaths, were singled out in the drama world.

The awards are administered by the university's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. As in past years, there were about 1,000 entries, with documentaries the most-often entered genre, said Horace Newcomb, director of the Peabody Awards.

The war-related topics include Mr. Woodruff's and Ms. Dozier's reporting on veterans recovering from Iraq war injuries, Vice President Dick Cheney's philosophy of presidential privilege, the death of an Afghani taxi driver while in U.S. custody, the killing of Iraqi civilians by U.S. Marines in Haditha, Iraq, and a Bulgarian report on efforts to supplant poppy production with roses in Afghanistan.

Musical Winners

While war and the Middle East were popular topics, documentaries on other subjects caught the judges' attention as well, including Sundance Channel's eight-part series "Nimrod Nation," about a snowy town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, PBS' "Nova" dramatization of a trial over the teaching of intelligent design and a profile of jazz arranger and composer Billy Strayhorn, which aired on PBS' "Independent Lens."

On the radio side, recognition went solely to public radio productions, with six programs singled out, including a series about rockabilly and another featuring the insights of Michael Tilson Thomas, conductor of the San Francisco Symphony.

The weekly series "Speaking of Faith," which Mr. Newcomb said had been considered "over and over again" by the judges in past years, was honored for its report on the Persian poet Rumi.

Two of the radio honorees were local productions. "The Brian Lehrer Show," a two-decade-old two-hour daily call-in program

from New York's WNYC that swings from local to national news and prides itself on civil debate, was lauded as "community-building radio." Baltimore's Center for Emerging Media was honored for "Just Words," 55 four-minute documentary pieces of personal reflection on issues such as homelessness and youth violence.

Local Leaders

Overall, Mr. Newcomb said, it was a particularly strong year for local news reporting.

When four reports from Dallas-Fort Worth station WFAA-TV stood out, Mr. Newcomb said, the decision was made to combine the entries into a single award, so the station wouldn't have a monopoly. "They just have an incredible investigative reporting unit there," Mr. Newcomb noted.

A PBS series about contemporary art and another about American craft were recognized, as were two reality series, public television's "Design Squad" and, in what some thought was a surprise, Bravo's "Project Runway."

"What we say is that we recognize excellence on its own terms."

Horace Newcomb, director, Peabody Awards

"Project Runway" is "clearly different from Bob Woodruff's excellence," Mr. Newcomb said, but "what we say is that we recognize excellence on its own terms." The program, he said, offers a clear insight into the creative process. And, he added, "It's fun."

Not all the television reports have aired in the U.S. and some, like the Balkan News Corp.'s Afghanistan report, may never do so. Others haven't been released on DVD, so viewers who missed them may be out of luck. Mr. Newcomb said the Peabody Awards hopes someday to overcome rights issues and perhaps put the recognized work on a Web site so it is more widely accessible.

In this special report, *TelevisionWeek* profiles some of this year's Peabody-winning projects, with the emphasis on those most closely related to TV journalism. ■

FUNNY "The Colbert Report" offers "a sendup of politics and all that is bombastic and self-serving in cable news," according to the Peabody citation.



Hello Doggie, Busboy Productions and Spartina Productions

'THE COLBERT REPORT'

By Jarre Fees

Special to *TelevisionWeek*

Like "Nimrod Nation," another Peabody Award winner for 2007, "The Colbert Report" started as a series of commercials. But unlike that series—or any other series, for that matter—the ads were fake and the show didn't even exist. Once a few creative minds at Comedy Central decided to test the waters with a real program, however, American political satire did a backflip.

"The Colbert Report," according to the statement released by the Peabody Awards committee, is "a sendup of politics and all that is bombastic and self-serving in cable news." The group adds that host Stephen Colbert "has come into his own as one of electronic

media's sharpest satirists."

Allison Silverman, an executive producer along with Jon Stewart and Mr. Colbert (Dr. Colbert, if you count the honorary doctorate of fine arts he was awarded in 2006 by Knox College in Galesburg, Ill.; that title is now listed in the show's credits), admitted it can be "tricky" to make the show work five nights a week. "But what we have is Stephen Colbert," Ms. Silverman said, "and he can make anything funny."



ALLISON SILVERMAN
Co-exec producer, "Colbert"

A typical day on the show, Ms. Silverman said, begins with research and footage teams—"We're well-served by those guys"—who comb the news wires and the Web to see what has happened in the news over the last 24 hours. The producers rely heavily on the research staff, she said, noting "it

can get dangerous" if the producers should miss something important.

There's a 9:30 meeting with the writers, which breaks "when we feel like we have a take on things, usually around 11," Ms. Silverman said. "Then the writers go off to write and we meet with the rest of the staff to let the production and graphics people know what we need."

The producers and graphics designers start "producing and designing," she said, and "at 1 p.m. the scripts come in. Then we meet with everyone to say, 'All that stuff we told you this morning? It's gone. But we have another idea.'"

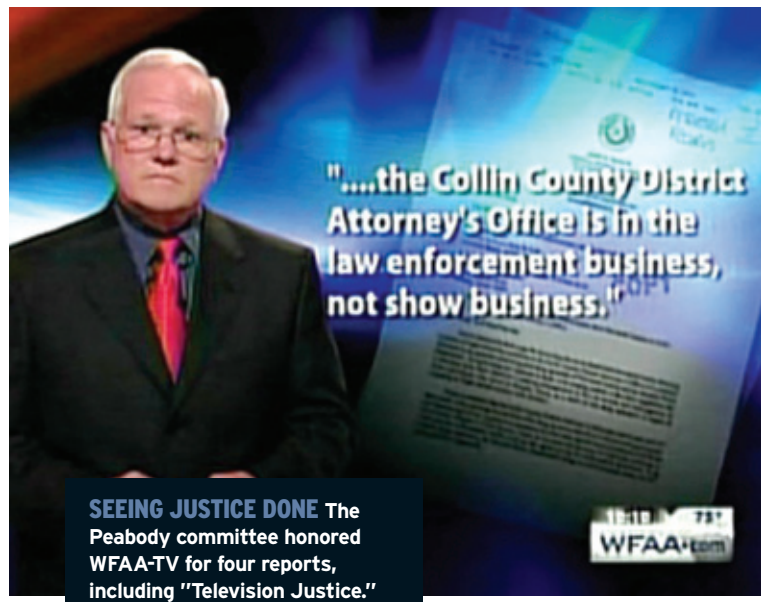
Ms. Silverman said she left "a secure job, a job I enjoyed, on 'Late Night With Conan O'Brien,' to do 'The Colbert Report.' Even if it was only 32 episodes," which was Comedy Central's original commitment, Ms. Silverman said, "I knew I had to do it. I felt wherever [Mr. Colbert] was leading it, it would be something good."

Mr. Colbert, who has described his fictitious counterpart as a "well-intentioned, poorly informed, high-status idiot," is himself known as a humanitarian, particularly after having adopted a "son," Stephen Jr.

That son is an American bald eagle bred for the wild, from whom the anchor is said to be estranged, although Ms. Silverman said there were reports the bird had recently returned to the U.S. Stephen Jr. is "a bit of a rebellious adolescent," she admitted, who prefers to spend his winters in Canada, much to the public chagrin of Mr. Colbert.

The show tapes at 7 p.m., Ms. Silverman said, with rewriting going on until the last minute. Then the staff goes home, and the next day they do the whole thing all over again.

In spite of the program's dead-on aim at political pundits, Ms. Silverman insisted "The Colbert Report" is not trying to change the world, or even affect American politics. Really, she said, "We're just trying to crack the staff up. If we can get them the stage manager to laugh, we've done our job." ■



SEEING JUSTICE DONE The Peabody committee honored WFAA-TV for four reports, including "Television Justice."

WTAE

Continued from Page 30

will give you a written response as to why they won't turn over public records. You can appeal and go to court. Instead, they sued us."

The legal staff of the three news organizations decided to pool their resources to fight the case. "We were victorious at every level in court, but PHEAA kept appealing to a higher and higher level," said Mr. Parsons. "When the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania turned down their request for an appeal, the Commonwealth Court awarded us attorney fees, which is unheard of in Pennsylvania."

When Mr. Parsons finally received the records he'd asked for, he quickly understood why PHEAA had gone to such lengths to protect them. The first batch of records, related to midlevel employees, revealed that they had bought kegs of beer and rented tuxedos with public funds. But the

second batch of records, on executives and board members, many of whom were legislators, was what really shocked the public.

"State lawmakers were treating themselves at expensive resorts, \$150 cigars, falconry lessons, lots of golf, lots of booze and spa treatments for their wives," he said. "The total amount on all these retreats over four to five years was almost \$1 million."

WTAE-TV did 20 stories on the topic. The PHEAA CEO was forced to resign, but no truly substantive changes took place.

What did happen was the beginning of a conversation to change Pennsylvania's open records law, which was passed in 1952.

"After this story ran, it pushed legislators to pass a new open records law that will go into effect in January 2009," Mr. Parsons said. "Under the old law, the presumption was that nothing was a public record. Under the new law, it's flipped around. Now, everything is a public record." ■

MTVU

Continued from Page 32

Half of Us site also has seen big increases in students connecting to its online screening tools.

MTV has already spent "millions and millions [of dollars] in terms of air time" on "Half of Us," Mr. Friedman said, and will continue to make that kind of commitment.

The testimonies of additional celebs are being solicited. The campaign has added a focus on returning Iraq war veterans, given the number suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome from their time there.

A new element, still in testing, is www.myMoodring.com, a Facebook.com widget that lets users tell others how they are feeling. More than 30,000 people are using it, Mr. Friedman said, and those who are reporting depression can choose to get messages that will link them back to the Half of Us resources. "It's our way of moving to where the audience is," Mr. Friedman said. ■



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