

TELEVISION

PHIL ROSENTHAL

Kennedy shows lack quality, not quantity



You know you've seen too many Kennedy documentaries, dramas, docudramas, dramamen-

taries and the like, when the sight of Jackie Kennedy stepping off a plane in that pink pillbox that doesn't send chills up your spine. And, as Jackie in NBC's "A Woman Named Jackie," Roma Downey's shrieking as husband John F. Kennedy (Stephen Collins) is shot in Dallas' Dealey Plaza probably won't even wake you up.

The Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis we meet in "A Woman Named Jackie," a three-part, six-hour endurance test that's scheduled for 9 p.m. Sunday through Tuesday on KNBC (Channel 4), is an eyewitness to history. She's not really a participant. As competent as Downey seems to be, we get absolutely no insight into the events her character has seen.

She watches her husband become the Democratic presidential nominee on television. She walks into a room as President Kennedy talks on the phone about what to do about the James Meredith situation. While her husband embarked on the momentous first 100 days of his administration, she tells a White House housekeeper she wants the bed sheets changed twice a day.

This Jackie worries about her family being shot — by photographers.

No, it's not terribly interesting, not at all affecting, and yet it's probably the most intriguing part of the miniseries. At least the Kennedys had an impact on our lives.

The first two hours deal primarily with the influences of her parents — played well by Wendy Hughes and William Devane, an old hand at these Kennedy series. The final two hours center on her relationship with Aristotle Onassis (Joss Ackland), which was handled earlier in the semi-fictional "The Greek Tycoon" and wasn't all that good, either.

In any case, it's not exactly the stuff of epic drama. The Kennedy saga is, but we've seen it so often that we've become numb to it. The whole point seems to be choreographed to move the familiar characters into familiar positions.

We know Jackie will get up and join Lyndon Johnson as he takes the oath of office aboard Air Force One, for example, because we've all seen the picture. We even know where the bloodstains are supposed to be.

Furthermore, the stories it tells that are not as well substantiated — JFK's regular mystery injections from a physician he called "Dr. Feelgood" and his long-alleged extramarital affair with

Marilyn Monroe (Eve Gordon) — are limited to the bland, implied naughtiness that NBC's lawyers felt would keep the network out of litigious danger.

Watching this, your mind will wander. You'll consider the potential for miniseries about untold Kennedy tales ("JFK Jr.: The Failed Bar Exams," "Palm Beach Memoirs") or later first ladies. And then you realize "A Woman Named Jackie" could have been worse.

It could have been "A Woman Named Nancy."

The horror, the horror: Martin Sheen, his star, has nearly dropped dead of a heart attack and "Apocalypse Now" director Francis Ford Coppola is distraught.

"If Marty dies," he yells at an assistant, fearful of what the bad publicity might mean to the epic that has come to dominate his life, "I want to hear everything's OK until I say Marty is dead!"

"Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse," which makes its debut at 10 p.m. Saturday on Showtime, is a fascinating look at the making of Coppola's epic Vietnam War film based on Joseph Conrad's novella "Heart of Darkness."

Director Fax Bahr has combined 16mm footage shot by Coppola's wife, Eleanor, and interviews with principals into a breathtaking 100-minute documentary about a mission and a movie out of control.

It all seems to be here. You've got Sheen so drunk he can't perform. There's Marlon Brando wanting to improvise his part. You've got a script that's out of control and a budget to match. And then there's a typhoon to level the sets. "My film isn't about Vietnam," Coppola says at one point. "My film is Vietnam. . . . We were in the jungle. There were too many of us. We had access to too much money, too much equipment. And, little by little, we went insane."

By the end of "Hearts of Darkness," you might not disagree. You won't want to miss it.

Changing channels: The new edition of HBO's "Influences" looks at how George Jones has in-



Roma Downey as Jackie Kennedy fails to portray convincing horror at the assassination of her husband, played by Stephen Collins.

fluenced Randy Travis.

■ Not that we haven't seen this idea a few times, but sports guy Gary Cruz looks at life in minor-league baseball among the players who are good enough to dream in "High Desert — High Hopes" at 9 p.m. Sunday on KCAL (Channel 9).

■ Real baseball fans won't want to miss HBO's rerun of "When It Was a Game," which features rare color footage from games of the '30s and '40s, at noon Saturday.

■ Glenda Jackson and Denholm Elliott star in the two-part adaptation of John Le Carré's "A Murder of Quality," the first half of which kicks off the 21st season of PBS' "Masterpiece Theatre" at 9 p.m. Sunday on KCET (Channel 28).

■ Michael Feinstein works his musical magic on pop songs of the '20s, '30s and '40s with Rosemary Clooney and Mercer Ellington, who conducts the Duke Ellington Orchestra, on the PBS special "Michael Feinstein & Friends" at 9 tonight on KCET (Channel 28).

■ In a cruel twist, CBS has decided to renew "P.S.I. Luv U" for the entire season. Fortunately, the

brain-dead Connie Sellecca-Greg Evigan series will be pre-empted by baseball this weekend.

■ Also pre-empted by baseball this weekend is the first-rate family series "Brooklyn Bridge," which CBS will flip-flop on its schedule with "Princesses." Beginning next week, "Brooklyn Bridge" will move to 8 p.m. Fridays, followed by "Princesses" at 8:30 p.m. on KCBS (Channel 2).

■ With Julie Moran going to ABC, the oddly named Willow Bay has been named Ahmad Rashad's co-host on NBC Sports'

THE FACTS

■ **The show:** "A Woman Named Jackie."
 ■ **When:** 9 p.m. Sunday through Tuesday.
 ■ **Channel:** KNBC (Channel 4).
 ■ **Starring:** Roma Downey, Stephen Collins, Josef Sommer, William Devane, Wendy Hughes, Joss Ackland.
 ■ **Our rating:** ★

■ **The show:** "Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse."
 ■ **When:** 10 p.m. Saturday (with various repeats).
 ■ **Channel:** Showtime.
 ■ **Our rating:** ★★ ★★
 ★★ — don't miss it ★★ — worth your while
 ★ — has its moments ★ — if you must ☹ — don't bother.

"NBA Inside Stuff," which returns for a second season Oct. 26. Bay's most recent credit is as co-host of a show on the Travel Channel. Impressed?

■ KLOS-FM (95.5) joy boys Mark Thompson and Brian Phelps take a stab at coaching football at Taft High School in Woodland Hills in a scrimmage against Canoga Park High School in this week's scheduled edition of their low-rated NBC series, "The Adventures of Mark & Brian," at 7 p.m. Sunday on KNBC (Channel 4).

■ Take it from someone who was somewhere last weekend where NBC's San Diego Chargers-Los Angeles Raiders telecast wasn't blacked out. Unsuspecting viewers should not have been subjected to Thompson and Phelps' attempt at football announcing as a stunt for a coming edition of their Sunday show.

■ Fun fact of the day for those of you who aren't Willow Bay fans: The New York Times reports Turner Broadcasting shares, which were below \$14 in late July when Ted Turner's Atlanta Braves were in third place, have risen to nearly \$18 now that the Braves are in the National League playoffs.

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