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TELEVISION

NEWS, PROGRAMMING AND PERSONALITIES

INSIDE TV / BY PETER JOHNSON

Many forecasters rain on country's parades

You don't need a local forecaster to know which way the wind blows, most Americans say.

Of 1,256 adults, 40% say they often make decisions based on weather forecasts that don't come true, according to a new Harris Poll. And 21% say they got angry in the previous month because they'd made plans using such forecasts.

But though a mere 27% say forecasts are reliable, most credit TV weather mavens for being real weather experts.

Experience and attitude about weather forecasts might depend on where you're coming from: Respondents in the South are more likely to call forecasts reliable; those in the Midwest are most likely to find them unreliable and to make plans based on wrong forecasts. Both Midwesterners and Easterners are most likely to have gotten steamed recently over an inaccurate forecast. And those in California? Mellowest, of course; they're much less likely to be upset by wrong forecasts than those in other regions. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3%.

By George Lange

POUNDSTONE: Having her sitcom canceled 'hurts.'

BUMMED: Paula Poundstone, whose comedy show was axed by ABC last week after only two outings, is understandably licking her wounds. "It hurts. It really does, for a variety of reasons. Sheer ego is one — and (the cancellation) was fairly public," Poundstone said Friday. But, she says, practicing a wee bit of spin control (though this happens to be true), it wasn't as if the show drew zillions of viewers who decided they hated her humor. Instead, nobody came to her party. "The ratings were just so low. That's all there was to it."

BRIEFLY: Ed Asner and Felicity Huffman will play father (retired race-car driver) and daughter (divorced, moves in with her three kids) in *Thunder Alley*, an ABC midseason replacement. ... *CBS This Morning* begins a weeklong series today called "Who's Watching You?" — all about the eavesdropping that's part of our lives. ... John Wayne Bobbitt — acquitted of raping his wife, Lorena, last week, talks to Nancy Glass on today's *American Journal* (check local listings). He says he forgives her — Lorena, that is — for chopping off his penis. ... Finally, on Friday's *CBS Reports — Who Killed JFK: The Final Chapter?* (9 p.m. ET/PT), anchor Dan Rather asks Walter Cronkite how he felt when he broke the news to the nation that President Kennedy was dead. Cronkite breaks down, then says, "Anchormen shouldn't cry."

Tonight's TV listings, 6D

The real Oswald, and a pale imitation

By this time next week, even the most ardent Kennedy-deifier will probably have said "enough" to the TV feeding frenzy marking the 30th anniversary of JFK's assassination.

Two two-hour CBS specials in prime time, a four-hour ABC miniseries, a TNT Larry King *Where Were You?* special and countless news features — all harking back to a shattering national tragedy brought home by TV, which has flogged it relentlessly ever since.

But first, the bad guy.

This week of remembrance begins with two looks at assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, and as

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MATT ROUSH

is so often the case, there's nothing like the real thing.

Much the lesser of the two is NBC's lurid docudrama with the preposterous title ***Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald*** **(★★, tonight, 9 ET/PT).** (An earlier, and better, name was *Marina's Story*, but NBC always likes to put "fatal" or "deadly" in its titles.)

If you're not paying attention — always the best way to watch NBC movies — you could mistake this for any one of the network's ubiquitous domestic-tragedy movies of the week. Once it lapses into flashback mode, *Fatal Deception* reduces itself to the tale of a foreign bride whose secretive husband lashes out whenever she dares to ask what gives.

Of course, the stakes are higher this time around. This husband isn't just up to no good, he's about to achieve lasting infamy. The good news is that as Russian-born Marina, who must raise their daughters in the shadow of his awful act, Helena Bonham Carter gives an eloquently brooding performance of repressed guilt.

Bland Frank Whaley is nowhere near as effective as the enigmatic Lee Harvey, but that could be a function of the murky script, which poses vague conspiracy theories but is so limited to Marina's mournful perspective, you hardly know what to think.

Anyone interested in the Oswald mystique is advised to wait a night and get absorbed in the exhaustive three-hour *Frontline* report ***Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?*** **(★★★½, PBS, 9 p.m. ET/PT, times may vary).** Marina didn't participate, but her biographer is on hand, among other journalists and experts, to shed light on this most nagging of mysteries.

Frontline plans a news conference today in Washington, D.C., to trumpet new evidence it has unearthed in this investigative biography of "a man who chose his own politics, invented his own secret life and made himself into an assassin."

The Oswald that emerges is a dangerous and delusional political dilettante who left a perplexing and often contradictory trail of allegiances and connections that have fueled a legion of conspiracy scenarios. This account leaves little doubt, however, that he pulled the trigger in the Texas Book Depository that fateful Nov. 22.

But was he a patsy, as he claimed after his arrest? Or was this the last desperate act of a frustrated man aching to be noticed? His motives remain unclear, but in its balanced and thorough approach, *Frontline* again gives us much provocative food for thought.

By Alice S. Hall, NBC

HISTORY MAKERS: Frank Whaley and Helena Bonham Carter are the troubled Oswalds in NBC's 'Fatal Deception.'

Bonham Carter, in sync with Marina

By Tracey Wong Briggs
USA TODAY

Helena Bonham Carter wasn't even born when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and much of what she knew about the shooting and Lee Harvey Oswald came from the movie *JFK*.

"I certainly didn't know of the existence of Marina, nor of her children," says the British actress, 27.

Best known for the lush Merchant-Ivory period movies *A Room With a View* and *Howards End*, Bonham Carter put away those corsets and took a crash course on the Dallas shooting before starring in NBC's *Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald*, airing tonight.

Told in flashbacks and flash forwards, the story opens with his widow as a Russian immigrant, adrift and ostracized in Dallas with two young daughters and limited English skills.

"I think she's been given a pretty hard time. She was an innocent sort of bystander," Bonham Carter says. A pariah to those who thought her husband acted alone, and a disappointment to conspiracy theorists, Marina took it from all sides, the actress says.

"Hopefully this shows how much pressure she was under, the bewildered state in which she testified" before the Warren Commission, when she said she thought her husband had acted alone.

But the actress doesn't have any answers. "I could only perceive it from Marina's point of view," she says. "No one knows, but I suspect he didn't do it on his own. He wasn't equipped to do it on his own and the basic motivation wasn't there."

Bonham Carter watched hours of interviews before meeting Marina two days before filming started. "But I didn't want to ask questions — I thought that would be too rude and crude."

Nonetheless, she picked up on what she calls Marina Oswald Porter's strength and zest for life. The actress focused on letting her portrayal flow from the accent. "It's like a mask, really, or a new pair of shoes. If you get the accent right, the other characteristics come."

Bonham Carter and Frank Whaley portray the Oswalds as a couple whose marriage is eroding from cultural differences, economic stress and her lack of trust in his secret activities.

"They obviously had a tempestuous relationship," she says. "They might have connected in such a way that they set each other off."

Filming took place over three weeks in Moscow and Texas. Though she's used to the more leisurely pace of films, "I loved it. I was exhilarated at the speed. You didn't have time to think; that's often a good thing for acting."

In the movie, Marina dreads November, and this year will probably be worse with the 30th anniversary of the shooting. "I think it's a bit macabre they're showing it in November," Bonham Carter says. "She must be so tired of it. I would be sick of it by now, to have your whole life determined by this one event."

AP

NO DOUBT: PBS' 'Frontline' portrays Lee Harvey Oswald as complex and delusional, capable of killing President Kennedy.