

DAILY VARIETY

ABC, STONE BROKERING SERIES DEAL

BY RICHARD HUFF

NEW YORK—ABC is in the advanced stages of developing a short-term series from director Oliver Stone—part of the network's plan to provide programming that will rise above the rest of the pack, according to entertainment president Bob Iger.

Speaking before the monthly gathering of the International Radio & Television Society here along with his counterparts at CBS, NBC and Fox Broadcasting Co., Iger said that there is so much production going on the air that it is important to create programming that will stand out, if only for a short time.

Creating limited series—six or eight hours cut into one-hour blocks in a fixed position on the schedule—would give the networks such a boost, Iger said, citing the ill-fated series "Twin Peaks" as a perfect example of the theory.

Had "Twin Peaks" ended after Laura Palmer's killer was revealed, it would have fit into ABC's new mold. Instead, the series was stretched for another year and creatively the program could not maintain viewer interest.

In addition, to the Stone project, ABC has inked a deal with novelist Judith Krantz (see story, page 3) that would result in similar event-type miniseries programming.

Agreeing with Iger, CBS' Jeff Sagansky said that while his web has drawn criticism for airing too many specials, it has no intention

of cutting back.

Citing the programming methods of some who held his position before, Sagansky said he hopes to have a special airing every month and reiterated that big miniseries would be back on the network next year, noting that the expensive form is more viable due to co-production opportunities.

The entertainment heads didn't agree, however, on what level of change is needed with the development and pilot process and the costs involved.

"The traditional process just hasn't worked very well" in terms of results, said NBC's Warren Littlefield. Instead, he said, the network was doing more back-door pilots and films. "We must change the craziness of the development process."

Iger disagreed, saying the pilot is a very useful tool and that by doing a pilot, a program can be changed for the better before it goes on air.

While calling the development season one of the most insane economic processes, Fox's Peter Chernin agreed with Iger that it served its purpose; however, he added that it's one area where the network could substantially cut its budget.