

# C.B.S. Puts Off Papp's 'Sticks and Bones'

The Columbia Broadcasting System yesterday postponed indefinitely the telecast scheduled for Friday night of Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival production of "Sticks and Bones," a bitter drama about a blinded Vietnam veteran's homecoming.

The action, was taken, according to Robert D. Wood, president of the C. B.S. television network, on the ground that presentation of the Tony Award-winning play "at this time might be unnecessarily abrasive to the feelings of mil-

lions of Americans whose lives or attention are at the moment emotionally dominated by the returning P. O. W.'s and other veterans who have suffered the ravages of war."

Mr. Papp branded the postponement "a cowardly cop-out, a rotten affront to freedom of speech and a whittling away at the First Amendment." He vowed that he would not honor the terms of his four-year contract with C.B.S., signed last August, which calls for the production of 11 more plays.

### Affiliates' Refusal

Although there had been rumors Monday that C. B. S. was considering dropping "Sticks and Bones" because of the refusal of many of its affiliate stations to carry the program, the network's decision was apparently not made until midday yesterday.

Mr. Papp said that in the morning, "we were still working on the final cut, and agreed to drop a couple of goddamns and a line or two the program-practices people found objectionable." At lunchtime, he said, Mr. Wood called him to "break the shameful news."

Mr. Wood detailed his decision to postpone in a telegram sent to affiliate stations and refused to comment further. In the telegram he noted that "Sticks and Bones," based on David Robe's play, had been shown to the affiliates twice last week via closed-circuit.

"As you know," he said, "the play deals in compelling allegorical terms with the callous reception of an American veteran returning blinded from war. Most of us agree that the production is a serious, concerned, and powerful tragedy of some of the uglier aspects of human nature as revealed in a highly imaginative contemporary story."

He then said that showing the drama Friday might be "unnecessarily abrasive to the feelings of millions of Americans."

Mr. Wood said that "never

has there been a greater or more serious and responsible sense of concern expressed by our affiliates about a projected program and the timing of its broadcast."

The network has concluded, he said, that "Sticks and Bones" should be postponed and rescheduled "when the context of its showing will be less distressing and its possible application to actual events less immediate."

A spokesman for C.B.S. said that the reaction of the affiliate stations to the previews had been "vigorous" and that "at last count, and the number is climbing rapidly, 69 of the 184 C.B.S. affiliates that take the Friday network feed had defected—refused to carry the program."

### Executives Attend

It was learned that the C.B.S. affiliate-relations department had spent the last several days trying to persuade stations to carry the program.

As affiliate protests increased executives at top levels in

C.B.S.; Inc., including William S. Paley, the chairman, and Dr. Frank Stanton, vice chairman, who do not normally look at programs in advance, attended screenings of "Sticks and Bones"

Mr. Wood made the final decision to postpone, a spokesman said. In place of "sticks and Bones," C.B.S. will show a movie, "The Cincinnati Kid," Friday night.

Mr. Papp said that the decision to show the special program Friday from 9 to 11 P.M. was made Jan. 24, and that C.B.S. had done so "because they were so high on its quality they wanted it to qualify for the Emmy awards for this year. The names of "Sticks and Bones" artists have already been submitted for the awards, he said.

### \$7-Million Over 4 Years

Mr. Papp had previously delivered only one of the 13 productions called for in his contract with C.B.S.—"Much Ado About Nothing," shown Jan. 2. His over-all agreement with C.B.S. calls for an expenditure of more than \$7-million over four years.

"It is frightening that this monster corporation, C.B.S., had decided to put its tail between its legs and back away from this program because some affiliates find it too strong stuff," Mr. Papp said. "I told Bob Wood that even if every affiliate defected, he had an obligation to put the show on the air. Who is Wood, who is C.B.S., to decide the mood of the country?"

"They're accepting control by their affiliates, denying millions the right to see an important work of art. This is implicitly a First Amendment issue."

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