

## MOST COMPLETE TV COVERAGE

# Pop culture is 'Alive' & well

## PBS series offers insights into mood of country

**I**F YOU'RE a fan of "Alive From Off Center," recently renamed "Alive TV," a series that begins a new run on PBS tonight at 10, you'll need to do some detective work to catch it locally.

It will not appear on WNET/Ch. 13 in New York until 11:30 Saturday night, or on WNYC/Ch. 31 until July 4, 10 p.m. As for the rest of the country, the schedule is equally as confusing, so check local listings.

The theme for the season is "America Discovers Some of Itself" — which plays on two events, the election and the Columbus Quincentenary. From viewing the first three episodes of the eight-week series, it promises to offer fresh new insights into American culture.



**KAY  
GARDELLA**

The three editions I saw are cleverly and entertainingly produced. The first, "Punch and Judy Get Divorced," the work of David Gordon, a delightful, colorfully costumed outing, uses the puppet show to play on the age-old battle of the sexes theme. Two people are cast in each role: Mary Louise Wilson and Alice Playten as Judy, and Michael Butler and Stephen Hanan as Punch. Then there's Toby the Dog, whose bone is almost as big as he is (Ain Gordon and Scott Cunningham), and the baby, with an oversized bottle (Michael Cobb and Bobo Lewis).

Sets are fluid and unstructured, so the cast of 14 characters, including the clown who introduces the action, the Devil, and Polly, the other woman, can move about freely. So imaginative and colorful are the costumes that the cast looks like it stepped through Alice's looking glass into Wonderland.

The production unfolds in short, punchy rhymes, using the language of men and women, including such tired old clichés, as "it's a dog's life," "it's a man's world," "woman's work is never done," "laugh and the world laughs with you." Punctuating them are asides of advice by the clowns and the Devil.

For openers, we see Punch and Judy as Adam and Eve, who, after taking the fatal bite of the apple, wind up in the small suburban house where their troubles begin.

"What's all the fuss? So we moved," says Judy. "It's smaller, but I can fix it up. I'm entitled to a few mistakes you know. After all, there's no job description. I'm the first girl, I'm the first woman, the first wife. I'm the first mother, the first grandmother, and I'm the first mother-in-law."

She's also the first woman to get a divorce after many battles of words, tears, recriminations and the entrance of "pretty, pouty, sexy Polly." Meantime, we hear the plans and dreams of the babies,



**OH, BABIES:** Michael Cobb (l.) and Bobo Lewis

as they talk about growing up and becoming the next generation's Punch and Judy. Like all good TV, it ends with a cliffhanger: Will Judy take Punch back?

Collaborating with Gordon, who envisioned Punch and Judy as the archetype of all men and women, was Mark Pellington. Music chosen was by the late Carl Stalling. Alyce Dissette is the executive producer of "Alive TV," which earns its name with the first three outings.