

'Alive TV' will feature recast Punch, Judy

An odd little show will pop up to-night at 11:30 on WFYI 20.

It's the eighth-season premiere of "Alive TV," the PBS series that used to be called "Alive from Off Center."

That show spotlighted emerging film makers, writers, dancers and musicians in eight cutting-edge shows each season. The title change reflects the aging of the series. "How can you be old and new at the same time?" asks executive producer Alyce Dissette.

The show still will feature a variety of artists' work, but this season they'll all touch on the theme of "America discovers some of itself." All of the shows will have something to do with work that "scratches the surface of American culture, revealing the origins and status of present-day political and social realities."

So, to tonight's show, titled "Punch & Judy Get Divorced."

Yes, it's styled after the old puppet show, where two-faced puppets keep bopping each other with rubber truncheons. But the way it has recast the age-old wars of men and women, incorporating today's disillusion, is spectacular.

You may have trouble getting used to it. First of all, each of the characters is played by two people, sometimes speaking in unison, sometimes in sing-song, sometimes in opposition. Then there's the almost classical poetry of the dialogue, or singing, or whatever you want to call it.

But the longer you watch the more you realize how these absurd-looking characters — Punch, Judy, Polly, the Baby, the Dog, the Clown, the Devil — come to represent all the husbands, wives, other women; pets and babies of mankind. And how the story of what happens when Punch leaves Judy for Polly represents a little history of the world, rather like Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "The Skin of Our Teeth."

The program was written by Obie Award-winning writer-director David Gordon, who also co-directed with Mark



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Pellington. The music comes from classic Warner Bros. cartoons.

The cast is so uniformly good that it's hard to believe it's a pickup company from Gordon's days as artist in residence at University of California, Los Angeles and in rehearsals in New York. I'd like to think that this was a repertory company we could expect to see more of.

In a curious bit of programming, Channel 20 delayed "Punch & Judy Get Divorced" from its national premiere last Thursday to tonight. The station will then follow the opening show with the series' second program, "MTV: The Reagan Years," at midnight.

This is a shameless promotion for the music video network; now in its 11th year, done in MTV style by MTV producers. Their thesis: "You had to be alive then to see what an amazing thing MTV was in the '80s," and: "I think it was the best thing Reagan ever did."

Watch it if you want to understand what this world your kids love so much is really saying to them.

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"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is, There Is Liberty." —II Cor. 3:17

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