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NICE-TOLD 'TALES'

'Alive' packs Punch

REVIEW

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YOU want weird? Strange? Off center? Step right up.

Two daring anthology series — one on HBO, the other on PBS — unveil their season premieres tomorrow night with programs featuring sex, violence and wit, plus puppets of both the inhuman and human varieties.

The inhuman puppet is the Crypt Keeper, the skeletal punster who serves as the bare-bones host of "Tales From the Crypt."

As always, the newest season of "Crypt" kicks off with a trilogy, showcasing both the series' wide range of moods and its ability to attract strong talent.

"None But the Lonely Heart" stars Treat Williams as a murderous gigolo, and Frances Sternhagen ("Cheers," "Golden Years") as his intended victim.

Sugar Ray Leonard has a bit part, Henry Gibson all but steals the show as a stuffy butler, and another canny cameo is turned in by Tom Hanks, who also serves as the episode's director.

Williams and Sternhagen are very funny together, and "Heart" is played



SUMMER SERIES: HBO's "Tales from the Crypt" kicks off a new season with Sonia Braga in "This'll Kill Ya." And PBS's "Alive TV" premieres with "Punch & Judy Get Divorced," featuring Michael Butler and Stephen Henan (right).

"Tales From the Crypt"

Tomorrow night at 10:30 on HBO
★★★½

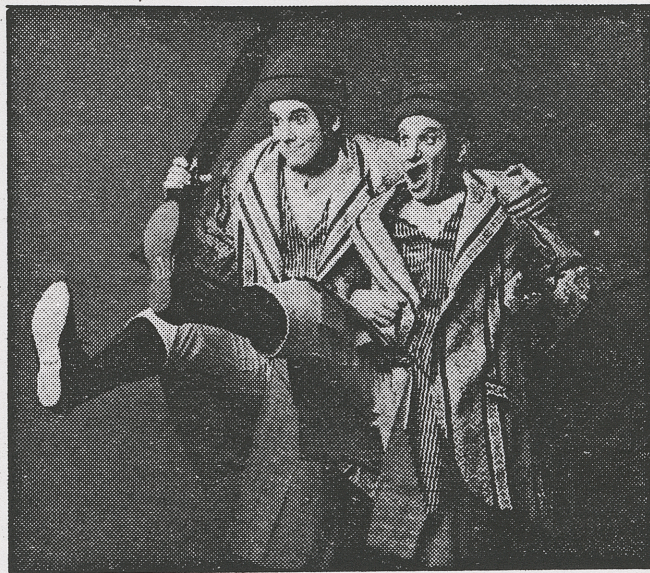
largely for laughs.

"This'll Kill Ya," on the other hand, is the sexiest installment.

It features a sizzling love scene — well, not love, exactly — between Sonia Braga and Dylan McDermott, who play sometimes adversarial colleagues at a medical research institute. Robert Longo directs.

And finally, "On a Dead Man's Chest," in which director William Friedkin and writer Larry Wilson tackle one of the most memorable stories from the classic EC Comics series, emerges as one of the grimmest, grisliest, spookiest "Crypt" TV shows yet.

Tia Carrere of the "Wayne's World" movie plays a woman whose love of one rocker (Paul Hipp) threatens to break up the band, until the lead singer



(Yul Vasquez of "Mambo Kings") decides to get a tattoo that might help.

Supporting roles in this one include Heavy D as the tattoo artist and Gregg Allman as a very Gregg Allmanish character.

Even more than before, "Tales From the Crypt" is aimed at mature audiences — and, to those viewers who know what to expect, it more than delivers.

After a dizzying and disconcerting start, so does "Punch & Judy Get Divorced," the season opener of "Alive TV" — which used to be known as "Alive From Off Center."

Writer David Gordon, who co-directed with Mark Pellington, came up with a goofy idea that, after a while, really gels.

It dresses up a cast of funny actors (including Alice Playten and Michael Butler) as two sets of Punches, Judys, Bobos and others

(including some racily attired Pollys), and lets them loose in a set that, like the photographic style, is a little like "Pee-Wee's Playhouse."

While they're tempting and teasing and hitting one another, these human Punch and Judy puppets deliver rapid-fire punch lines and observations about courtship, marriage,

"Alive TV"

Tomorrow night, 11:30, WNET/Ch. 13
★★★½

ennui, infidelity and lots of other stuff.

Adam and Eve are recast as "the first Punch and Judy" in a staged flashback, and somehow, to no small measure because of the music by "Looney Tunes" composer Carl Stalling, all of it works.

It, too, though, is an "adult" version of something originally intended for children.