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ACTION IN COLOR TV

Happenings of the Past Week Indicate Speedup in Tinted Video Timetable

By JACK GOULD

COLOR television, which has had its ups and downs for over ten years, took a major step forward last week. The latest color TV showing by the Radio Corporation of America was much the best tinted video yet seen and an exciting augury of the home television of the future.

All indications are that the demonstration is going to have the effect of materially speeding up the whole timetable for color and that previous estimates of its arrival must be revised substantially.

The consensus of a number of well-informed industry figures is that after three or four months of field testing the R. C. A. color will go before the Federal Communications Commission for approval. If there is substantial advance agreement on technical matters, the F. C. C. might move quickly enough to authorize the new color before this year is out.

David Sarnoff, chairman of the board of R. C. A., has stated that within nine months after F. C. C. authorization his concern could could turn out about 2,000 color receiving tubes a month for its own use and a like number every month for other set manufacturers. That would mean color set production of the order of 50,000 a year by the end of next year or early 1955.

Costs

The initial color TV sets probably will sell for figures roughly comparable to the earliest black-and-white receivers, perhaps more. Here again the chances are that the initial color TV sets will be placed in public auditoriums, clubs and stores prior to the general availability of receivers for the average consumer. If the history of black and white is duplicated, this could mean the stampede to color would be on.

Adding to the stimulus to color undoubtedly will be the uniquely strong position of R.C.A. in the broadcasting field. Through its subsidiary, the National Broadcasting Company, it is already in a position to offer a substantial amount of color programming on a regular schedule and this is bound to attract a great deal of attention.

Once N.B.C. goes color, the other networks will have scant alternative but to make the same move to maintain their position.

The important difference between this boom in color and the others that have gone before is that now the element of time is all in favor of color's introduction. Set sales in some markets have almost reached the saturation point and a new novelty would be a shot in the arm. In addition, the R.C.A. color technically can be brought forth without disrupting present black and white service, a condition that also did not prevail before.

It is no secret that the Columbia Broadcasting System is realistically reappraising the color TV situation and that its key officials

were impressed with the R. C. A. showing, even though they naturally are allowing for possible hitches or unforeseen difficulties. This could lead to a degree of unanimity that will make events move very much faster than many now think.

One educated guess, not of R. C. A. origin, was that Christmas in 1955 would be "a color television Christmas" in many retail stores. That seems like a thoroughly reasonable conclusion at the moment.

The R. C. A. demonstration was shown in Princeton, N. J., for the benefit of the members of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, which has been investigating the current status of color TV. Representative Charles A. Wolverton, Republican of New Jersey, chairman of the committee, made no secret of his enthusiasm over the show.

This observer, who has sat through many color TV demonstrations over the years, believes that the hues shown in Princeton are really the first to be ready for public acceptance. On a set with a 14-inch screen in particular the colors were often extraordinarily beautiful and easy to watch, every bit as easy as the best Technicolor.

The tones had depth and delicate gradation and stayed in place. Perhaps the most apt comparison between the color seen last week and color seen previously was the difference between a "live" show in black and white and a kinescope of the same program. The improvement was that substantial.

What color can do was vividly illustrated in a dance scene. In black and white the dancers could be barely seen when they were at the back of the stage. In color their costumes were lovely and had meaning for the eye.

Pastel shadings were exquisitely blended together in another scene. In comparison with black and white, the effect was somewhat like making a maiden visit to the stage show at the Radio City Music Hall.

Real TV Oomph

Especially startling was what color TV is going to mean to the ladies. The addition of flesh tones, the color of the hair, the red of the lipstick, the hue of the evening gown and a soft background setting at long last makes a lady come to life on the screen. She no longer will be a pale illusion in monochrome, for which the heavens be praised. It's high time TV acquired a bit of real oomph. Color will do it.

Looking at color makes it abundantly clear that a long training period for personnel will be necessary. Part of the success of the R. C. A. showing could be traced to the practice which the N. B. C. production staff has had at the Colonial Theatre.

If nothing else, this is reason enough for prompt expansion of experimental color so that the dif-

ficulties of the transition can be minimized in so far as the viewing audience is concerned. Only learning by doing will make good color programs and good color sets.

The R. C. A. color employs the technical standards developed by the National Television System Committee, an all-industry group, which worked together to help bring last week's show to reality. Many as yet unsung individual engineers and companies have made contributions that helped to bring full color to the screen. This same spirit of cooperation should now be continued and expanded to the end that the public will have color TV as soon as possible. That day no longer is far off.