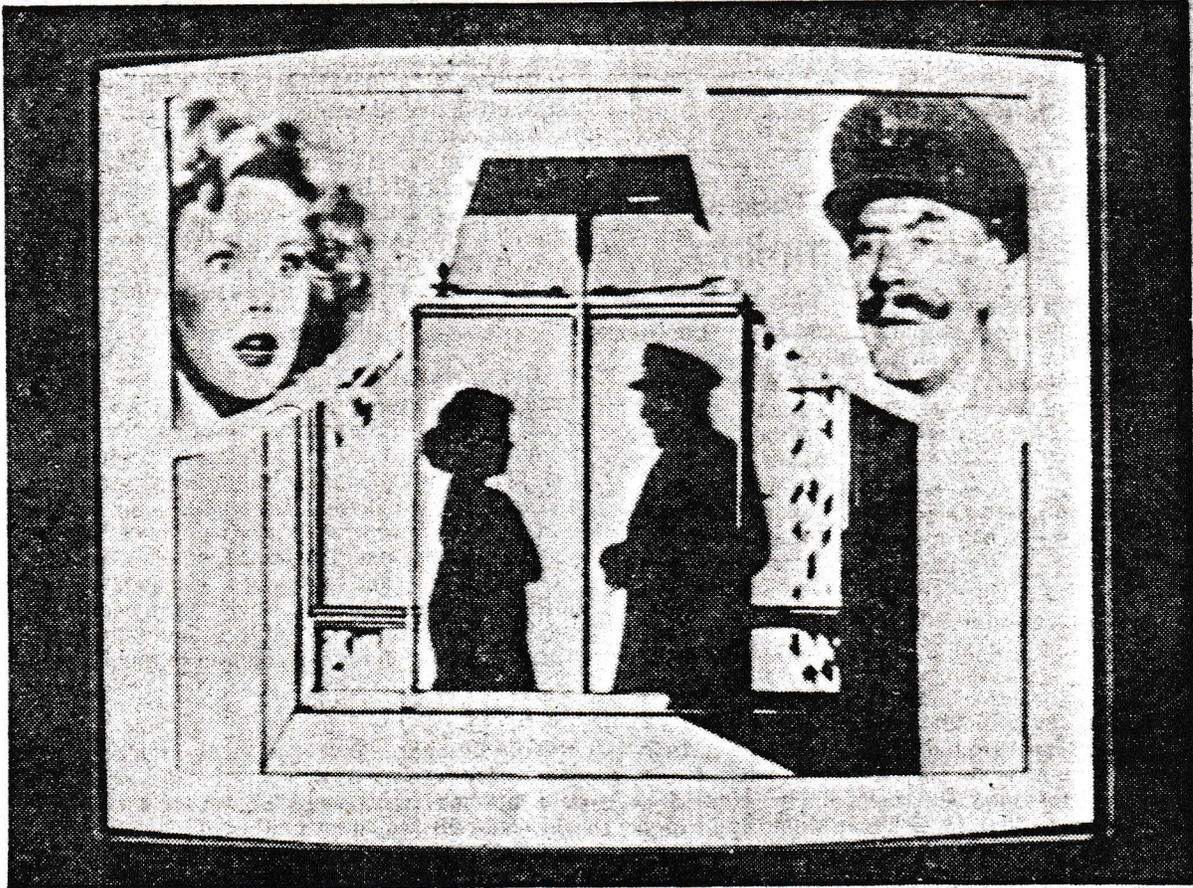


**ART**



A scene from Andrew Gosling's "Jane," which re-creates a World War II British cartoon with live actors.

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## Something for everyone at AFI's video festival

By Hunter Drohojowska

**F**or the first time, Los Angeles is the sole host to the American Film Institute's National Video Festival, which runs through Sunday. For the last two years, the event has begun at AFI's base in Washington, D.C., with a step-sister festival here.

Unlike last year, the festival eschews a specific theme so the offerings in tapes, panels and presentations run far and wide; a sampling of hors d'oeuvres in art and technology. This decision, and to a great extent the menu of the festival itself, was made by Jacqueline Kain, the festival's associate director. She felt that a specific theme would be limiting. "You're excluding work. You leave out good tapes or try and force the work to fit a theme. So why not celebrate all the diversity in video that's around today," she said.

The diversity runs from the highlights of Ernie Koyacs, who noticeably influenced contemporary video, to Robert Wilson's bizarre epic work made for television, from the most experimental techniques to straight documentary.

A new emphasis in this year's festival is the in-person presentations of new videotapes by their directors, writers or producers. Among those who'll be at the festival are composer Robert Ashley, introducing his television opera "Perfect Lives," and artists Dara Birnbaum, Bill Viola, Branda Miller and Max Almy discussing their new works. Producer Susan Dowling will present the haunting tape of Meredith Monk's performance "Turtle Dreams (Waltz)," and Lois Bianchi will talk about producing Robert Wilson's "Stations."

An unmistakable characteristic of these and many other tapes in the festival is the absence of conventional dialogue, which has been supplanted by music. For the most part, the scores are original "new-music" compositions. The trend would seem to have been influenced by the growth of music videos, not so much in the style of the music but in the acceptance, even celebration, of the pure music video.

The narrative tapes are often equally innovative in their visual techniques. For example, a compelling murder drama, "The Bad Sister" by experimental filmmakers Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollin, is enhanced by techniques that amplify the fantasy aspects. Andrew Gosling's "Jane," a work for television, re-creates a World War II British cartoon strip using a complicated chroma key process to render the comic backgrounds for the

live actors. Even more elaborate chroma key effects animate the backgrounds of the dancers in "Tango Glaciale" by the Italian theater group Falso Movimento.

In the more technically conservative tradition of the documentary, there are some moving samples such as Michelle Parkerson's "Gotta Make this Journey," something of a portrait of the gospel singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock. "Oblique Strategist," a video portrait of composer Brian Eno by Edin Velez, incorporates a random element in the editing process that was borrowed from Eno himself.

Four days of watching television does not make much of a festival, however. As festival director James Hindman observed, "Fifty percent of the festival happens in the halls. Beyond seeing the tapes, it's about people getting together and schmoozing." Among the related events at the festival are four panel discussions, two of which are on the interactive video disc. One is moderated by producer-director Sheldon Renan, bringing together executives from MCA, RCA, Atari and Sony, manufacturers of video disc hardware, to discuss the present and future applications of interactive technology. The other, organized by Virgil Grillo, director of the Rocky Mountain Film Center, focuses on the video disc's creative design by artists and scientists. There is also a panel on the practical craft aspect of the music video, moderated by Jo Bergman, director of TV and video for Warner Bros. Records. The fourth deals with "breakout" programs — those which depart from conventions — for mainstream television audiences. Media critic Ron Powers will moderate a heady panel on program designs that blur the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction. Among the participants are producer Norman Lear; Don Ohlmeyer, executive producer of the controversial "Special Bulletin," a simulated news report on an incident of nuclear terrorism; and Alan Landsberg, who will premiere his TV movie "Adam," the true story of a boy abducted from his parents.

The subtext of the festival approaches the history of video as a medium, with tributes to Ernie Kovacs, the public television laboratories of KQED, WNET and WGBH, and the history of the television commercial, as well as a look at the preservation of historic video. In such an immediate medium it may seem hard to conceive of a history, but if any common denominator reigns throughout the festival, it is familiarity with the evolution of TV. Most of the creators have grown up with the television. The way it has shaped their perspectives molds their productions. The medium is, after all, the message.

(For tickets and a schedule of the programs, call AFI in Hollywood at 856-7600.)