

'Night Live' still thriving after 12 years

From Associated Press reports

There are scandals in the government, and celebrities are being indiscreet. What a time to launch an upstart, late-night show and a group of unknown but talented performers and writers.

The show isn't new. It's 12 years old. But the flow of the universe being what it is, "Saturday Night Live" is taking off again, with its original producer, Lorne Michaels, back home and happy at the helm.

Michaels, a former comedy writer, launched the show in 1975, and with it, the careers of Chevy Chase, Dan Aykroyd, Jane Curtin, Bill Murray, Laraine Newman and the late John Belushi.

Michaels came back to the show in 1985 after a 5-year absence with an all-new cast. The critics hated it. "Saturday Night Dead," they said.

"We had to sort of scramble to put that season together, and we survived it, and we came out with, I think, the nucleus of a new group both in writers and in cast," Michaels said in a recent interview in his office at NBC. "This year the additions have added both a stability and a certain kind of brilliance."

Jon Lovitz, Nora Dunn and Dennis Miller remained from last year. This year, Michaels added Dana Carvey, Jan Hooks, Victoria Jackson, Phil Hartman, A. Whitney Brown and Devin Nealon. And this year, Michaels has "Iran-gate," Gary Hart and Jim Bakker, to name a few targets of the show's satire.

Carvey has been the standout newcomer in the public's mind with his popular "Church Chat."

After five years, when the original cast's contracts were up, Michaels left to pursue other projects, including the underrated and short-lived "The New Show," a prime-time satirical review that featured many of the "SCTV" players.

Except for the year before Michaels returned, when Dick Ebersole put together the cast that included Billy Crystal, Martin Short and Christopher Guest. "Saturday Night Live" was spiritless. And the Ebersole season, despite some innovative sketch humor, didn't have the same dangerous, on-edge quality of the old show.

Michaels has brought back a "full-swing-at-the-ball" feeling, thanks to an enthusiastic cast that rivals the original for sheer talent.

NBC has renewed the show for another year. The cast will remain intact.



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