

With Betamax, 'living-room' film fests possible

By JIMMY WILKES
DTH Contributor

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to sit back in your den, prop up your feet, and watch "Chinatown" and "The Maltese Falcon" back to back, on a Saturday night full of Charles Bronson reruns? Only a dream you say. Not so. In fact, you could even have a Humphrey Bogart, Bette Davis, or Cary Grant film festival right there in your own living room.

How is all this possible? Simply by spending about \$1,100 in a local electronics store. For \$1,000 you would buy Sony's new Betamax recorder. The remaining \$100 would be spent for video cassettes.

Betamax is a device similar to audio tape recorders. The major difference lies in what can be taped. With the Betamax,

any television show which you enjoy enough to view again or those shows which are on while you're occupied elsewhere, can be taped right from your television set at home for future viewing. After a show has been taped, it is rewound just like audio tape, and then punched up when you're ready to view

it. The Betamax is so clever, in fact, that it can even tape one show off a station, while you simultaneously watch another.

However, the Betamax has begun to create some very sticky problems. Presently, MCA/Universal and Walt Disney Studios are both suing Sony Corporation for copyright infringement. MCA and Disney argue that an individual who tapes one of their movies, and then replays it, is violating their copyright protection.

For major motion picture studios this is no laughing matter. Over the years attendance figures at local movie theatres has dropped drastically, forcing many well-known studios out of business. A large number of studio executives blamed the drop on television's evergrowing popularity with the American public.

Because more and more people were staying home for their nightly entertainment, many movie studios

began producing films for television. This was one way in which they could try and keep their empty lots from total decay. Now, they contend that devices similar to Betamax will further erode their once powerful grip on our movie-viewing habits, by allowing anyone to reproduce and distribute studio-made films.

Not only questions concerning copyright infringement, but other queries concerning television recorders are bound to come up, such as: how will these devices affect the traditional network rating process; will advertisers be charged higher rates because of the multiple viewing possibility for each commercial spot, and who will regulate what can be taped and then sold to someone else (will there be television tape shops with all the popular shows in stock?). These issues and many more are bound to arise before television tape recorders become part of the American way of life.



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