

# Networks beat bushes, bag a pair of Partridges

By Lisa de Moraes

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Because there just are no more great works of fiction, absolutely no more interesting true stories and not a single Hollywood writer with a fresh idea in his head, the poor broadcast networks are forced to double up on TV movies and miniseries this coming season.

Yes, indeed. Not one, but two long-form projects are in the works about the Partridge family. Two networks have projects about Jesus, and two have competing rock-and-roll movies.

CBS was first to announce its Jesus program, a four-hour miniseries. NBC followed with an announcement that it had green-lighted a two-hour Jesus movie. But while CBS' mini is to air in May, NBC's is fast-tracked to air in mid-November — leading to speculation in Hollywood that the peacock network rushed the project to quash viewer interest in CBS'.

Asked about the two movies during a recent TV critics tour in Pasadena, Calif., NBC West Coast president Scott Sassa, who appeared several days after CBS network topper Leslie Moonves, insisted that his network started the Jesus-movie trend.

"Did Les tell you he invented the Bible?" he snapped.

Undaunted, Moonves is quoted in a recent issue of *Newsweek* as saying, "Our Jesus is better than their Jesus."

In all fairness, it's plausible that the two networks coincidentally pursued the projects, what with the end of the millennium little more than a year off, not to mention CBS' success last season with its *Joan of Arc* miniseries and NBC's with its *Noah's Ark* miniseries.

But the Partridge family is another matter entirely. NBC announced its movie first, but it had no director, no script, no writer;

what it had was a deal with Partridge heartthrob David Cassidy. Meanwhile, ABC had Partridge movie plans of its own, including a signed director, a finished script, music rights and a production start date. The only thing it hadn't done was make an announcement. So it was upstaged — leading to speculation that NBC had rushed to quash a competing network's movie.

NBC's movies and miniseries division chief, Lindy DeKoven, says she has been interested in doing a project about Cassidy since his early '90s book, *C'mon Get Happy: Fear and Loathing on the Partridge Family Bus*.

ABC's project, meanwhile, is based on a Sony script (Sony owns the Partridge family franchise). That script has been around for years and initially got a nibble from the Fox network, which later thought better of the idea or we might have had three Partridge projects airing this coming season — which would have signaled the end of the world, not just the millennium.

Neither net has announced an air date, but ABC's movie starts shooting next week, while NBC still has no finished script, so it's likely ABC will beat it to the air. (Both networks had very successful rock-based long-form projects this past season: NBC's *The 60's* (22.5 million viewers) and *The Temptations* (22.1 million) and ABC's *The Sonny and Cher Story* (18 million).)

But, wait, there's more.

CBS earlier this year announced that it was going to do a four-hour, rock-and-roll miniseries, *Shake, Rattle and Roll*. Some time later, NBC announced it would broadcast a two-hour movie, *Mr. Rock 'n' Roll: The Alan Freed Story*. CBS has scheduled its rock mini for Nov. 7 and 10. NBC's is airing in mid-October, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*.



**David Cassidy**