

TELEVISION REVIEW

Civics Splashed With Celebrities, Fashion and a Techno Beat

By ALESSANDRA STANLEY

The new fall season on television bristles with radical change. The best-paid stars of the ABC series "The Practice" were all fired. Aaron Sorkin left "The West Wing" on NBC, leaving his White House in the hands of new writers determined to ramp up the sex and violence.

And Crosswalks, New York City's cable television station, is now called NYC TV and has gone Hollywood.

Suddenly, the numbingly prosaic municipal channel looks and sounds like a civic-minded MTV. There are dizzying graphics, celebrity cameos, rock concerts, fashion shows and jauntily abbreviated news-you-can-use updates. "City Drive Live," a look at the rush hours through the lenses of Department of Transportation traffic surveillance cameras, has pulsing music and a blurred, artsy appearance. (It is not always entirely clear whether the graphic "Gowanus at Hamilton" refers to an ex-



Maryam Basir, a host on "City Drive Live" on NYC TV, offers tips on inexpensive fun.

pressway or the title of an Abstract Expressionist painting.)

Even a stately display of black-and-white photographs of the Brooklyn Bridge under construction on the new series "From the

Archives" is punctuated by bracing techno-groove music. NYC TV publicists proudly describe the funky slide show as "audio-visual wallpaper."

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, who says he never watches television but gave his blessing to the makeover, certainly has no reason to feel ashamed. The city channel was always a mayoral boosterism machine, but NYC TV's new shows are well packaged and imaginatively produced.

NYC TV Channel 74 is the flagship of the city's five cable channels. (NYC TV 71, for example, provides Off-Track Betting information.) It has not gotten rid of its core material — gavel-to-gavel coverage of City Council hearings and mayoral news conferences.

Instead, it has sifted through its vast archives and impenetrable city agency files. For instance, an advertisement for the new feature "City Classics," which consists of reruns of vintage news conferences and

awards ceremonies, is a shot of an aging Johnny Weissmuller performing his trademark Tarzan yell at City Hall in the 1970's. The graphic reads: "It's a jungle in here."

"\$9.99" is a perky advice show on how to enjoy the city's offerings for less than \$10 a day. A look at free fun in Midtown, presented by Maryam Basir, stretched a little — she recommended a free tour of Grand Central Terminal, which seemed mainly to consist of a zany guide standing at a track and impersonating a commuter. The real draw in the show might have been Grande Harvest Wine, a shop opposite Track 17 that holds frequent free wine tastings.

Viewers of "\$9.99" may know that the Whitney Museum of American Art offers free admission to its gallery of contemporary art at 120 Park Avenue, at 42nd Street, but many New Yorkers may not know about the Jan Krugier Gallery at 41 East 57th

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Street, which does not charge visitors who want to see its collection of 19th- and 20th-century masters, including Chagall and Picasso.

The oddest series in the new fall lineup on NYC TV is "City Classics." Some old film clips have obvious appeal — City Hall appearances by Muhammad Ali and Alfred Hitch-

cock. But the material is presented as is, without commentary or updates.

On Friday, for example, "City Classics" will present a 1966 documentary made by Mayor John V. Lindsay's office: an account of the All Sports Youth Festival, a competition that brought hundreds of public school children, most of them black, to New York City in August of that year. The context is glaringly obvi-

ous, yet unmentioned: the event came only two long, hot summers after race riots in Harlem, and one summer after the 1965 Watts riot in Los Angeles, in which more than 30 people died and more than 1,000 were injured. Mayor Lindsay, in khakis and a short-sleeved plaid shirt, is showcased saluting the benefits of physical exercise in a black-and-white documentary that was narrated like an old-fashioned newsreel.

There were track meets, a trip to Yankee Stadium and a banquet provided by Old London Foods.

In some ways, the film cries out for commentary and updates — even for the recollections of those who were once young athletes from the poor areas of Boston, Washington and Brooklyn. But regular television, from PBS to the History Channel, is crammed with knowing looks at American social history.

NYC TV provides a different service — a chance to look at old material as it was seen then, without the benefit of hindsight or interpretive editing.

It is not a bad use of the city's cable station.