

The Union Leader, Sunday, February 22, 2004

FAN PLANTS SEED FOR FAMED DETECTIVE'S TV REBIRTH

By Roger Amsden, Sunday News Correspondent



GILFORD -- A fan who has campaigned to have the A&E Television Network resurrect the Nero Wolfe series says she hopes uproar brought about by the Super Bowl half-time show will provide a new spark for quality television. "It's about time television went back to quality shows that are well-done," says Deb Montague, who has read (and re-read) all 74 Rex Stout novels featuring the corpulent crime solver since the series first aired four years ago. "Why not uplift the audience? One of the great things about the Nero Wolfe shows was that they didn't dumb down the material. The dialogue was almost exactly the way it was written in the books and everyone who acted in that series had to read the books first.

The Nero Wolfe series ran for two seasons on A&E and earned high marks from the dedicated viewers it attracted. The network, citing high production costs, dropped the series before the start of the 2002-2003 season, prompting outrage from fans who have been conducting a massive letter writing and e-mail campaign ever since then to get it back on the air. Montague is doing her bit about spreading the word by setting up a display of Nero Wolfe cover art at the Gilford Library. The exhibit will be on display for the rest of the month. The series featured Maury Chaykin as Nero Wolfe and Timothy Hutton as Archie Goodwin, Wolfe's partner in

crime-solving. Each episode had a similar structure in which Wolfe would, without leaving his New York brownstone, where he grew orchids and enjoyed gourmet meals, assemble the suspects in his office and disclose the identity of the murderer. Quality television Montague says the series was simply the best television she'd ever seen, with every scene and detail from the books meticulously recreated and first-rate acting that made characters come to life.

"The sets are marvelous with details such as rugs, orchids, cookbooks and desk paraphernalia. When you watch the show you feel as if you've walked into Nero Wolfe's brownstone for a consultation," says Montague, who notes the music is also always appropriate and well done.

She became such a fan that she joined "The Wolfe Pack," a group dedicated to Rex Stout's novels, and has attended its conventions in New York City as well as touring the author's home in Danbury, Conn.

Stout, who died in 1975, introduced Nero Wolfe to the world in *Fer-De-Lance* (1934), which appeared first as a serial in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He wrote at least one Wolfe novel every year after that.

Montague said the show proved popular with young people, many of whom joined in chat room discussions about the series and even convinced high school English teachers to include the books in classes.

"It's a shame that something as good as this couldn't continue. Do we really need one more degrading reality show? Who knows? If they bring it back maybe we'll see that there is a big audience out there for quality shows," says Montague.

She seems some movement toward that, noting that starting on Saturday, March 6, A&E will start reruns of the series on its' Biography Channel.

"Maybe our nagging is starting to pay off," says Montague, who notes that in June DVDs of the show's second season will be released.

She said DVDs from the first season are hugely popular and hopes as the Nero Wolfe shows are seen by more people it will lead to a growing demand for better television and get her favorite series up and running again.

The Contents

- A copy of Kevin Gordon's portrait of Wolfe with Wolfe's "merely a genius quote" at the bottom
- A spray of yellow and white silk orchids
- A Remmers beer bottle
- A bio of Rex Stout
- A Print of the Wolfe Pack Home Page (editor: WOW)
- Darby's floor plan of Wolfe's office
- A Zeck Trilogy shelf with the Trilogy, Viking's *ABV*, *TSC*, *ITBF*. the picture of the open door to the Brownstone from the Pack site with a brief description from McAleer about the Zeck trilogy, and scans of *More Deaths Than One* (with the beefcake Archie), *The Second Confession's* Brit publication showing Archie's scratched face, *Even In The Best Families*
- A shelf of "Companions" -- McAleer, Darby, Baring-Gould, Corsage, and Van Dover with a blurb from Van Dover's re-issue
- Framed scans of several of the lurid paperbacks including *MBTB*, *Triple Jeopardy* (I love to hate that monkey!), *CFO*, *TMW*, *Trouble in Triplicate*, *3 Doors*, *Red Box*, *OMDB*, *4 to Go*
- Framed scans of hardcovers including the Brit *Death of a Dude* and *Family Affair*, also, *TBM*, *LoFm*, *Black Orchids*, *NQDE*, *FDL*
- A scan of the *Too Many Women* cover from "The Montreal Standard", 1948
- A brief description of Archie and Wolfe

- A list of Wolfe web sites
- **A shelf for "Wolfe On The Air"**
 - the Season One DVD set
 - Scans of Wolfe on Italian TV
 - a poster for the LoFM movie
 - a scan of the 1980's series
 - pics from the 2001-2002 Nero Wolfe tv series
 - excerpts from reviews of the Season One DVDs
 - the Emmy Nominations
 - VHS tapes - *The Doorbell Rang and Death of A Doxy*