

# Film Roman on syndie march

'Simpsons' producer launches syndication division with daily action block

By Joe Schlosser

Just as the majority of independent syndication studios are selling out, Hollywood production company Film Roman is checking in.

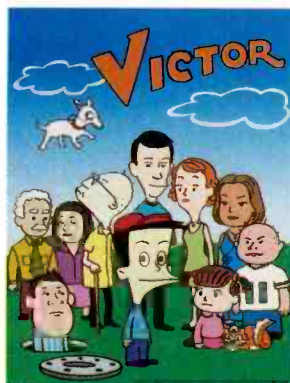
The production arm behind Fox's *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill* is launching a syndication division with an ambitious debut effort.

Film Roman executives have unveiled plans for a \$50 million programming block aimed at young adults, which incorporates two live-action series and what it bills as the first, first-run animated series designed for that demo. The company has produced short pilots for all three programs and is gearing up for a domestic sales push that will start later this month.

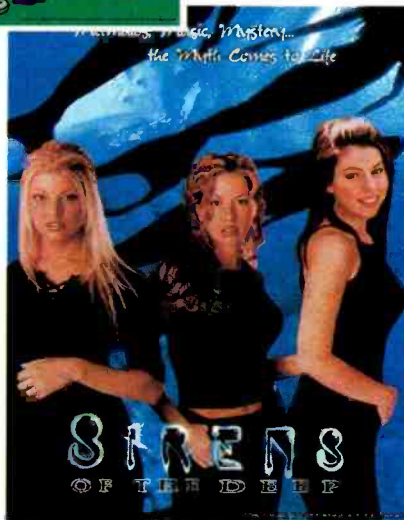
Max Degree TV, the hour daily block set to debut in fall 2000, also has a number of major Hollywood names behind it. Steve Tisch, who produced *Forrest Gump* and *Risky Business*, is set to co-produce one of the two live-action series, entitled *Mission Extreme*. The other, *Sirens of the Deep*, will include special effects from Steve Wang, the Hollywood special effects maven behind such films as *Godzilla* and *Men in Black*. And Wes Archer, the director and lead animator on both *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*, is signed to pave the way for the animated series *Victor*.

Max Degree TV is designed for viewers 12-34 and is being sold on a barter basis for early fringe-time periods, Film Roman executives say. The two live-action series (40 episodes per season at \$500,000 per episode) will air during the weekday block and the animated *Victor* (22 episodes per season at \$450,000 per episode) will be sold under the Max Degree TV banner for weekend play.

Max Degree TV is the product of new Film Roman television programming President Mark Lieber, who pitched the idea to Film Roman brass shortly after arriving at the studio six



Wes Archer, lead animator of 'The Simpsons,' brings his innovative 'view-mation' technique to 'Victor' (l). 'Sirens of the Deep' follows the underwater adventures of three attractive singers who also happen to be mermaids.



months ago.

Lieber, who co-created Saban's domestic television division and formerly worked for PolyGram Domestic Television, will head up Film Roman's

in-house domestic distribution efforts. Film Roman is also looking to sell the programming block overseas and studio executives say this is the first of more offerings to come on both the syndication and cable programming fronts.

"Having been in the syndication marketplace for so many years, I felt that the stations have been underserved for a long time.... We wanted to come out with first-class product, and we think we've got it."

Lieber says MTV and The WB were a big inspiration for Max Degree TV. He says the young adult population has not had anything to crow about in early fringe-time periods for some time.

Both live-action shows include young adults in lead roles, with sexy, high-tech effects and lots of action. *Mission Extreme* takes a handful of extreme sports athletes and transforms them into undercover detectives fighting international espionage. The series will feature in-line skating, skateboarding and a number of other sports. *Sirens of the Deep* is a fantasy adventure starring three young female singers who are also mermaids. They lead a secret underwater life fighting creatures from an ancient world.

*Victor* is the story of a boy who believes that he can talk to aliens. The series is produced in Archer's innovative "view-mation" animation style. Lieber describes the series as broadcast television's equivalent of *South Park*. ■

## Scoreless match scores big time

The Women's World Cup championship on ABC on Saturday (July 10) between the U.S. and China was the most-watched soccer contest ever on U.S. television, pulling in an estimated 40 million viewers, ABC said. The game (from 3:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.) averaged a 13.3 rating/32 share in the 44 Nielsen metered markets and an 11.4 rating/31 share in the nationals. With the U.S. team involved, the Women's World Cup final also proved more popular than the NBA finals, which averaged an 11.3 rating over a five-game series last month on NBC. By comparison, the men's World Cup final last year (which did not feature the U.S. team) averaged a 6.9 in the overnights, a little more than half the rating of Saturday's game, where the U.S. beat China in a down-to-the-wire defensive struggle that was decided on the final penalty kick after a scoreless game that included two over-times. The previous U.S. ratings record for a televised soccer game was the 1994 Men's World Cup Final, which averaged a 12.8 rating.

—Steve McClellan