

TV Sunday

12/24/99
The Whole World Is Watching

By MICHAEL GILTZ

If the lights go out on New Year's Eve, it may have nothing to do with computers.

The power grids may simply fail under the burden of so many people — all over the world — watching TV at the same moment.

Join hands, chant your favorite mantra, feel the burn. We are about to take part in the greatest communal event in recorded history.

We're all going to watch TV at the same time.

The most watched television event in history was once the moon landing. Then it was — by some accounts — "Who Shot J.R.?"

Later it was the O.J. Simpson verdict.

After next weekend, the most watched television event in history will be the massive coverage of Y2K — the first sunrise, the first birth, the first ATM failure and every other millennial event TV crews can capture on videotape.

Literally billions of people will watch some (or all?) of the three days of coverage starting Friday morning and running — if that is the right word — through Saturday night.

Bringing that sometimes exhilarating, sometimes tendentious mix of news and entertainment ("Yes, Papua, New Guinea, has JUST hit midnight!") is the most ambitious undertaking in TV history.

ABC and PBS are the most zealous, with round-the-clock coverage from all over the world. ABC says it's been planning this event for 10 years; PBS for three.

But every TV station around the world — from local affiliates in Indiana to TV Asahi in Japan — will put every available reporter on the streets to grab whatever the magic moment offers.

Camera crews will be flown to the South Pole so PBS can watch how the new millennium may effect the penguins.

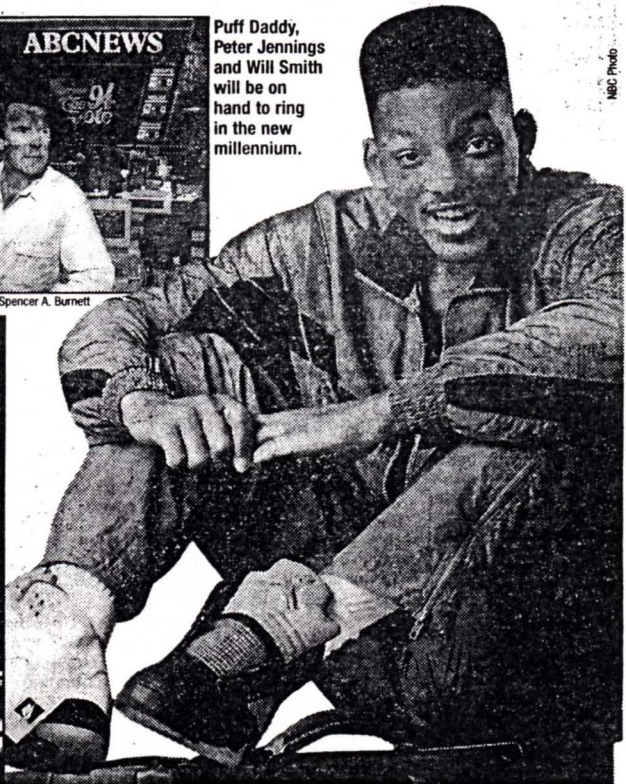
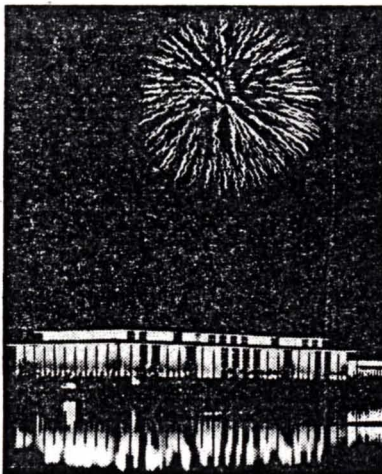
Cameras will be rolling on a microscopic island in the South Pacific, Kiribati, where the BBC says the first sunrise will occur. (Competing news organizations have declared Chatham, a lonely piece of New Zealand, the official starting line for the millen-

Your Ultimate Viewers Guide to Y2K Day



Puff Daddy, Peter Jennings and Will Smith will be on hand to ring in the new millennium.

New York Post: Spencer A. Burnett



NBC Photo

nium.) At the pyramids in Cairo, composer Jean-Michel Jarre will perform his New Age music for a new age.

And 70 camera crews will be stationed at a maternity wards throughout New Zealand in hopes of glimpsing the first official baby of the new era. (Repeat that scene at practically every hospital in every town around the world since everyone

else will also want to coo over their local tyke for 2000.)

How many camera crews will be roaming the world? Count how many there are and you'll have your answer. Satellite feeds will bounce back and forth in an unprecedented sharing of live coverage. ONCE TV in Mexico, SABC in South Africa, and the CBC in Canada are in the mix, along with "Puff Daddy

Easter Island, and any other spot on the globe you can name.

The coverage will make the landing at Normandy seem like a sale at Loehmann's.

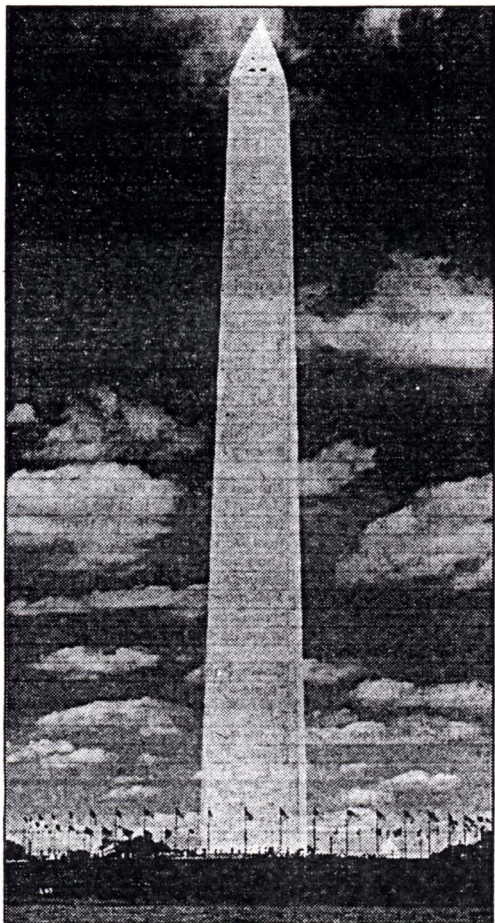
The live feed from Kiribati is a remarkable technical challenge in and of itself: the BBC is lugging in two and a half tons of equipment (including 10 generators and a mobile satellite earth station) to broadcast from a country that doesn't have television.

Surely the Kiribadians will be the only people with an excuse for missing the TV hoopla.

ABC is putting to work almost every employee in its stable — with Peter Jennings himself on air for some 26 hours straight.

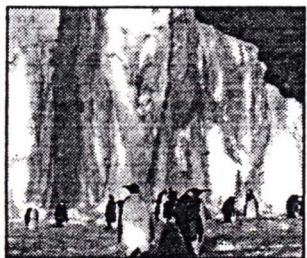
CBS is broadcasting America's Millennium: A

TV Sunday

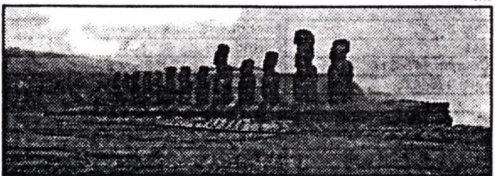


Washington Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

Millennial TV action will include updates from the Y2K briefing room in D.C., penguins at play at the South Pole and scenes from Easter Island.



CNS



CNS

Washington D.C. from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. It's hosted by Will Smith (who cannily called his latest album "Willennium") and features a short film by Steven Spielberg celebrating the American century.

Every network will feature news updates from the Y2K briefing room in D.C. — the government's attempt to give everyone

squelch any wild rumors. Reporters will camp out at the FAA, just in case planes really do begin tumbling out of the sky. Fox will even have someone on hand at Roswell, New Mexico. (You never know.)

And you can be certain if just one ATM machine fails to spit out \$100 on demand at 12:01 a.m. on New Year's Day, that's

The last Elvis sighting of the millennium ... and other really important stuff

TV is ready to cover Y2K meltdowns, riots in the streets and even the Second Coming.

But unlike the rollover from 1999 to 2000, networks can't really count on any of those excitingly newsworthy events actually taking place.

So, just to be safe, they've lined up proven ratings grabbers: musical superstars, marathons of classic TV shows, and of course Dick Clark in Times Square for ABC's "Rockin' New Year's Eve."

Here are some of the other highlights channel surfers can catch during the three-day fest.

— Jay Leno may be ahead in the ratings, but it's David Letterman who's being treated like a VIP this year.

Leno's "Tonight Show" is reduced to just his monologue and a sketch before NBC cuts back to Times Square and well-known funny man Tom Brokaw.

Letterman, on the other hand, gets his own lavish, two-hour primetime special.

—The cleverest marathon idea has to go to the Discovery Channel, which is hosting round-the-clock specials devoted to bugs — but not the Y2K kind, just the squishy, there-are-a-lot-more-of-them-than-us kind.

Other familiar marathon standbys include "Andy Griffith" on TBS, "Twilight Zone" on Sci-Fi and the Three Stooges on AMC.

— MTV's reckless young audience apparently has no fear: Lucky contest winners will jump on a "Fly 2K" plane to jet over to

Cairo, Paris, Rome and London when their parents are nervously avoiding airline travel like the plague. MTV will also host an eight-hour Times Square bash from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m., featuring Puff Daddy, Bush, Blink 182 and others.

—Nickelodeon's even younger audience is being treated more thoughtfully: They'll watch a commercial-free 24-hour documentary with kids all over the world discussing their hopes for the new millennium.

—A similarly weighty tone will pop up on Pax (with its quietly religious tone perfect for focusing on the spiritual celebrations in Rome and elsewhere) and PBS (where composer Tan Dun's "2000 Today — A World Symphony for the Millennium" serves as the official theme song).

—The History Channel is a safe haven for the pop-star-weary. It will broadcast the "Mega Millennium Marathon," 37 hours of episodes from series like "The Century: America's Time" and "The Times Capsule."

—Anyone who can't wait for new episodes of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" should tune in to the Game Show Network: It's focusing on the last day of the century by rebroadcasting the final episodes of shows like "Double Dare," "Super Password" and "Card Sharks."

—Finally, there's certain to be at least one Elvis sighting: He'll be on TCM, swiveling his hips through flicks like "Jailhouse Rock" and "Viva Las Vegas!"

—Michael Giltz

