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Networks Unveil Slew of Latino Efforts

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By Darcel Rockett **FOX NEWS**

PASADENA, Calif. — This past year, the NAACP and other minority groups were up in arms over what they called a lack of diversity on the television screen. But in the wake of boycott battles and advertising threats, one group has pulled ahead this coming fall TV season.



Showtime

Resurrection Blvd. debuted on Showtime in June entertainment world.

At this year's annual summer tour of the Television Critics Association in Pasadena, it seemed Latinos have the ayes and the eyes for upcoming programming.

Showtime's *Resurrection Blvd.*, a drama about a Los Angeles Latino family, debuted in June. CBS heralds the arrival of the first annual *Latin Grammy Awards* Sept. 15. Now, cable innovator HBO is hopping on the Latin bandwagon that began rolling through the music industry when Ricky Martin shook his bon-bon at the 1999 Grammys and made a larger audience aware of what they were missing in the Latino

HBO will launch its own separate Latino channel mid-September. Described as an evolution of sorts for the popular cable channel, the all Spanish-speaking version is geared toward the 11 percent of bilingual subscribers who seek original programming, foreign films, documentaries, and boxing — something that HBO Español (regular programming dubbed in Spanish) and HBO Olé (the Latin America-only outlet) don't provide.

"HBO has been on the cutting edge of getting things done," said Andy Garcia. "I think they recognize there's a great market. People are starving for information and product; and they're just being hip enough to say we'll be the ones to produce it."

While no programming promises have been made yet, a source at HBO says this eighth addition to the seven HBO themed-channels does promise to be around for awhile; in other words, it's not a just a knee-jerk response to a trend. The latin TV boom is also surfacing elsewhere on the dial:

* Nickelodeon unveiled several new programs with strong Latino components, including *Dora the Explorer*, an animated interactive adventure featuring a seven-year-old bilingual Latina girl who lives inside a computer; and *Taina*, a live-action series that chronicles the life of an ordinary Latina teen trying to start a singing career.

* *The Brothers Garcia*, also on Nickelodeon, is the first English language sitcom with an all-Latino cast and creative team (it's in the same vein as *The Wonder Years*, but John Leguizamo does the



narration).

* HBO has produced *For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story*, a biographical drama about the jazz trumpet player who fled Castro's Cuba.



HBO

HBO's *For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story*

* Latina TV star Kiki Melendez will have her own syndicated talk show, targeted to air beginning in the fall 2001.

* Jay Leno's production company has inked a deal with comedian Mexican American Willie Barcena for a sitcom vehicle.

* The Latin Grammys will air on CBS Sept. 15, and NBC will air the *Hispanic Heritage Awards* Sept. 9.

* Home Shopping en Español debuted this year, as did Fox Sports en Español.

"There's almost like a magic two percent rule," said Dr. Harry Pachon, president of The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute in Claremont, CA. "Less than two percent of the producers and two percent of the actors on TV are Latino; less than two percent of the executives are Latino, so really, change has to be massive. Things like HBO Latino are a good first step."



FOX

The PJs is one of the few all-black shows airing outside a black programming block happen and then when it happened, it exploded. So we're still waiting for that to happen to us."

Television may be taking those first steps, but one of the complaints raised in the earlier debates about TV diversity is that many black shows currently run in blocks separate from other programming (e.g. the WB's *Steve Harvey*, *Jamie Foxx*, *For Your Love* and UPN's *Moesha*, *The Parkers*, and the new fall show produced by Kelsey Grammer, *Girlfriends*.) Shows airing outside these blocks, such as Fox's *The PJs* and CBS' *City of Angels*, have suffered near-cancellations.

"I don't know what needs to happen," said *Angels* executive producer, Steven Bochco. "The thing that you learn after years in this business is television isn't medicine. You can't make people watch because it's good for you. You have to do good work, then they'll find you."

"I don't think we need a channel to become popular," said Maria Conchita Alonso, star of TBS' *High Noon*. "We just need to be allowed. It took a while for the black actors to make it

Triple TV threat Ian Gomez agrees. "Until everyone can be in the same show, there needs to be: 'Oh look, it's just as good as this is over here,'" said the star of the WB's *Felicity*, ABC's *Norm* and *Drew Carey Show*. "So it may not be the most ideal situation at the moment, but it's working towards that."

Darcel Rockett is an entertainment writer and TV critic at iFUSE.com.