

Bravo Channel Adds Dimension in South County

■ **Cable:** The station, which specializes in presentations of opera, film, jazz, theater, dance and more, marks its arrival with the shooting of 'ArtsBreak' at the Laguna Art Museum.

By MARY HELEN BERG
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

LAGUNA BEACH—Under the hot glare of television camera lights, Charles Desmarais, director of the Laguna Art Museum, dabbed perspiration from his upper lip.

"Where's the person with the powder?" he joked. The camera zoomed in. Desmarais was on.

Bravo, cable's cultural channel, landed in Laguna Beach last weekend to shoot a segment for "ArtsBreak," the network's weekly news show focusing on local arts across the country.

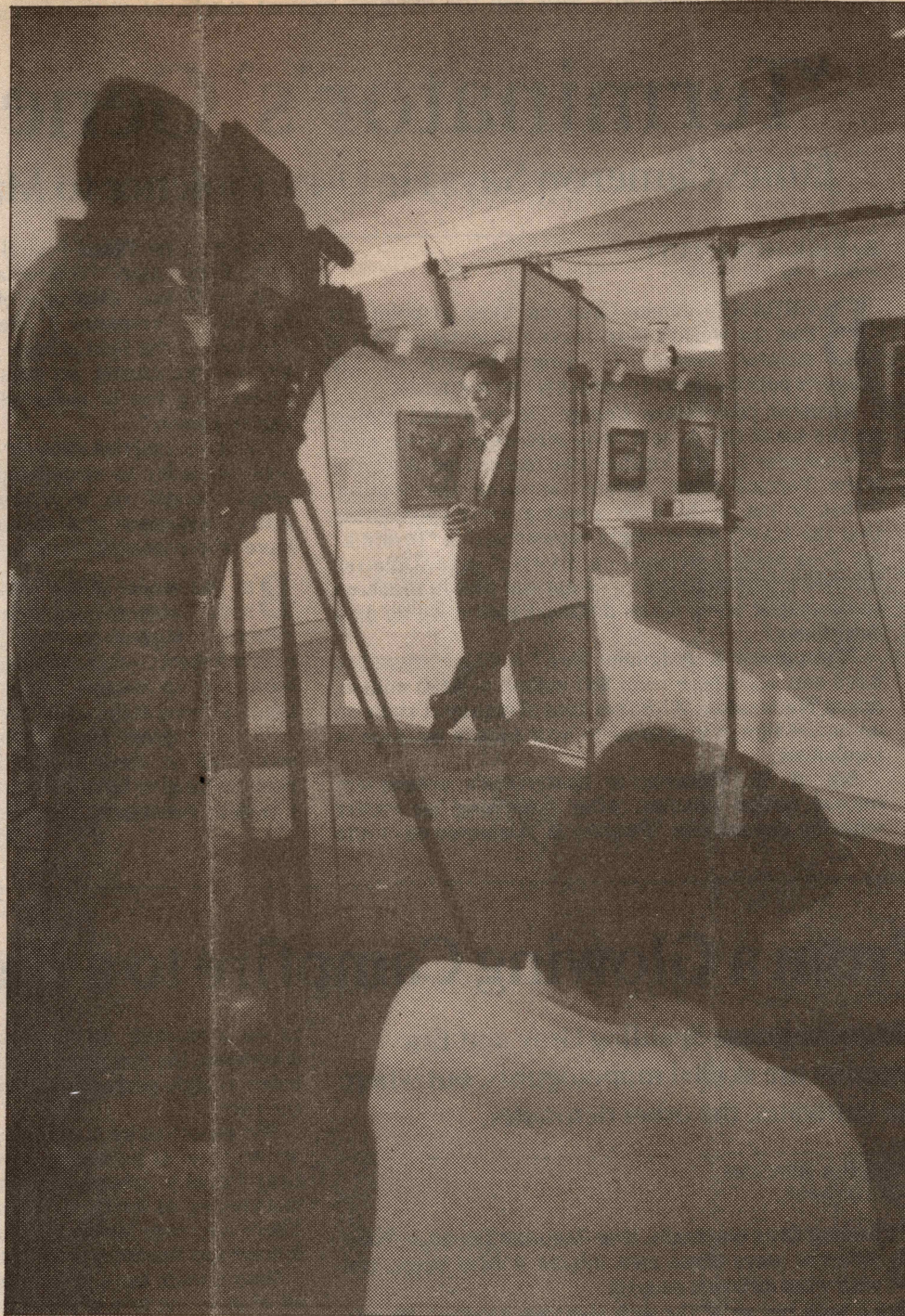
The shoot announced Bravo's arrival Monday on Dimension Cable services, a Times-Mirror Co. subsidiary serving 122,594 subscribers in South County. Bravo serves 6 million subscribers on 400 cable systems nationwide and specializes in independent film, opera and orchestra performances, jazz, theater and dance presentations. Dimension customers will receive Bravo as part of basic cable service at no additional cost.

"ArtsBreak," hosted by actor Jerry O'Neil, often covers the markets where Bravo is launching its service. The producers also try to visit towns that have little-known but lively arts communities, said producer Amy Briamonte.

"It's a way for us to say, 'Rah! Rah!' and sort of celebrate people around the country who are making art and who are committed to the arts," Briamonte said.

'ArtsBreak,' which uses performance footage and interviews, airs every Sunday at 4 p.m. and repeats throughout Bravo's programming. The eight- to 10-minute Laguna Beach segment will probably premiere this fall and air up to 20 times.

The program should help dispel any perception of Orange County as a cultural wasteland, Briamonte said.



MARC MARTIN / For The Times

Charles Desmarais, director of the Laguna Art Museum, during "ArtsBreak" filming.

"In some ways the perception back East is that out West things are all new and just now springing up all over," Briamonte said. "But Laguna's art history dates back to the

early 1900s. . . . Laguna is really a Western city that has an eye on the past and an eye on the future."

In the past year, "ArtsBreak" has turned

its camera on 18 cities, from Scottsdale, Ariz., to Indianapolis—communities not renowned for their historical commitment to the arts.

But the "ArtsBreak" segment on Laguna Beach will recognize the city's enduring arts community, visiting cultural cornerstones such as the Laguna Art Museum, the oldest cultural institution in Orange County; the Laguna Playhouse, California's oldest community theater; Ballet Pacifica; the Festival of the Arts/Pageant of Masters and Capistrano Valley Symphony.

Two exhibits currently running at the Laguna Art Museum—"Past Presidents: Artist Founders of the Laguna Art Museum" and "The Cutting Edge: Contemporary American Folk Art"—will help set a historical perspective for the segment. Interviews with Desmarais; Laguna Playhouse managing director Richard Stein; Barbara O'Hara, executive director of the Capistrano Valley Symphony; Molly Lynch, artistic director of Ballet Pacifica, and Sally Reeve, spokeswoman for the Festival of the Arts, will establish the legacy of these organizations and explain the area's role in keeping them alive.

"Laguna is an educated community, a community that cares about cultural things," Desmarais said.

'In a sense, [adding Bravo] is like adding another arts institution to Orange County," he said. "It's an electronic arts institution."

This month, in addition to theater, dance and children's specials, Bravo will offer films such as Wim Wenders' metaphysical "Wings of Desire," and "The Elusive Pimpernel," starring a swashbuckling David Niven. Also in July, "The Sounds of Summer"—a seasonal music festival celebrating everything from rock 'n' roll to jazz and classical music—will include a performance by the king of Nigerian JuJu music, King Sunny Ade. Bravo is also carried by Copley/Colony in Newport Beach, Costa Mesa and Cypress and by Community Cable in Irvine.

"Is there anything you're burning to say on national television?" Briamonte asked Desmarais at the end of his interview.

Desmarais couldn't resist. "Yes. Hi, Mom!"