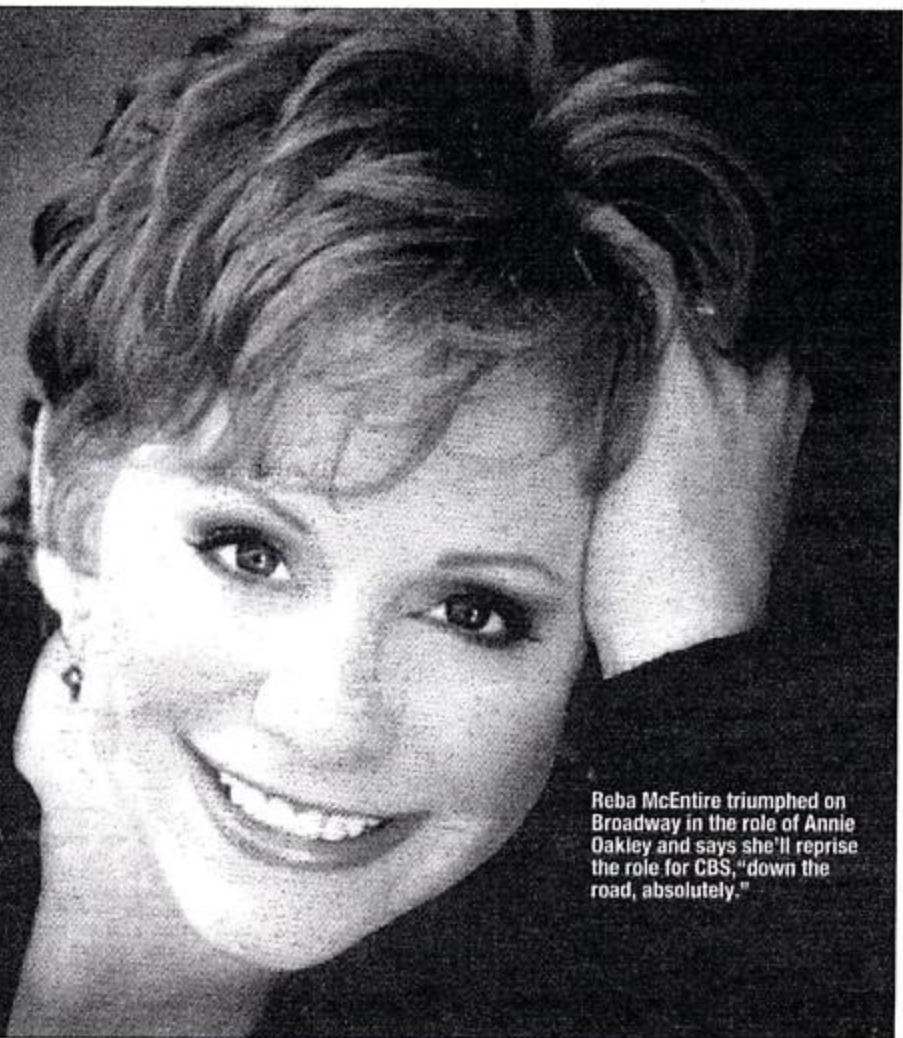


Reba sticks to her guns



Reba McEntire triumphed on Broadway in the role of Annie Oakley and says she'll reprise the role for CBS, "down the road, absolutely."

She'll give CBS another shot at Annie Oakley movie

By MICHAEL GILTZ

SO what's with CBS? They had Reba McEntire in the palm of their hand — and let her slip through their fingers.

McEntire, who's conquered country music, movies, Broadway and TV — as the star of The WB's hit sitcom "Reba" — was all set to film "Annie Get Your Gun" as a TV movie for CBS. A no-brainer, right?

But the network squandered her window of opportunity by dragging its feet — and now the project has been put on hold.

"We're not doing it," reveals McEntire, calling from Santa Monica, Calif. "We've run out of time and my number-one priority is the sitcom."

"CBS just kept backin' it up and backin' it up and it was kind of runnin' out of time and getting too close to my August 15 [date] when we go back to shooting the sitcom. So I thought I better tend to business and focus on that."

McEntire had to take a pass, but it wasn't really a close call. "They didn't have a leading man or even a director chosen yet," says the 57-year-old Oklahoma native, who will present an award



Reba plays a Texas housewife trying to raise her kids after her husband runs off with a dental hygienist in the WB's "Reba."

at the May 17 Daytime Emmys. "They weren't ready."

Letting that project fall through the cracks is a real blow to CBS. McEntire is the only woman to star in a new hit sitcom this season, the only standout in a too-crowded field.

She's already triumphed on Broadway in the role of Annie Oakley, garnering ecstatic reviews for her performance in the Irving Berlin classic.

Despite the network's shenanigans that

kept her from making any other commitments during "Reba's" hiatus (she often goes on tour in the summer), McEntire is ready and willing to do the project the next time her hectic schedule can be freed up.

"Down the road, absolutely," says McEntire, who was the toast of Broadway during her stint in the show — even though it was the first time she'd ever performed on stage.

She got infinitely better reviews than Broadway legend Bernadette Peters, who originated the role in that revival.

And the reviews of Susan Lucci and Cheryl Tiegs, who also played Oakley, aren't worth mentioning.

Everywhere she went, McEntire was deluged with compliments.

"I was going over to get my teeth cleaned or something at my dentist in New York," remembers McEntire about her Broadway run. "I hopped in a cab and he said, 'Where to, lady?' I told him where I was going and he looked in his rearview mirror and he just stopped the car and slammed the gearshift up into park and he turned all the way around and he said, 'You Annie Get Your Gun!'"

"I said, 'Yeah, that's me.' He said, 'You good! You really good!' I got the biggest kick out of that."

The WB's getting a kick out of her ratings triumph. McEntire's show is the heart of that network's fledgling attempt to duplicate ABC's family-friendly TGIF lineup. She stars as Reba, a Texas housewife trying to raise her kids after her husband runs off with a dental hygienist. Her high school daughter Cheyenne got pregnant by the quarterback of the football team, married him and now the two of them live with mom.

"The Donna Reed Show" it ain't, but those real-world problems are kept at bay by McEntire's no-nonsense love and dead-pan humor. (When her husband revealed his dopey dental hygienist was pregnant and he wanted a divorce, McEntire quipped "Why is this the only house in Texas without a gun?")

CBS has nothing to worry about: its blunder is McEntire's gain. "I'm going to spend my time with Narvel and Shelby," says McEntire, referring to her second husband and their 12-year-old son. "This is the first summer in 25 years I'm not working. Shelby, when I told him over dinner the night we found out that the movie wasn't a go, he was ecstatic. He's not having to share his momma and daddy with the world."

"As much as I love to tour and as much as I love working, it's family time."