

to make some comment," she said, "I find, 'Oh?' very effective, provided my eyebrows are arched. Sometimes I'm forced to make a more substantial contribution. Then I say, 'Oh, really?' or 'I see.' When things are really looking good, I say with great authority, 'Let's continue in that vein.'"

But before long, financially minded outsiders began to recognize what Lucille Ball's friends and associates had known all along: that the image of Miss Ball as a flighty, lame-brained doll was a convenient cover-up for an actress who is one of the most efficient, professional, no-nonsense performers in show business.

Sure she'd had no business experience, but as a friend put it: "She's got one hell of a business nose. She's one of those people who know instinctively what real estate not to buy roughly 100 percent of the time."

"I wouldn't want to get into a poker game with that lady," adds another close associate.

Her close friend and former co-star Vivian Vance is equally in awe of Lucy's business ability. "Believe you me," Miss Vance told GH, "I wish she were my business agent."

In the years since Miss Ball took over management at Desilu, the company changed from a deficit operation (in 1961, the last year of Desi Arnaz's presidency, it had lost \$665,387) to a profit-making bonanza (last year, Desilu grossed thirty million dollars and showed profits of \$830,094). On the sixty-two acres of land Desilu occupied at three separate locations, fifteen shows were being shot—four of them Desilu-produced (*The Lucy Show*; *Mission: Impossible*; *Star Trek* and *Mannix*). And a year ago, after a round of high-level negotiations notable for the amount of tears shed by the protagonist herself, Lucille Ball sold Desilu to Charles Bluhdorn's Gulf & Western Industries for the seventeen million dollars mentioned above. Of that sum, she herself banked ten million as majority stockholder.

Bluhdorn has by now combined Desilu with Paramount Pictures, which he also owns (new name: Paramount Television), and Miss Ball has abdicated her position as corporation president. But, at the age of fifty-seven, she has barely slackened her pace. She is currently appearing in a new film, *Yours, Mine and Ours*—a story based on the real-life Beardsley family (which appeared originally in GH). Lucy plays opposite Henry Fonda, as a widow with eight children who mar-



Lucy and Henry Fonda with some of their twenty children in "Yours, Mine and Ours."

ries a widower with ten. In the fall, you will see her in a new TV series with a brand-new title (still undecided) and a brand-new format. It will feature Miss Ball as a working mother, co-star veteran actor Gale Gordon and introduce Miss Ball's two children, Lucie, almost seventeen, and Desi IV, fifteen. It is slotted for Mondays at 8:30 P.M. on CBS; and unless pigs become popcorn, it will continue to hold a top spot in the ratings.

Miss Ball's decision to return to television for her twelfth season and third series format came after another year of playing what most of Hollywood ruefully refers to as *The Lucy Game*. Every year, Miss Ball solemnly announces that her current television season will be her last. The very last. Positively and absolutely her last. Then, having coasted on her block-busting Nielsens through a winter of moderate discontent, she relents and announces that she has decided to return for one more year. Whereupon,

CBS heaves a sigh of corporate relief, and Miss Ball signs a contract giving her a bigger budget and salary than ever. Last year, she earned \$350,000 in salary for her series, in addition to \$75,000 for being Desilu's president; this year, without benefit of presidency, her salary will probably be somewhere around half a million.

The attributes that have kept Lucille Ball consistently at the top of the ratings are the same attributes that—uncannily enough—made her a first-rate corporation president.

As one of show business' most respected performers, Miss Ball is famous for being able to spot the one detail that is wrong with a script, or the one angle wrong with the camera. In the same way, she became well known in her corporation as a finger-poker who could spot a bad clause through sheer common sense and instinct. She still didn't know what a debenture was—she left high-level business . . . *continued on page 54*

As she has for many years, Lucy will work with Gale Gordon in her new TV show.

