

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Actor's role is intact with TV show's renewal

By Victor Swanson
special writer

WHEN NBC-TV announced its fall prime-time schedule for the 1988-89 season, it was good news — great news, really — for former Livonia resident, actor James King.

The network renewed "Midnight Caller," for Tuesdays at 10 p.m., the series on which King is a semi-regular, playing a police officer named Sgt. Online.

"What I like about it (Midnight Caller) is that it's a crime drama, but there's never any gunplay — rarely," King said during a recent interview at his sister Peggy's home in Dearborn. "I think they did one episode where there was some hostages in a bank, so they had a shoot-out. But there's no car chases or any of that other stuff."

King had come back to Michigan for Peggy's wedding. He has 12 brothers and sisters, one of whom is Steve King of Steve King and the Dittles, a band doing well in the Detroit area.

"MIDNIGHT CALLER" is the first television series King has ever worked on. Shooting for the new season begins in July, which is customary for prime-time series. How did he get the job?

"The casting director called me and asked me if I would be available to play a character, Sgt. Online, who was an inept police officer, a rookie, the sidekick of one of the regulars (Arthur Taxler's character, Lt. Zymak). They said it would be a comic-relief-type thing, where I would be the 'goop-up.'"

King, whose "favorite TV cop of all time is Barney Fife," recalled, "I jumped at the opportunity." Not long after, King showed up at the studio. "I got the script, and looked through the script, checking for my scenes, and there would be like three different scenes where I'd get something to say or do, so I was really happy. I called my family and told them and everything. And so I got a revision. I was down to one scene. And so I got to the set. We did the scene. And by the time they got the final edit, I had half a line left."



James King, who is originally from Livonia, returns to television this fall for a second season as Sgt. Online, sidekick to Lt. Zymak, on "Midnight Caller." King, who appeared in the movie "Harry and the Hendersons" directed by William Dear, also is co-writing a motion picture script with Dear.

For King, having his first scenes cut wasn't too unfortunate, especially since he became a semi-regular and got to work on more episodes.

KING MENTIONED that his wife, Victoria Skerritt (whose uncle is actor Tom Skerritt), wasn't so fortunate. She worked on one episode in which Joe Spano appeared, and her scene was completely cut out before the episode was shown.

About the series, which is set mostly at night, King stated flatly, "I think it really needs a little lightness. They've all been very hard."

ANOTHER DIRECTOR King admires — though not one who worked on "Midnight Caller" — last season is William Dear, who directed the movie "Harry and the Hendersons." The film starring John Lithgow was King's first movie. On that set, King and Dear hit it off well, and today they are co-writing a comedy-adven-

ture, a script that is already under development at Universal Studios.

"Rewrite is the name of the game (in Hollywood)," King said. He hopes to hear soon what is the latest status of what, for now, is titled "The Jimi King Project." "Every studio executive you talk to has a different idea of what they want it to be, so they say, 'Rewrite it!'"

Currently, King and his wife (who have been married about three years), live in the San Francisco Bay area, which they love. King said, "You can drive a few miles and be out in the country. Whereas, we went to L.A. It's like the traffic and air. You feel like you can drive for hours and you're still in the city."

King thinks it might be necessary to move to Los Angeles to complete the script. This would disappoint him and his wife not only because of having to leave the bay but also because of having to quit operating a sum-

mer, performing-arts day camp for children, which they have run for several years at a YMCA in Berkeley.

This summer, the Kings will have two four-week camp sessions, each with about 50 children. "My wife and I write the shows. And at the end of the four-week session, then the kids act it out, and all their parents and grandparents come. We don't give them anything really difficult, but we do like them to stretch and make it a challenge."

THINKING ABOUT how such musclemen as Stallone and Schwarzenegger have become big box-office names, King had this advice for aspiring actors: "Forget acting," he said with a laugh. "Join a gymnasium." He fell back in his chair and laughed even more. "Work out."

He was serious when he said, "It's (acting) a long, slow process. But I figure I'm in it for the long run. And hopefully, 10 or 15 years from now, I'd like to be in a situation where I can actually have more creative control than I do now."



Paula Abdul is one of the stars of Club MTV Live... the Tour, a big dance party at 7 p.m. Thursday, July 6, at the Palace of Auburn Hills.

upcoming things to do

Deadline for the Upcoming calendar is one week ahead of publication. Items must be received by Thursday to be considered for publication the following Thursday. Send to: Ethel Simmons, Entertainment Editor, The Observer & Eccentric, 35251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150.

50S FESTIVAL
Five days of entertainment will be presented Wednesday-Sunday, July 28-30, at Novi Town Center. The event features vendor's concessions, the Happy Days Beer Tent, live music and a car exhibit. Outdoor dining and entertainment at area restaurants, an ice cream social, nightly entertainment and

dancing are offered for the entire family. Tickets are on sale for the festival's major event, The Sock Hop Express will be held Friday evening, July 28. The Contours perform their smash hit "Do Ya Love Me" on Saturday, July 29 (the Contours will be joined by Hoopa Hoop artist Matt Plend). Showtimes are 5, 7 and 9 p.m. at the Novi High School Auditorium. Tickets for these events can be purchased through the Novi Chamber of Commerce Office and the Novi Parks and Recreation Department. For more information call 349-3028.

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