

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor 644-1100



BC(O)

O&amp;E Thursday, April 26, 1990

## 'Sydney' creator

### Michael Wilson from Birmingham writes the show



Now living in Hollywood, TV producer and writer Michael Wilson feeds his son, 17-month-old Perry.

By Victor E Swanson  
special writer

**T**HE COMMERCIAL television networks — ever battling each other for ratings — recently premiered a number of new series, including "Sydney" (Wednesday nights on CBS).

The comedy, starring pretty Valerie Bertinelli as Sydney Kells, was created by Michael Wilson and Doug Wyman. Wilson is a graduate of Groves High School in Birmingham.

"It's a half-hour comedy about a contemporary woman in the '90s, trying to make it in L.A.," Wilson said, describing the series during a telephone interview from Hollywood. "And she happens to be a private detective. Her dad was a cop. She comes from a cop family."

"Sydney" began as a "spec" screenplay that Wilson wrote in 1988. Speaking as fast as Sydney does in the series, Wilson said, "I submitted it around, and I had some interest from a couple of studios on it for a couple of different actresses, and around that time I took a job working — running what you call creative affairs or development — for a guy named Bud Grant, who used to run CBS and now heads up his own independent production company. While I was running Grant's company as creative affairs vice-president, he read the script and started expressing an interest in doing it as a series."

MEANWHILE, Bertinelli was looking hard for an idea for a series. She had a 13-episode commitment for some type of series with CBS.

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**'It's a half-hour comedy about a contemporary woman in the '90s, trying to make it in L.A. And she happens to be a private detective.'**

— Michael Wilson

meeting, and I just went in and pitched the character to Valerie in a meeting. I'd never met her before," Wilson said.

The idea Wilson presented was a combination put together by Wilson and Wyman, partly based on the "Sydney" screenplay.

"She really, really liked it," Wilson remembered.

"I asked for a lot of lead time before we started the show," he said. "We took just three months and we just did readings, which is what you traditionally do with most pilots, but we just took a longer time than most pilots. We had a terrific casting director, whose name is Allison Jones, who also cast 'Dear John.'"

Other regulars in "Sydney" are Craig Bierko as Matt Keating, the married lawyer, from whom Sydney gets most of her cases and on whom she has a crush; Rebecca Bush as Jill, her best friend; Matthew Perry as Billy, her brother, the police officer; Barney Martin as Ray, the bartender and owner of the bar called the Blue Collar; Daniel Baldwin as a barely named Chucky, and Perry Anzillo as a snitch named Perry. Hardest character to cast was Jill.

"Bud knew Valerie and her manager, Jack Grossbart, and set up a

the day before we started shooting. We couldn't find a girl that we liked, and then we'd find people that we liked, but we couldn't make a deal with them," Wilson said.

"Initially, we did three shows and then we shut down, and Doug Wyman quit, and then I just took over the show on my own. I wasn't really happy with the first three shows we did. In fact, we're re-shooting those next week."

Wilson does most of the writing on the show and is one of its four executive producers. The others are Bertinelli and two of her business associates, Jack Grossbart and Marty Litke.

"The executive producer in half-hour comedy is pretty much the writer who has the final say, the writer who runs what you call the room on rewrite night," Wilson said.

He works differently than many executive producers. To write an episode, he doesn't get a bunch of gag writers together in a room and have them pitch jokes. He wants character comedy, not joke after joke, which a stand-up comedian might do. That doesn't mean the show is slow. Each episode is produced from about a 45-page script. Usually, comedy shows are made from 35-page scripts.

"SYDNEY" IS officially Wilson's first writing job.

He did get some journalism experience at Groves High School, however, and he did study English and film at the University of Michigan, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in 1978. After college, he and his girlfriend moved to New York. Wilson held a variety of jobs until his father helped him get work in the mailroom of the William Morris Agency.

In New York, he and Brooke, the

daughter of Dr. Vince and Mary Louise Greeson of Bloomfield Hills, decided to get married.

Wilson soon found himself working as an agent for William Morris. In the 1980s, he moved to California to work for the company. Then he worked for Creative Artists, where he met Marcy Carsey, an executive producer on "Roseanne" and "The Cosby Show."

"I ran creative affairs for Marcy Carsey for like three years," he said. "When you're writing creative affairs, you're not writing, but what you're doing is meeting with writers, you're getting scripts in and you're evaluating them."

"Everything I know about half-hour I learned from Marcy Carsey."

Carsey and Wilson did work on some scripts together, such as the pilot for the 1983-84 series "Oh, Madeline," which featured Madeleine Kahn and James Sloyan.

WILSON REALLY started to write for himself when he and Brooke got together again about two years ago. They had divorced after a few years of marriage.

"The weirdest thing that happened in my life was when Brooke and I got back together. When we started living together, Brooke really encouraged me to write. I mean, I really have to give her most of the credit for all her support and encouragement with me."

They now have a 16-month-old son, Perry.

In June, Wilson's writing-producing contract expires with Grant/Tribune Productions, one of two companies that produces "Sydney."

His options, he said, are to renew with Bud Grant or go to another company. But, he added, "who knows what's going to happen."

## 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, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150.

star," opening Wednesday, May 16, for a five-week run through Sunday, June 17. Zmed is best known for his TV series "T.J. Hooker" and as host of TV's "Dance Fever." For ticket information call the box office at 644-3533.

● **CHILDREN'S CONCERT**  
The Creative Center for Young Children will sponsor a children's concert, 10-11:30 a.m. Saturday, April 28. Children's entertainer Maureen Schifman will perform with music, movement and puppetry. The concert is open to children 2 years

and up, accompanied by an adult. Cost is \$3 per child. Tickets are available at the door. For more information, call 348-3820.

● **CASTING CALL**  
Open auditions, ages 9 years and up, for "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" will be held 3-4 p.m. Saturday, April 28, at Ridgely Players in Troy. Show dates are Friday, June 8, and Sunday, June 10. For

more information, call 288-0799 or 649-2571.

● **'ODD COUPLE'**  
The female version of "The Odd Couple" by Neil Simon opens Friday, April 27, at the Farmington Players Barn in Farmington Hills. Performances run through Saturday, May 19. For tickets at \$6 call the box office at 538-1670.

● **RHYTHM NATION**

Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation World Tour 1990 returns to Detroit to play the Palace at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 7. Opening the show will be Chuckii Booker. Tickets at \$22.75 reserved are on sale at the Palace box office and all Ticketmaster outlets. Tickets may be charged by calling 645-6666.

● **HIGHKICKER SALOON**  
In association with the Palace of

Auburn Hills, the Highkicker Saloon in Pontiac will host country music stars in the Summer Country Music Series, beginning this month and running through August. The following shows have been scheduled: April 29, Foster and Lloyd with special guest James House, two shows: 3 and 7:30 p.m., tickets \$14.50, or \$16.50 the day of the show; May 6, Vince

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