

Janine Turner happy with role in revived 'Northern Exposure'

Sense of adventure common to actress, character

By Mary Ann Townsend

Janine Turner fits into her role as an adventurous pilot in CBS' "Northern Exposure" as snugly as residents of Cicely, Alaska, fit into their parkas.

"Northern Exposure," a refreshing one-hour drama with comedic overtones, returned to the CBS schedule earlier this month after a successful, but nonetheless short run last summer. It currently airs Mondays.

The show follows the antics of the eccentric residents of Cicely, a remote village deep in the Alaskan wilderness.

The part fell right into Turner's hands, she said. "I auditioned — they videotaped me in New York — and then they flew me out to L.A. the next day, and it happened very fast, which is a great way to have it happen because you don't have to think about it too much."

But even if she'd had the time to think about tackling the role, she undoubtedly would have taken it anyway. With executive producers Joshua Brand and John Falsely, who created shows such as "St. Elsewhere" and "A Year in the Life," Turner appreciates the show's wit.

"This show is eccentric and kind of a touch of black comedy, and it's intelligent. And Maggie is a character that's the antithesis to cheese-cake," she said. "I moved to New York four years ago to study acting and to do off-Broadway and to be very selective with what I did. And for TV I think that Maggie's no-nonsense and a pilot and a landlord and is in big Alaskan boots and baggie pants all the time, so I love the role. She deals with people from her gut and her instinct and her intelligence."

Born in Lincoln, Neb., Turner moved with her family at the age of 3 to Euless, Texas, between Dallas and Fort Worth. Her love of the arts began in junior high school, when she studied dance and became an apprentice with the Fort Worth Ballet. At age 12 she took her first trip to New York City and fell in love with the pulse of the Big Apple. Three years later she became the youngest client of the prestigious Wilhelmina modeling agency.

However, her parents insisted she return to Texas to finish her schooling, which proved to be one of her first lucky breaks.

"Dallas at that time was no longer just a thriving commerce. It was the embodiment of the nation's new hit series 'Dallas.' I met Leonard Katzman, the producer, and was cast as Lucy's friend Susan. Leonard

encouraged me to move west. I finished high school a year early, packed up my Buick Regal and drove to Hollywood," the actress said.

In addition to her regular role on "Dallas," Turner's first show, a late-night soap called "Behind the Screen" ran opposite Johnny Carson for 13 weeks. Then came her role as Laura Templeton on "General Hospital."

Family is important to Turner, and her family is proud of her success so far, she said, especially her dad, a West Point graduate and airplane pilot among an elite group of pilots who have flown Mach II, twice the speed of sound. How does he feel about her role as a pilot?

"Well, he's thrilled," she said, although she admits she doesn't do her own flying for the show. "He's never really taught me anything about flying technically, but just the attitude, the approach to flying."

The actress finds a similarity between her move from Texas to California and her character's move to Alaska.

"She's kind of traveled and she's cultural but I think that she wanted to get away. She went to Alaska with her boyfriend and he left, and she ended up staying. I think that we mirror each other with the sense of adventure and independence."

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