

Ellen Burstyn, Walter Matthau remember love in TV drama

Pair co-star again after 27 years

By Christy Bergslien

"Mrs. Lambert Remembers Love" is really a life-affirming story about the power of love," says Ellen Burstyn of the new telefilm in which she stars. Burstyn, who won an Academy Award for her performance in "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore," co-stars with Walter Matthau in the heart-rending drama Sunday, May 12, on CBS.

"Mrs. Lambert Remembers Love" marks the first time Burstyn and Oscar-winner Matthau ("The Fortune Cookie") have co-starred together since their 1964

performance in "Goodbye Charlie." In their new project, Burstyn plays an elderly woman named Lil Lambert, whose failing memory leads to a custody battle for her young grandson, played by 9-year-old Todd Ryan. Matthau plays Clifford Pepperman, an old friend of the Lambert family who remains a loyal ally to Lil in her struggle.

"I loved working with Walter back then; I loved working with him in 1991," says Burstyn of her co-star. For 27 years I've been consciously and unconsciously looking for a property that would allow us to work together again."

Burstyn says although she loved the script of "Mrs. Lambert Remembers Love," she wondered if she could possibly play a woman 20 years plus her senior. She's 58.

"As a matter of fact, I said jokingly to Robert Halmi, the producer who sent me the script, 'Do you think I look that old? If the answer's yes, I better get myself to a health spa, and fast!'"

The actress says Matthau, on the other hand, has hardly changed in the last 27 years. "The funny thing is, Walter had jet-black hair in 1964, and he's still got jet-black hair. To make him look the same age as me in this picture, the makeup people actually had to whiten his hair."

Matthau is 70 years old. It is likely both Burstyn and Matthau are hoping for a more highly acclaimed film with "Mrs.

Lambert Remembers Love" than they saw with the less-than-successful "Goodbye Charlie" a generation ago.

"I did a lot of research for this picture," says Burstyn. "At first I thought Lil Lambert was suffering from a form of senile dementia," but she explains of her character, "but after reading several books about gerontological diseases, I think she's probably suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's."

"Lil has these occasional memory lapses. She just can't remember who people are or what events actually happened. She finds it terribly frustrating, and that's exactly what happens to people when they first become affected by Alzheimer's. They know something's desperately wrong, but they can't figure out what it is."

Burstyn has high praise for both of her co-stars. "He makes it look so easy — and, of course, that's the

secret of fine acting," she says of Matthau. "Walter brings a wonderful naturalness to his roles, and that's why I think people who watch him on the screen like him so much."

"Todd is a very special little being. He's so curious and bright, so open and warm. On the set he saw everything. He was totally tuned in. After a while, I really saw Todd and his character Jared, as one. Jared is very close to his grandmother Lil; Todd became very close to Walter and me."

Essentially, "Mrs. Lambert Remembers Love" is the story of three people whose love and loyalty triumphs over green and hurt. Moral of the story: Nice guys don't always finish last. "I think people who watch this are going to be moved," says Burstyn optimistically. "It may even influence some people to offer help to loved ones who need help."



Tony (Tony Danza, left), determined to protect an elderly friend (Pat Buttram) from social security cutbacks, lobbies Washington on ABC's *Who's the Boss?*, Tuesday.