

No time on his hands: John Tesh keeps busy

Music, 'E.T.,' the Olympics and... he's a newlywed

By Steven Alan McGaw
"In this world, a lot of people think that you can't do more than one thing," says John Tesh, in a rare moment of relative inactivity. "I do a lot of things 'kinda good,'" he laughs, "so I do 'em all."

A lot of folks would scoff at Tesh's low-key appraisal of his work. The producers of the syndicated "Entertainment Tonight," which Tesh co-anchors, would surely praise Tesh's charm and easy wit before the camera. Thousands of music lovers and sports fans gave their support by purchasing the composer's stirring soundtrack for TV coverage of the 1987 Tour de France bicycle race. NBC Sports has given Tesh a double vote of confidence by hiring him to provide on-air commentary for events like gymnastics, synchronized swimming and cycling

in the network's coverage of the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, as well as to compose several musical pieces to accompany footage of the Games. Since 1983, the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences has recognized Tesh with an armload of Emmy Awards.

Tesh regularly maintains a tight schedule, balancing the daily taping schedule of "E.T." with afternoons and evenings spent composing, recording or simply practicing the piano, a habit dating back to his childhood in Garden City, N.Y.

"I don't get a lot of sleep, ordinarily," he admits, and says his schedule has only intensified with his dual Olympic duties. Still, Tesh meets his career's demands with equal parts eagerness and philosophy: "I like the chaos. I let my life go in the direction it wants to."

While attending North Carolina State University, Tesh had dual majors in music and communications ("My dad said to study something so I could make some money") and landed a job as a local news anchor before he graduated. Subsequent jobs took Tesh to Florida, Tennessee and New York, and an Associated Press award for investigative reporting seemed to confirm his career as a newsmen. Then came the call from CBS Sports.

"I took what I felt was a big chance and it changed my life," Tesh says of his move into network sports. Besides increased exposure (and income), Tesh saw another opportunity. "I tried to use television to expose my music," he admits, and the gamble paid off, first in 1983, with his theme for the Pan American Games, and then with the Tour de France.

Following cutbacks at CBS, Tesh accepted an offer from "Entertainment Tonight" and was readily accepted by co-workers and audiences alike. Simultaneously, his musical career was growing, with works like the theme for Fox's animated "Bobby's World," some film soundtracks and appearances with several symphony orchestras. On television, Tesh was rewarded with his own daytime interview show on NBC, "One on One."

The fall of 1991 brought a grand offer from NBC Sports to both cover and score the '92 Olympics. "I realize this could be a once-in-a-lifetime chance for me," Tesh says. Never claiming to be a sports expert, Tesh feels, "It's all about knowing how to do the homework. The athletes are the real stories."

Tesh also says that his twin Olympic responsibilities, reporting and composing, have a vital cross-pollinating effect. "Sports are very passionate. So is music. The translation is easy."

The music for the Olympics is collected on an album titled "The Games," available on Tesh's GTS label. The work contains nine tracks, including two arrangements of "Concetta," written for Tesh's wife, actress Connie Selleca

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