

All's right with CBS' 'Love and War'

By Suzanne Gill

While some TV producers are fond of saying they're making "a little movie" every week, Diane English is not among these cultural effete. English, the award-winning creator of *Murphy Brown* and the target of election-year criticism for her characters' lack of "family values," is bringing a new comedy to CBS on Monday, Sept. 21.

But don't think of the premiere of English's *Love and War* as a TV show or even a movie. Think of it as an evening at the theater.

Set in Manhattan, *Love and War* has a Gershwin theme and the feel of a sophisticated, 1930s romantic comedy. It features Susan Dey as a just-divorced restaurateur and Jay

Thomas as an opinion columnist and 42-year-old bachelor. Despite their differences and their mutual fear of new disappointments in romance, the pair begin to fall in love.

To give us a glimpse of her main characters' souls, English employs the common stage device of having them turn and speak to the audience — or in this case, the camera.

But besides such calculated theatrical elements, the one-hour premiere episode plays like a play because it was filmed that way — in one pass, with no time for retakes, extra camera angles or flubbed lines. The live-on-film effect was a child of necessity: After a 10-day rehearsal schedule and a day's delay due to union negotiations with the

crew, the pilot had to be shot on the first evening of curfew during last spring's Los Angeles riots.

Otherwise, English would have lost two of her actors — Dey and co-star Michael Nouri — to other commitments.

"At about two o'clock in the afternoon, the manager of the lot that we were shooting on came to us and said, 'We're evacuating the lot, and you must all go home.'"

"There was no way we would postpone. So Joel (Shukovsky, English's husband and co-producer) negotiated for us, and they allowed us to shoot our show, only one pass, at 4 p.m. At 6:30, everyone had to be in their cars going home."

Even their planned studio audience was unavailable. But a tour bus of 40 teenagers (some with Super Soakers) turned away from *The Dennis Miller Show* was located in time.

"They weren't the people that we expected to respond to our show," English continues, "and yet we got a wonderful response from them."

Besides Thomas' Jack Stein and Dey's Wally Porter, the cast includes Suzie Plakson as Meg, an acerbic sports writer; John Hancock as Ike, the owner of journalists' watering hole *The Blue Shamrock*; Joel Murray as a sanitation worker who feels at home in the seedy hangout; and Nouri as Dey's ex-husband, a narcissistic actor. Future episodes will include Joanna Gleason as a suburban housewife hired as a *Blue Shamrock* waitress.

"So we went ahead. There's some bouncy camera work here and there that we'll live with. But we kind of considered it a small miracle and are looking forward to going on from there."

"From there" includes the development of both the romance and *The Blue Shamrock*, which Wally buys on a kind of self-imposed dare to prove to herself and the world that she's still a success. (Her first place, *Chez Wally*, had to be sold in the divorce settlement.)

With top-notch writing and acting, and a premium Monday-night time slot, *Love and War*, Wally and Jack and *The Blue Shamrock* should all be long-running hits.

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