

LET'S TALK

STAR NOTES

Orbach started on stage; many a 'Madame X'

By Taylor Michaels

Q: I am interested in knowing a little about actor Jerry Orbach and an address where I can write to him. —C. Foulsham, Newport, N.H.

A: Orbach, who replaced Paul Sorvino on NBC's *Law & Order* earlier this season, was born on Oct. 20, 1935, in Bronx, N.Y., but grew up in Waukegan, Ill., the son of a restaurant manager. He gravitated to acting while at Northwestern University and figured to make it big in New York upon graduation. His rise wasn't immediate, but after a break as an understudy on Broadway in 1955's *The Threepenny Opera*, stage work began to come with more frequency. He was nominated for a Tony award for *Chicago* and finally won the prize in 1968 as the star of *Promises, Promises*. In the late 1980s, he appeared on television's *Murder, She Wrote* as Harry McGraw, which led to a brief spin-off titled *The Law and Harry McGraw*. Among his more prominent films are *Prince of the City*, *FX*, *Someone to Watch Over Me*, *Dirty Dancing* and *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. You may write Orbach in care of APA, Inc., 9000 Sunset Blvd., Suite 1200, Los Angeles, Calif., 90069.

Q: Please assist me in finding the title of a movie I saw long ago. It's about a woman who is either accused of murder, is an alcoholic or both. At the end of the movie, she is defended in court by a man she does not recognize as her son. I've been trying to identify this movie for over two years. —Chip Kinney, High Point, N.C.

A: The plot you describe is a story written by Alexandre Bisson that was made into a 1929 movie directed by Lionel Barrymore titled *Madame X*. This picture was actually a refilming of earlier efforts in 1906, 1916 and 1920, which would also be remade in 1937, 1966 and in a television movie in 1981. As you can see, there are quite a few versions of this story (the 1929 version even appeared on television as *Absinthe*), and only you know which one you originally saw. All concern the plight of a wife and mother who is cast out of the family to fend for herself on the streets by the cruel father. Years later, a vagrant, she is defended on a murder charge by a hotshot attorney — her son, who grew up believing she was



Jerry Orbach

dead and never realizes she is his mother. I'm betting you saw the 1966 version with Lana Turner in the pivotal role. It also starred John Forsythe, Constance Bennett and Burgess Meredith. Ring any bells?

Q: During World War II, a film was made regarding a Sullivan family with several boys in the Navy. A younger teenage son wanted to join but couldn't without his parents' permission, which was finally given. All the brothers were on the same ship, which went down and claimed their lives. I believe the film was based on truth. Can you tell me the name of the film, who played in it and if it's available on video? —Florence Sullivan, Jacksonville, Mo.

A: That film is 1944's *The Sullivans*, also released as *The Fighting Sullivans*. The story was based on actual events, and the movie effectively conveys the heroic, tragic story.

Five Sullivan sons from Waterloo, Iowa, were quick to join the Navy after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and all eventually wound up on the same ship stationed off the Solomon Islands. In an instant, their ship was sunk, claiming all five. The Navy went on to name a ship after them and made a policy change unconsidered before the tragedy: Siblings were no longer allowed to serve on the same vessel at the same time. The picture stars Anne Baxter, Thomas Mitchell, Selena Royle and Edward Ryan. It is available on video.

Send questions to Let's Talk, Features Dept., P.O. Box 961009, Fort Worth, Texas, 76161-1009.

© 1993 TV Listing Inc.

Nothin' like a Dame (Edna, that is)

By Steven Alan McGaw

On Saturday, Jan. 2, NBC offers the third edition of *Dame Edna's Hollywood*, an unpredictable showcase for the self-described "socialite, author, swami and megastar" Dame Edna Everage. Her previous specials, allegedly taped in her "lavish Bel Air mansion," were solid ratings successes and hopes are high for this third outing, which features guests Burt Reynolds, Barry Manilow and Sean Young.

Describing herself, the loquacious, sometimes caustic Dame Edna says, "I'm fundamentally a therapist, someone to talk to. Deep down, I'm just a housewife, I'm not an affected woman."

Dame Edna rose to prominence in a series of well-received London stage shows, followed by many appearances and specials on British television. Her two previous NBC specials included guest stars such as Mel Gibson, Bea Arthur, Cher and Burgess Meredith. In the future, she'd like to front her own weekly show "with Norman Mailer as my sidekick." Asked what NBC says to this plan, Dame Edna sniffs, "They haven't got much to say about it at all."

Although she vehemently denies it, the statuesque celebrity's alter ego is writer-producer Barry Humphries. Dame Edna calls him her manager. "He's never there when you need him," she complains, "like all managers. But he's got me trussed up like a chicken in our contract. I can't get out."

© 1993 TV Listing Inc.



Stephen Fry (right) and Hugh Laurie reprise their roles as *Jeeves and Wooster*, beginning Sunday on PBS.