

## 'Double, Double' gives Leachman two roles for Halloween

By JOHN CROOK

Cloris Leachman is fending off an asthma attack on an October afternoon, but her spirits lift as she talks about her upcoming dual roles in a Halloween special. The multi-award-winning actress plays both a wicked witch, and her sweet sister in "Double, Double, Toil and Trouble," an ABC TV movie airing Saturday, Oct. 30.

Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen ("Full House") star as twins Lynn and Kelly Farmer, who discover that their Aunt Agatha (Leachman) is a black-hearted witch. In the course of trying to help their financially troubled parents, they learn that Agatha has placed her own twin, Sophia, under an evil spell. Unless the girls can save Sophia by midnight on Halloween, their kindly aunt will remain trapped in a magic mirror forever.

Helping them in their mission is a small circle of unlikely friends headed by Mr. Nofziger (Meshach Taylor of "Dave's World"), a homeless eccentric. But Agatha is an evil force to be reckoned with.

"She's the best witch ever," Leachman says with relish. "When you first see my character, I'm studying deeply from a big tome on my desk. And it's obvious I'm muttering in Latin. Now, children won't know what I'm saying, but I'm going" (she drops her voice into a deeper, spookier register). "Per diem. Ad nauseam." She laughs at the memory. "That's the kind of thing I do to amuse myself."

The six-time Emmy winner, who also holds an Oscar and a Golden Globe, is well known for her prodigious knack for inventing memorable bits of business—"doing things under the story," she calls it—and she says she was delighted with the way her producers and directors, Stuart Margolin, gave her more or less free rein to work her inspired brand of lunacy.

She happily shares a catalog of the rich silliness she invented for the TV movie. For example, the producers wanted her to have gray hair during most of the movie, but black hair when she attends the witches' ball. What to do?

"I said, 'I have an idea. I'll shine my witch's boots and I'll have a strand of hair hanging over my eye, and finally, I just push it back with my hand—and (the polish) will get on my hair. Then I catch myself in the mirror and get the idea: Oh! So I do a couple of more strokes, then (there's) a quick cut to me all ready.'"

Leachman says she found the Olsen twins "amazing...very normal, responsive children," although their presence did require some adjustments in the acting process.

"These kids, of course, couldn't read. Well, they're just learning. So their coach stands off-camera and says a line, and they just parrot it after her. So you wait for that. It's like skiing, where you're traversing down a slope...and as you do the turn, you lift your ski a little bit, you 'unweight' it. So it was like that. You unweight your ski while they say (their lines), then you keep sliding along in the snow, then on another line you do another traverse—and it just slides right along."

Leachman says she hopes "Double, Double" becomes an annual Halloween staple, pointing out elements of "The Wizard of Oz" in the story of misfit companions trying to help a child, or children, on a dangerous mission.

"I think it's a marvelous, wonderful achievement. I haven't seen such care, such detail, going into something. We were like little kids," she laughs. "It's the most fun I've ever had for Halloween. And I think being on the night before Halloween, you could have...parties around this, use this as a centerpiece."

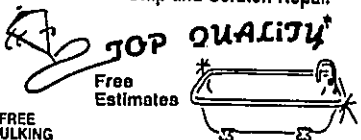
"It's scary. Very scary! These things I've been talking about, these are just my little-heh heh heh," she chuckles softly, still very much in character.

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