

TV Close-Up: Kevin McKidd

by Eirik_Knutzen

Last chilly, soggy spring, Kevin McKidd received an urgent phone call from an agent in his London agency's TV department to report that there was a very strong buzz about his work in Hollywood.

KEVIN MCKIDD - Kevin McKidd plays Dan Vasser, a journalist who travels backward in his own life through time in the TV thriller 'Journeyman.' CNS Photo courtesy of Trae Patton. Los Angeles producers who had tuned into his work as the conflicted, merciless centurion Lucius Vorenus in the BBC/HBO series "Rome" liked his work and obvious assets, including shapely legs when wearing the leather miniskirt of a legionnaire.

In fact, it was wearing a kilt as Lord Danley (Mary, Queen of Scots) in BBC's "Gunpowder, Treason and Plot" while shooting in Romania that led directly to the "Rome" job through American producers scouting locations near Bucharest, Romania. Between jobs as usual, the lean, mean and blond lad of 34 hopped the next plane to Hollywood in time for the annual pilot season.

"I was just prospecting, looking at several other pilots, too," McKidd explained, "but my gut feeling was to go with 'Journeyman.' The script had been e-mailed to me and I read it off the computer screen. It was different and kind of weird, not at all the usual cop, lawyer or medical show. And then I met with the creators/producers of the show. (Kevin Falls and Alex Graves, former producers of 'The West Wing'). Beyond talented, they happen to be very nice gentlemen."

"Journeyman" is set in San Francisco and shot at the 20th Century Fox studios on L.A.'s Westside. McKidd portrays Dan Vasser, a Bay Area journalist who suddenly starts traveling backward in his own life through time. Often gone without explanation for hours - sometimes days - he is often in trouble with his editors and wife Katie.

His life becomes very complicated when Dan discovers that his deceased fiancée (Moon Bloodgood) also is rattling around in his time travels - especially since he is deeply in love with his current spouse (Gretchen Egolf) and son (Charles Henry Wyson). Jack - Dan's dull, humorless cop brother who once dated Katie - doesn't really care if his sibling is dead or alive.

Very much a family man from Elgin in Scotland's Highlands, McKidd made sure his wife Jane, son Joseph, 7, and daughter, Iona, 5, were imbedded in Los Angeles before he shot a frame of film on "Journeyman."

"We made a decision long ago that I couldn't spend months away from the family because the kids are way too young.

"It has been a big adjustment for us all because we are used to quiet country living in Bedfordshire near London, which has kept us safe and sane - as it was when we all moved to Italy for 'Rome,'" he said. "The kids are now in school in the (San Fernando) Valley and seem to enjoy it. I guess the biggest adjustment is not using public transportation and walking everywhere. I see why people here go to gyms."

The son of a corporate secretary and a semiretired water inspector in Elgin was so awe-struck by Steven Spielberg's "E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial" in 1982 at the local cinema at the age of 11 that he joined a nearby acting company called the Moray Youth Theatre. His first job was that of the lead actor's understudy in "Oliver!"

"My career was pretty much set right there, but don't ask me why - I just knew it was for me," McKidd recalled, laughing at the folly of it all. "I did quite a few musical productions with the group, then enrolled at the University of Edinburgh as an engineering major - to appease my parents. Looking back, I should have studied English literature."

Eventually tired of physics and applied mathematics, he dropped out to join the Edinburgh University Theatre company.

"When I got the main part in a serious production, another light bulb went off in my head. I could do straight drama as well as children's musicals. I immediately signed up for Edinburgh's small Queen Margaret Drama College - then called my parents."

He was surprised to find that his parent's weren't particularly surprised by the wayward son's decision - after all, they had another son with a "proper" job close to home. A couple of years later, McKidd made his professional acting debut in The Rain Dog Theatre company's production of "The Silver Darlings," which led to a tour of Scotland's major cities and a theatrical agent in London.

A major turning point was portraying the gentle, ill-fated Tommy in the Scottish feature film "Trainspotting" in 1996, a big cult hit internationally.

"I was paid real money and, at 21, blew it all very quickly," he chuckled. "I had quite a few growing pains. In London, after four years of working quite regularly as an actor, I still had to occasionally work at a building site or a pub to make ends meet."

Despite good work in smaller film and television roles, McKidd's career kept sputtering until another low-budget (\$800,000) cult movie titled "Sixteen Years of Alcohol" drew raves on the film festival circuit in 2003 - including Toronto.

"After a slow start," he mused, "I was finally able to take control of my work."

