

TV Close-Up: Courteney Cox

by Eirik Knutzen

"Dirt" - inspired by Courteney Cox's personal war with paparazzi during the "Friends" years when she became rich and famous - focuses on Lucy Spiller, a take-no-prisoners editor of tabloid magazines who plays and works hard.

A glamorous character equally at ease at glitzy Hollywood cocktail parties as in sterile corporate boardrooms, Spiller usually doesn't shed her sexy red satin dress until diving into bed with her current boy toy. Lots of skin flashes across the screen in every episode, though strategically placed objects - from sheets to flower vases - always manage to obscure the naked actors' private parts.

COURTENEY COX - In 'Dirt,' Courtney Cox (seen here in Morgan Creek Productions' and Franchise Pictures' action-thriller '3000 Miles to Graceland') plays Lucy Spiller, a tabloid editor who tries make her way in the world of celebrity journalism. CNS Photo courtesy of Alan Markfield. "I wasn't at all ready for that environment at first," admitted Cox, 42, happily married to fellow actor and producer David Arquette and the mother of Coco, their 2 1/2-year-old daughter. "My love scene with the young guy in the pilot was the first I had done in a long time, and it made me uncomfortable and nervous.

"But I have to be honest, 'Dirt' has become so much racier than it was in the first episode and what I used to consider uncomfortable and nerve wracking is now old hat," she continued, slowly. "This is what I do now and it includes the cast and crew, my family. They've seen me naked more than my husband has for a long time. Its crazy. I say to the writers every day, 'What's going on in your lives that make you think of this stuff?' "

The 35-year-old Arquette - her husband and fellow executive producer of "Dirt" - readily admits that he is not enamored with his wife's steamier love scenes, but has grown to accept them as a fact of life.

"David doesn't come to the set on those (heavy sex) days," Cox said, "and I don't want to see them either. I just close my eyes - I don't need to have that vision in my head."

But off-screen jealousy and envy seem to be changing at a steady pace, according to Cox.

"We had a love scene at the beginning of the seventh episode that's pretty racy, and I remember that David called me up after he saw it. He said he really liked it, and didn't even mention the love scene. After all these years, we have gotten more mature about that stuff and realize it's part of our jobs."

Try as she may, Cox does not get worked up about her husband's lightweight love scenes with the gorgeous Lori Loughlin in his new ABC sitcom "In Case of Emergency."

"David gets about 40 kisses a day from Lori, but it's all so sweet and intimate," she said. "Plus, I like her so much that it really doesn't bother me. She's a good girl ... if she were some kind of floozy, I'd feel differently."

Their rock-solid marriage is based on love, respect and giving each other lots of space - principles also applied to their business relationship, according to Cox.

"I trust him and he trusts me, especially on things one or the other has expertise. Creatively, you have to give him free reign because he is such an original, creative person with limitless ideas. I'm a little more sensible, someone with an eye on the budget we have for a particular project."

Their next joint venture as executive producers is "Cowboy Bob," a true story based on a magazine article revolving around a woman who dresses up as a man when she robs banks.

"I also star in this small-character piece," said Cox, "which has some really interesting twists. She doesn't hold up banks just to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars, then escape. Working only with a (threatening) note, she does it for the thrill of it. But it has a very tragic ending."

Before going into production on "Cowboy Bob" next year, they hope to work in a long vacation with Coco (a compromise name as Cox wanted to name her daughter Courteney, just like her mother before her) in a temperate climate. Fortunately, Coco is very portable at her tender age.

"She visits both sets - when David's show was in production, she would spend time with him in the morning and me in the afternoon. For some reason, it just works out."

Their quality of life has changed immeasurably since their daughter came along, according to Cox, who was born in Birmingham, Ala., and raised in affluent Mountain Brook nearby.

"Especially since there were so many years of trying to get her to come along," she said. "Before then, we had no major responsibilities except for three dogs.

"And now she has enriched our lives in countless ways," she continued, laughing. "She's a special kid, I know that everybody says that about their kids, but she really is. The most joyful thing about being a parent is just watching her grow up and develop a totally independent personality. The scariest thing is knowing that you're providing them with lots of love, a nice home and a balanced life - only to go away someday on their own journey."

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