

TV Close-Up: John Stamos

by Eirik Knutzen

John Stamos arrived at "ER" in the nick of time. Depressed, sad, frustrated and physically exhausted, he checked in during the 2005-06 season to recover from a broken heart as his five-year marriage to actress-model Rebecca Romijn ended in a painful divorce and his promising sitcom, "Jake in Progress," failed miserably.

"'ER' came at a time when I was craving stability in my life, along with good acting, writing and directing," said Stamos, still a handsome heartthrob at the age of 43. "It also seemed like a good place to go because (the producers) had wanted me for a long time. So far it has really paid off."

JOHN STAMOS - On "ER," John Stamos plays Tony Gates, an emergency medical technician who happens to be a Gulf War veteran with dyslexia and serious temper issues. CNS Photo courtesy of Paul Drinkwater. And life is getting better at warp speed, according to Stamos, who now works on a two-year contract in a large ensemble show - the television industry's equivalent of a part-time job that rarely calls for more than three days of work per week.

Topping it off, he loves his character, Tony Gates, a deeply flawed individual who happens to be a Gulf War veteran with dyslexia and serious temper issues. Gates, who arrives at Chicago's County General Hospital as a paramedic studying to become a licensed physician, "is a fully-loaded, complicated guy taking care of his best friend's widow and child after the war who falls in love with a girl at the hospital," Stamos explained. "He certainly is the most adult and manly man I've ever played. Meeting with the writers, I only asked to make the intern a man's man."

Playing the testosterone-powered maverick is even more exciting because of the talented, veteran cast dedicated to make the 13th season a memorable one.

"Laura Innes (Dr. Kerry Weaver) has been there forever; the 'new' people in the cast for seven to eight years," said Stamos. "I came in willing to play their game because I respect them. It's like working with a whole orchestra instead of just a pianist."

Stamos - born to a homemaker and a restaurateur in the Los Angeles suburb of Cypress - started out as drummer in high school rock bands, gained a healthy following as Blackie Parrish (1982-83) on "General Hospital" as a teenager and became rich and famous as Elvis-freak Uncle Jesse on "Full House" (1987-95). Long on guts, he made his 1997 Broadway debut in "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying," followed by "Cabaret" in 2000.

When acting came to a crawl in the wake of his eight-episode series "Thieves" (2001), he increasingly turned to producing telefilms and miniseries - often with the extraordinary executive producer team of Craig Zadan & Neil Meron - including "Beach Boys: An American Family" and "Martin & Lewis." They also produced his latest lighter-than-air TV movie, a romp as a gay wedding planner in "The Wedding Wars."

When "ER" gave him the shot in the arm to develop a taste for more acting, Stamos signed on during Christmas vacation for a remake of the movie "A Raisin in the Sun" (1961) starring Sidney Poitier as Walter Lee Younger. In the ABC network telefilm version, Sean "P. Diddy" Combs plays Younger to Stamos' Mr. Lindner, a volatile white racist bent on ridding his community of blacks.

With luck, Stamos will be able to produce and star in the TNT movie "Dillinger" - the life and times of gangster John Dillinger - as soon as "ER" wraps for the season in May.

Stamos also produced and starred in the short subject movie called "I Am Stamos" and the feature-length film "Knots." Neither set the box office on fire, but Stamos has serious designs on turning "The Jeffersons" (1975-85) - a sitcom featuring a predominantly African-American cast headed by Sherman Hemsley and Isabel Sanford - into a glossy motion picture.

There are more projects in the hopper, but Stamos is trying to maintain his equilibrium by hitting the road occasionally as a substitute drummer for The Beach Boys on tours and frequent traveling to distant destinations.

"There is nothing like playing in front of one million people at the Washington Monument in D.C.," he said, chuckling, "at least I'll never forget it."

About the only thing Stamos doesn't have time for at the moment is dating or mating with prospective partners in the hope of another long-term marriage leading to a solid family unit with children. He still claims to be a bit clumsy in the dating department, which sounds a bit strange from a man whose gorgeous ex-wife had her blue costume spray-painted on her outrageous body in order to play Raven Darkholme/Mystique in the "X-Men" film series. Nor does Stamos get much sympathy from Hollywood's small, but vocal, straight community who remember him well for giving close support to the likes of Paula Abdul and Demi Moore - before others married and divorced them.

"Single and lookin' to mingle again in L.A., I wouldn't shy way from getting married again if the right person came along," he said, apparently serious. "If it happens, and hopefully it will, it will take care of the one thing that I feel I haven't done in life. Absolutely on top of my list is to be a father."

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