

## Hollywood Exclusive: Jerry O'Connell loving his real-life role as Mr. Mom/Hit film, landmark episode and kid

by Marilyn\_Beck\_ & Stacy\_Jenel\_Smi

Jerry O'Connell is playing Mr. Mom on the set of wife Rebecca Romijn's pilot for a possible ABC series version of "The Witches of Eastwick" and sounds like he couldn't be happier about it.

"Nothing prepared me for what it would be like to raise twin girls," he says of 3-month-old Dolly and Charlie. "When one quiets down, the other one starts up. At night, I am sleeping more than my wife who is a saint. She has to get up," he says of Rebecca, who is nursing the babies. "I watch the kids at work. It's good they like coming to another place. Although, she had a kissing scene today, and it must have been weird for the other actor, to know she has kids and a husband nearby," adds Jerry, who tells us he pretty much stays off the set.

"I'll tell you what's funny," he adds. "I really thought I was going to be a very strict father about what they could wear, when they could go out and all that. But now that they're starting to smile at me, I just know they're going to walk all over me! If I don't see them for a couple hours, I miss them so much."

Jerry has Lifetime's original movie adaptation of Nora Roberts' "Midnight Bayou" coming up this Sunday (3/28), starring with Lauren Stamile and Faye Dunaway as well as roles in the forthcoming big-screen chiller "Obsessed" with Beyonce and Idris Elba, and the upcoming movie comedy "Baby On Board" with Heather Graham. "I hate to say it, but it's probably going to be quiet for a while now," he says. "My wife is the one working. I want this series to work out for her first, then we'll see about me."

"Midnight Bayou" was shot in a real antebellum mansion outside New Orleans and the authentic location for the atmospheric tale was one of the lures for Jerry. "Can you imagine if they'd tried to shoot this somewhere like Calgary?" he asks. "I didn't really know Nora Roberts' books before this. I'm not really her demographic," he adds of the hugely popular and prolific romance writer. "But Rebecca knew this book very well. When I told her about the movie, she said, 'Oh, it's one of her best! Really spooky!'"

**THE BIG SCREEN SCENE:** What a time it is for director Ken Kwapis. His big screen "He's Just Not That Into You" with its stellar ensemble of Ben Affleck, Jennifer Aniston, Drew Barrymore, Scarlett Johansson, Justin Long, Jennifer Connelly, Ginnifer Goodwin, Kevin Connolly and Bradley Cooper has grossed more than \$130 million so far. He's about to shoot the 100th episode of "The Office," for which he's served as key director since helming the pilot of the hit series. And his first movie, the 1985 "Sesame Street Presents Follow That Bird!" has been re-mastered and is being re-released by Warner Bros. on DVD this week.

The first "Sesame Street" feature, "Follow That Bird" as in everybody's favorite 8'2" tall avian creature, Big Bird was made when Kwapis was "a kid, like barely 25." He flew to New York and met with Muppet creator/performer Jim Henson, performer/creative talent/director Frank Oz, and voice of Big Bird,

Caroll Spinney. "It was overwhelming, but they were immensely generous," recalls Kwapis, whose credits up 'til then included two after-school specials and a Student Academy Award for a film he made while attending grad school at USC.

Kwapis notes that making the movie may have been complicated, but "the beauty of the Muppets" and one of the things that was so visionary about Jim Henson "was that they have a very simple quality. I've worked with creatures that require five, six or seven technicians to work them" one controls the eyeballs, one the mouth and so on. When Jim did Kermit, there was one person "Jim put his hand into a little green piece of felt, and his knuckles did all the work. Grown men and women on the set just stopped in their tracks. I thought, 'Gosh, if this is what they're doing to my crew, it's really going to be something.' And it was. I think it still retains all its charm. I loved the idea of doing a film about the acceptance of difference, and I still do."

AND: With "Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2" having pretty much tied up the stories of the much-loved characters played by America Ferrera, Blake Lively, Amber Tamblyn and Alexis Bledel, chances for another "Traveling Pants" flick are pretty slim. Still, some of the principles aren't ruling it out. Kwapis, who directed the original feature, notes, "I'd love to do another one, just to have the chance to hang out with all of them again."

CASHING IN: "I Love Money 2" is going strong, pushing toward its May 4 finale, and host Craig J. Jackson tells us he hopes this won't be the last people will see of the popular VH1 reality show. "Hopefully it ends up being like 'Survivor' or 'American Idol,' where we stay on the air forever. I think this show can go on for as long as people are interested," says Jackson. "It's not like people are trying to fall in love with somebody, because you can get tired of watching that, but people never get tired of money. You might get tired of Flavor Flav or Brett Michaels, but how are you going to get tired of \$250,000?"

With reports by Emily Feimster.

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