

Hollywood Exclusive: George Lopez's roster of A-list industry pals ready to join him on show; Kathy Baker

by Marilyn_Beck_ & Stacy_Jenel_Smi

George Lopez, who is up for Favorite Movie Actor honors for "Beverly Hills Chihuahua" at the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards, is heading to the show with an ulterior motive. Speaking of his fellow nominees Jim Carrey, Will Smith and Adam Sandler, he tells us, "Those are three guys I'll be looking for so I can get them on my show."

That is, his fall-debuting late-night show that was announced earlier this week by TBS. The star reveals he already has a roster of industry pals: the likes of Justin Timberlake, Will.i.am and Eva Longoria offering their presence, or more. Andy Garcia, for instance. "We were out to dinner the other night, and he said, 'I want to do film vignettes for your show,'" reports Lopez, who has been quietly preparing for his huge undertaking for months. "We did a very low profile pilot in August," he notes. He's already shot comedy bits with names including Samuel L. Jackson, and ... President Barack Obama.

"We shot that at the end of summer in San Francisco," says Lopez of the sketch, which has him asking the chief exec about a Cabinet post.

"People know me already. They know I'm funny. We've already taken care of those intangibles. There is no part of this that is frightening to me at all," Lopez declares. "I think the gladiator attitude that you have to have to do stand-up will serve me well."

In addition to having what TBS calls "an outdoor street-party atmosphere and a high-energy crowd," the yet-untitled show will have a "diverse group of guests" maybe more so than other shows who are still very relevant," according to Lopez. The fact that his will be the only English-language late-night show on U.S. TV hosted by a Mexican-American obviously will make it stand out as well.

"I wish I was on now," says Lopez. "Anderson Cooper has been reporting at the Mexican border all week, which strikes me as very funny. If I were doing the show this week, I'd love to do something with that."

THE RIGHT STUFF: Kathy Baker may be the holder of three Emmys, a Golden Globe and an Obie Award, but her experience and acclaim didn't keep her from having a case of nerves when she started filming her two-episode stint on Holly Hunter's "Saving Grace" series. But then, "I always get nervous. It shows I care," Baker says. "I'd rather be nervous than overly calm and have to work to call up my energy."

"I love Holly. I think she's one of the best actresses in the business and this is a big thrill for me," she adds, speaking of the guesting that starts March 30. "She and I have known each other a long time and we've worked together before. I didn't exactly ask her directly, but I think maybe because of our relationship I got the call out

of the blue to do this part."

Baker's playing "a bartender in the bar where they all hang out, who starts dating Doug (Chris Mulkey), Holly's character's brother-in-law. They're trying to sort of figure each other out. They immediately have a connection in that they're both kind of tough gals. Being the cop she is, she's trying to find out if my character is on the up-and-up. Well, things are not as they seem, let's put it that way. We have a very big arc."

ROLE MODEL: Missy Peregrin of "Reaper" says that if she hadn't become an actress, she might well have become a P.E. teacher. As it is, the 26-year-old Montreal-born, Surrey, B.C.-raised beauty spends some of her off hours helping out at her old school coaching girls' basketball.

"I'm passionate about young girls having self-respect," says the former fashion model, a self-admitted tomboy. "I'd love to have an effect on that in a positive way, to be a good influence." She says that thanks to her coaching involvement, she's gained a lot of insight into what teens are thinking about these days. She also lets them know, when it comes to young Hollywood's famous drama queens like Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears, things aren't as glamorous as they might appear. She recounts, "I tell them, 'You need to understand that these girls are actually hurting.'"

Meanwhile, despite its ratings struggles, Peregrin is enjoying work on the CW show in which Bret Harrison plays a bounty hunter for the devil, and Tyler Labine is seen as Brett's slacker pal. "Tyler always adlibs in scenes. Sometimes it's hard for me to stay in character," admits the actress. "We laugh all the time between shots."

KEEP SINGING: Justin Guarini is enjoying his TV hosting work on the TV Guide Channel as he's covering this season of "American Idol," but he tells us he has no plans to get back into acting. "Not at this point. I think my focus lies on music and television. That's really where my head is at and I'm making the best with that," says Guarini, who horrified fans in 2003 with the awful movie "From Justin to Kelly." "I think if I were to get into acting again I would want to do a little more studying." Yes, please!

With reports by Emily Feimster.

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