

TV Close-Up: Jeff Goldblum

by Eirik_Knutzen

Family legend has it that Harold Goldblum - a man with high intelligence, nerves of steel and cold hands - once was torn between a career in medicine or acting. Eventually, he took the easy way out and became a successful physician.

"My dad once sat at back of an acting class at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, cringed when he observed some of the more talented actors and said to himself, "This is out of my league,"" said Jeff Goldblum, 54, who displayed his guts and youthful naivete by dashing off to New York at 17 to study drama with Sanford (Sandy) Meisner at Neighborhood Playhouse.

"I'm not entirely sure what he meant by saying that, but I think my dad was probably a better doctor than an actor and made a wise decision," mused Goldblum, now the star of hundreds of plays, TV shows and feature films. "My mom had flirted with show business when she was a kid and both loved the theater, saving every Broadway playbill. I think they were tickled when I became an actor."

JEFF GOLDBLUM - Jeff Goldblum plays hardboiled police Detective Michael Raines on the new TV thriller 'Raines.' CNS Photo courtesy of Chris Haston.

Among Goldblum's current projects is his title role in "Raines," an NBC midseason replacement retro series revolving around a hard-boiled Raymond Chandleresque Los Angeles Police Department homicide detective on some of the better-maintained mean streets in Southern California. And the eccentric, laconic cop is just back to work after being shot several times in the line of duty.

While recovering from his grievous wounds, Michael Raines learns that his cop partner Charlie Lincoln (Malik Yoba) was shot and killed in the same incident. With no life, such as it is, the hurt detective soon finds that he possesses the unique ability to focus on murder victims to the point where he can conjure up images of them in his mind to help solve the case.

In most police departments worldwide, Raines would be dismissed as a nutcake who frequently talks to himself and was forcibly retired. But this is the LAPD, frequently shorthanded. He also has an understanding boss, Capt. Daniel Lewis (Matt Craven), an empathetic therapist, Dr. Kohl (Madeleine Stowe), and a confrontational jerk policeman in the squad room, Remi Boyer (Dov Davidoff).

Goldblum - pulling on a diet soft drink while trying to relax in a noisy reception room for celebrities and their handlers at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Pasadena, Calif. - was getting skinny in preparation for the April start date of shooting the feature film "Adam Resurrected" in Israel, Germany and Romania under the direction of Paul Schrader.

He portrays Adam, a Jewish stage performer, mind reader, violinist and animal trainer entertaining Holocaust victims as they are herded to their deaths in Nazi concentrations camps during World War II, then is "reunited" with some of the camp survivors at an Israeli institution in 1961.

"I start out playing myself as a much younger man, then flash forward 25 years," Goldblum explained, "so I have been working hard with a terrific personal trainer to lose lots of weight and achieve a gaunt, frail look, ironically, through eating less of the right food and exercise. I'm Jewish and this is a personal story in some ways, but I didn't lose any immediate family members in the Holocaust."

The angular actor returns to his Los Angeles digs in midsummer, ready to film the fall season on "Raines" ("should there be one"), teach acting at Playhouse West (which he co-founded some 20 years ago) in North Hollywood and drum up support for a couple of 2006 independent films - "Pittsburgh" and "Fay

Grimm" (a 10-years-later sequel to Hal Hartley's "Henry Fool") - after the film festival circuit.

Working with Robin Williams and Christopher Walken, he also churned out the 2006 release "Man of the Year" shortly after his return to Broadway in Martin McDonagh's "The Pillowman" with Billy Crudup and Zeliko Ivanek. He was awarded an Outer Critics Circle Award for his work, plus a host of nominations for acting from such organizations as the Drama Desk and Drama League Awards. Twice married (Patricia Gaul, Geena Davis), twice divorced and with no children in the mix, Goldblum is free to do pretty much what he wants - including gigs playing the piano on a jazz band called The Mildred Snitzer Orchestra, which also features Peter Weller on trumpet. They hooked up while shooting a cult flick titled "The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension."

"Raines" is his first television series since "Tenspeed and Brown Shoe" in 1980. Since his film debut as Freak No. 1 in 1974's "Death Wish," the Pittsburgh native has cashed nice paychecks from parts large and small in scores of motion pictures. His lengthy credits include "Nashville," "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," "The Big Chill," "The Fly," "Jurassic Park" and "Independence Day."

And the man who tackled acting with natural talent in the fifth grade and learned the work ethic from his father is in a very good place: "With experience and teaching, this is the best time I ever had as an actor."

Â© CNS

TV Close-Up: Jeff Goldblum by Eirik_Knutzen