

TV Close-Up: David Morrissey

by Eirik_Knutzen

Lonely and bored, David Morrissey spent most nights and weekends snoring or staring at hotel room walls in New Zealand last year while shooting "The Water Horse" - a big family film revolving around Scotland's Loch Ness Monster.

DAVID MORRISSEY - David Morrissey plays Danny Brogan in the drama 'Meadowlands.' CNS Photo courtesy of Ecosse Films/Showtime. Most of all, the Liverpool-born London resident missed his wife and three children back in England to a point just short of despair, then decided to do something about it by sending his agent scrambling for film and TV projects close to home.

"I wanted was to be around my family and enjoy life again," he grumbled.

Morrissey's demands were met only weeks later when the scripts for the first two episodes of "Meadowlands" landed on his desk. A British production with American input, it was billed as a "dark, unpredictable and mysterious eight-part series" revolving around the Brogan family as they start to assimilate in the bucolic, crime-free village of Meadowlands.

Before assignment to Britain's witness protection program, they were known as the Foy clan. And now they're surrounded by weird, threatening families and individuals in the same pickle, making the seemingly placid satellite community a very dangerous place to live. All are operating under aliases and no one knows the nature of the crime that landed their neighbors there.

"I really loved the first two episodes because I thought the premise was very different," said the 6-foot-3, 43-year-old actor. "I also liked my character, Danny Brogan, a very flawed, complicated man. He definitely got his hands dirty. ... I believe that greed and turning a blind eye to things landed him there."

The Brogan brood is fleshed out with an exceptionally competent cast led by Lucy Cohu as his finger-pointing wife, Evelyn, plus Felicity Jones and Harry Treadaway as their resentful teenage children. Best of all, according to a chuckling Morrissey, the whole series was filmed near Maidstone, Kent, a relatively scant 1 1/2-hour drive from his London home.

"It's a long drive home after a long day of work, but I feel it's my responsibility to be there as much as possible because my children are so young," said Morrissey, married to novelist Esther Freud, the mother of Gene, 2, Anna, 9, and Albie, 12. "Unfortunately, most of my work so far has been geared to adults and they won't see 'Meadowlands' for years. Fortunately, they loved me in 'Viva Blackpool' and should go crazy over 'The Water Horse' soon."

His luck holding, Morrissey followed the initial eight episodes of "Meadowlands" with his current classic film project, "Sense and Sensibility," with many scenes shot on London sound stages. Nor did he stray far from the hearth in order to complete a Henry VIII historical drama, "The Other Boleyn Girl".

Born and reared (the youngest of four) in Liverpool, Morrissey is the son of a proud, hard-working cobbler "with hands of leather" and one of thousands of employees for the city's massive catalog company, Littlewoods.

"I've always been kind of embarrassed about my soft hands because I've never done manual labor in my life, despite my working-class background," he sighed.

But he isn't the only one in the Morrissey family with clean, uncalloused hands - his eldest brother develops communications software while his younger brother and sister are career schoolteachers. But he made a departure from the family norm at an early age after participating in several plays during junior school and hooking up with Liverpool's highly respected Everyman's Youth Theatre.

At 17, Morrissey made great strides forward when Everyman's local playwright created a low-budget, five-part TV series titled "One Summer" focusing on two dirt-poor lads from Liverpool running away from

home and finding great adventure in the rural landscape of Wales. He promptly enrolled at RADA for two years, followed by two more years with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

"I had unbelievable luck from there on," he said, laughing. "Just as I was leaving drama school and the National Theatre with a new bag of tricks, Channel 4 decided to run 'One Summer' again and I was able to tell casting directors that they could catch my act on TV Tuesday evening. It was quite impressive."

Building a solid reputation in film and television, Morrissey's credits include such series as "The Knock" and "State of Play," plus TV movies including "The Deal" and "This Little Life." On the big screen, he cavorted in various states of undress in "Captain Corelli's Mandolin," "Stoned," "Basic Instinct 2" and "The Reaping."

His wife - the daughter of artist Lucien Freud and the great-granddaughter of uber-shrink Sigmund Freud - may not always be attuned to his romps in bed with the likes of Sharon Stone and Hilary Swank, but is far more sensitive to screen violence, according to Morrissey.

"She's a novelist, not a psychoanalyst," he observed playfully, "but she likes to get me on the couch now and then."

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