

TV Close-Up: David Duchovny

by Eirik_Knutzen

"Californication" - as the title strongly suggests - provides a whole new definition of the term "boob tube." It's particularly evident to viewers tuning in the half-hour comedy on Showtime (dealing with blocked writer Hank Moody drowning his anxieties in sex, sex, sex and alcohol) for the first time. Just in the pilot segment of "Californication," Moody is spotted in bed with at least three topless or nude women, all married or minors. The hapless writer even dreams about off-screen carnal relations with a nun ... A one-hit wonder as a novelist, he authored the highly praised "God Hates Us All," which was turned into a mediocre film starring Tom and Katie titled "A Crazy Little Thing Called Love."

DAVID DUCHOVNY - David Duchovny plays Hank Moody, an unapologetic, unhinged novelist in the TV drama 'Californication.' CNS Photo courtesy of Kirk Edwards Moody's self-destructive behavior seems fueled by the desire to reconnect with his gorgeous ex-girlfriend, Karen (Natascha McElhone), and their precocious preteen daughter, Becca (Madeleine Martin). Duchovny, who garnered huge attention as FBI Special Agent Fox Mulder on "The X-Files" (1993-02), wasn't looking for another TV series project when "Californication" presented itself.

"What got my attention in the pilot script by (creator) Tom Kapinos was the chance to play a romantic antihero in a project reminiscent of the sophisticated sex comedies of the '70s, like 'Shampoo,'" said Duchovny, 47. "And shooting only 11 episodes this season, all in L.A., meant more time with my family."

Duchovny admits to being "only 60 percent in love" with the show's title, but couldn't think of a better one either.

"Although it's a pun, it's not about fornication per se," he explained. "but it does take place in California."

"Just like 'Sex in the City' had sex in it. And I get to play Hank Moody as an unapologetic, intelligent, slightly unhinged, nihilistic romantic. That's a rare television character."

Shooting the initial episodes of "Californication" at a light industrial park in Venice, Calif., not far from his Malibu home, made it easy to communicate in person with his actress-producer wife, Tea Leoni, on a daily basis. One can only assume that they checked Duchovny's production schedule carefully for bedroom scenes with teenagers before bringing the kids - Madeleine, 8, and Kyd, 5 - to the set.

"The set is a really nice place for the kids because there are lots of people there to pay attention to them," says Duchovny, laughing. "My daughter can get her hair and nails done in the makeup trailer while my son gets things like fake tattoos applied to his body. Many, many people keep an eye on them.

"They're young enough where we can take them away for a month or two every year to work in other states, but we're still improvising to keep them as stable as we can."

So far, neither of his children has begged him for walk-ons and bit parts, although it could be a nice way for them to work their way through college by the age of 10, according to a joking Duchovny. He would much rather spend "lazy Sundays" doing nothing with his wife and kids at this point.

"The highest point of being a father is to watch my kids grow increasingly independent and developing personalities that have nothing to do with me - it's shocking and wonderful," he explained. "There are no real lows to parenthood, though your life is never your own again and you worry about them constantly."

The slender, 6-foot, stubble-chinned hyphenate (actor-writer-director-producer-key grip) also stars in the upcoming melodrama/tear-jerker "Things We Lost in the Fire" opposite Halle Berry and Benicio Del Toro. He is also awaiting the fate of "The Secret," an independent film kept under wraps for the past couple of years, the remake of a psychological thriller based on a Japanese novel and film.

Concurrently, his wife of 10 years is promoting her new motion picture, "You Kill Me," and they're working together on a half-dozen film and TV projects as producers.

"We hope to shoot our first television series, 'Yoga Man,' for Showtime sometime this fall," he explained, "and we have three or four movie projects very close to rolling."

And if the cinema gods cooperate, he will star as spooky Agent Mulder in another film sequel for "The X-Files" next year.

Born in New York City to Scottish-born school teacher mother, Margaret, and Amram Duchovny (of Russian-Jewish extraction), a public relations man-turned-playwright ("The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald" was mounted on Broadway in 1967), he took his prep-school brain and talents as a baseball and basketball player at Princeton long enough to earn a bachelor's in English literature.

He moved on to Yale for doctorate studies in English literature, but dropped out in 1987 just a dissertation short of graduating. Duchovny had already taken a few acting classes as a diversion from his studies, but soon grew uneasy with the realization that he was 26 years old and growing bored with academia.

After a few acting lessons, Duchovny was cast in a beer commercial and the feature film "New Year's Day" (1989). His lengthy credits now include "Chaplin" (1992), "Kalifornia" (1993) and "Zoolander" (2001), plus the TV series "Twin Peaks" and "Red Shoes Diaries."

"I have no regrets leaving Yale, honestly," he chuckled.

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