

# 'Wiseguy' creators try to return show's spice

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"Miami Vice" has gone cold. CBS' "Wiseguy" has become the hottest show in prime time.

It's also the hippest guest shot on TV. The current storyline, about the recording industry, guest stars rock stars Glenn Frey and Deborah Harry, cult actor Tim Curry ("The Rocky Horror Picture Show") and former Don Johnson main squeeze Patti D'Arbanville.

An earlier storyline lured reverse-cool Jerry Lewis into a rare television role. Tony winner Ron Silver ("Speed-the-Plow") played Lewis' son.

The attention is welcome — for now — but the pitfalls of being anointed as hot by the coolest of the cool is not lost on the show's producer-writers, Steve Kronish and David Burke.

"When you get too cool, you can get cold," said Kronish, sitting in Burke's office in the Stephen J. Cannell Productions building in Hollywood, a long way from Vancouver, where "Wiseguy" is filmed.

Kronish said he and Burke plan to avoid big-name stars in the future and return to the obscure, offbeat casting that impressed the industry and TV critics alike when the show premiered last season.

The first storyline rejuvenated Ray Sharkey's career. Then, unknowns Kevin Spacey and Joan Severance made a splash as an incestuous brother-sister crime wave in a second storyline. Another of last season's guest stars was '60s Andy Warhol film veteran Joe Dallesandro.

"Wiseguy" is something of a distant cousin of "Miami Vice." Burke co-wrote the pilot of "Crime Story" for "Miami Vice" executive producer Michael Mann.

Burke's road to Hollywood was winding.

His father, former late-night New York talk-show host Alan Burke, disapproved of his son's show-biz aspirations, but begrudgingly got him a job with a friend, director Otto Preminger.

Burke moved into documentary production and became a political media consultant for clients ranging from Jamaica to U.S. Senate candidate Jay Rockefeller.

Kronish, armed with a degree in journalism, got a job as talent coordinator on a local talk show in L.A.

A play he had written landed him his first script-writing job after he was variously unemployed, an insurance salesman and an assistant golf pro.

His first steady TV job was a game show called, appropriately enough, "Anything for Money."

While still overseeing "Wiseguy," Burke and Kronish found themselves with another series at midseason, NBC's "Unsub," about a crack federal forensic unit.

"Unsub" was a modestly successful midseason replacement. "Wiseguy," meanwhile, has begun to catch on. CBS, picking up on the cult status of the show, has launched an aggressive ad campaign.

Burke and Kronish are hoping, though, that the show is not a megahit.

"Maybe the fact that it isn't does

give us a certain amount of freedom to do things that a hit show might not be able to do," said Kronish.

"I think the people who like 'Wiseguy' like it because we've done things that are relatively unexpected, and I think we deal with the sort of gray areas of these characters' lives that a lot of episodic TV doesn't deal with."

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It took three auditions before former Midland TV reporter Rodney Wunsch convinced Hollywood that he could portray himself in the movie "Everybody's Baby: The Rescue of Jessica McClure."

In October 1987, Jessica fell into an abandoned well in Midland and was trapped for 58½ hours. Wunsch, 25, stayed on the accident scene for 45 hours, often broadcasting live.

Intense news media coverage turned then-18-month-old Jessica into a household name and now a movie event.

The film will air May 21 on ABC. The Midland area ABC affiliate is KMID-TV Channel 2, Wunsch's former employer.

In a telephone interview from his North Hollywood home, Wunsch said the rescue drama will be accurate.

"The producers are really making

# 'Golden Girls' reaches 100th episode

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Susan Harris says "The Golden Girls" began with a suggestion that she write about a group of older women in Miami.

But when the "suggestion" comes from Brandon Tartikoff, president of NBC Entertainment, it's a little hard to dismiss.

"I hadn't wanted to do any more television," said Harris, who had created "Soap" and "Benson."

"But that appealed to me. I like writing about older people. They

have more to say. They've led rich lives. That's really how it started. After that I came up with the concept and the characters. We got the stars we wanted."

The 100th episode of "The Golden Girls" airs Saturday. The Emmy-winning series just completed its third season. It was fifth in the Nielsen ratings for the season.

"The Golden Girls" are four women living in retirement in the same house in Miami. Bea Arthur plays Dorothy Zbornak, former schoolteacher whose husband left her for a younger woman; Betty

White is Rose Nylund, a naive, widowed grief counselor; Rue McClanahan plays Blanche Devereaux, an aging Southern coquette; and Estelle Getty is Dorothy's mother, Sophia Petrillo, whose uncontrollable bluntness was caused by a stroke.

"Estelle Getty was the only unknown when we started casting," said Harris. "She came in, read the part and in two minutes we said, 'That's it.'"

Harris said she believes there's a lot of life left in the "Girls" and that the award-winning show can go on for many more years.

# Reporter plays self in 'Baby Jessica' story

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an effort to produce a factual drama," he said. "I think West Texans will be pleased."

When the Odessa native moved to Hollywood six months ago, he noted his interest in the movie project to producer John Kander. Kander contacted Wunsch a few months later and said the studio had written him into the script.

"I was really excited about it," Wunsch said. "Out of four weeks of shooting, I am on for three weeks. I feel confident. Basically what I say in the movie is what I said on television reports during the rescue."

Wunsch, who left KMID to pursue a career in screenwriting, said he has missed some of the excitement and creativity involved with news reporting.

Wunsch works at AME Inc. in Hollywood in video postproduction. He still hopes to become involved in screenwriting, and was allowed to write a few of his own lines for some of the movie's simulated newscasts.

In a dramatic scene, reporter Wunsch has to pause during a live report because of tears. "We'll have to see how I do on that," he said.

Wunsch said much of the set resembles the Midland neighborhood that for two days became the nation's focal point while men work feverishly to free Jessica.

"The Midland Fire and Police Departments sent down decals for vehicles and patches for the rescue workers," Wunsch said. "It is very realistic. Walking around, it looks like Midland."

Wunsch's screen portrayal of himself often involves a compilation of several reporters.

"Things that happened to myself and other reporters during the rescue are together in my character," he said. "But a lot of it is things I actually experienced."

Along with Wunsch, the film stars Beau Bridges as Midland Police Chief Richard Czech, Roxana Zal as Reba McClure, Will Oldham as Chip

McClure, Patty Duke as victim's assistance worker Carolyn Henry and Pat Hingle as Fire Chief James Herts.

Also, Sam Whipple as Rob O'Donnell, Walter Olkewicz as Al Glasscock, Rudy Ramos as Max Beltran, Miles Watson as Char Boler, Scott Fuels as Ribble Boler and Molly McClure as Maxine Spague.

The actors, often inquisitive about the rescue, have turned to Wunsch for answers.

"They are all very nice," Wunsch said. "They ask a lot of questions about what went on during the rescue. They're really professionals and want it to be accurate."

Wunsch isn't sure if this role could lead to others.

"I don't know, maybe it will. It's been involved with a movie I've been a lifelong dream of mine. It's a kick."

The timing for such a movie is right, Wunsch said.

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