

TELEVISION | JOANNE OSTROW

"Dynasty" creators hope to make prequel set in early '60s

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The Denver Post



POSTED: 01/17/2011 09:10:26 PM MST
UPDATED: 01/17/2011 09:10:33 PM MST



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A prequel to the "Dynasty" TV series is being planned for the big screen. It'll focus on the young Blake Carrington, played back then by John Forsythe. The 1980s show, set in Denver, also featured Linda Evans as wife Krystle and Joan Collins as scheming ex Alexis; there's no word yet on who'll get the film roles.

If "The A-Team" could do it, why not "Dynasty"?

Here's hoping the next big-screen remake of an '80s TV favorite does it better.

Esther Shapiro has fond memories of bringing the "Dynasty" cast to town during the run of the Denver-set, over-the-top, iconic ABC prime-time soap of the 1980s.

Now that she and husband Richard Shapiro are shopping around a prequel to their long-running TV creation, also to be set in Denver, "We'll definitely send a location person out there," she said.

Interiors likely will be shot on a soundstage, but exteriors of the Carrington mansion and perhaps riding scenes could be shot here.

"Do you have any lakes?" Shapiro inquired.

The Shapiros are finishing a script that "can go further in terms of tone, story, sexuality" than what fans of the TV series recall. Additionally, the movie will be set in the early '60s and boast cool fashions. "Not Mod Squad," she said, "but elegant, hot stuff."

Skinny ties like "Mad Men," perhaps? The latest exercise in '60s nostalgia is ready for its close-up, once someone comes up with enough coin.

While a couple of studios have expressed interest, the Shapiros are holding out for the right partners. "We've had offers before from people who just wanted to exploit the title, and from other writers who didn't have the right feeling . . . (it requires) not an extraordinary budget, but it will take a few bucks to put it together."

Esther hopes for a quick production schedule. "I'd love to get it shot this year. We're used to moving fast because we worked in television for so long."

Their daughter suggested the concept of a prequel, telling of Blake's beginnings. The TV series opened with patriarch Blake Carrington (John Forsythe) about to marry his secretary, Krystle (Linda Evans). Only later did we meet his first wife, Alexis (Joan Collins). The prequel will chronicle the obstacles the

20-something Blake had to face, "what he was before he got to Denver and found out he was a Carrington."

Shapiro declines to name the actors under consideration to play the young Blake and Alexis. That would just send their agents into high gear and higher financial expectations, she says.

The idea is to "build a franchise, a series of movies, and meet young Krystle down the line."

If TV ratings are good predictors, there is box-office gold in the script's premise.

"One of our highest-rated episodes in 'Dynasty' had a dream sequence, with Alexis and Blake in love," Shapiro said. "We know there is a lot of interest in people knowing what that story was."

Comedies, sort of.

I'm telling you, the only sitcom worth your time this midseason is "Episodes," the brilliant sendup of Hollywood and the TV business, airing at 7:30 p.m. Sundays on Showtime.

Meanwhile, "Perfect Couples," a new NBC sitcom about three flawed pairs, bows (again) 7:30 p.m. Thursday on KUSA-Channel 9. It had a "sneak peak" in December, but nobody caught, it so the network is trying again.

"Traffic Light," a new Fox sitcom due Feb. 8, is an awful show about more flawed pairs.

Both "Perfect Couples" and "Traffic Light" are reminiscent of "Better With You," an ABC sitcom.

What makes any of these half-hours different from a long history of comedies about mismatched, funnily neurotic couples? Well, compared with, say, "Mad About You," they demonstrate less heart. Compared with "Dharma & Greg," they demonstrate less humor. Compared with "Moonlighting," there's no chemistry. Compared with the British "Couples," they're unsophisticated. The Americanized "Couples," like a number of American adaptations of British hits making the rounds, is best forgotten.

Maybe these shows think they represent a life stage that needs a voice, an angle on the next step in TV comedy after the single "Friends" model? But no.

"Perfect Couples" draws its too-broad humor from one couple who think they have the answer because they spout self-help relationship jargon ("I hear you") and another who routinely fight and have makeup sex.

The series should last approximately as long as that sentence.

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