



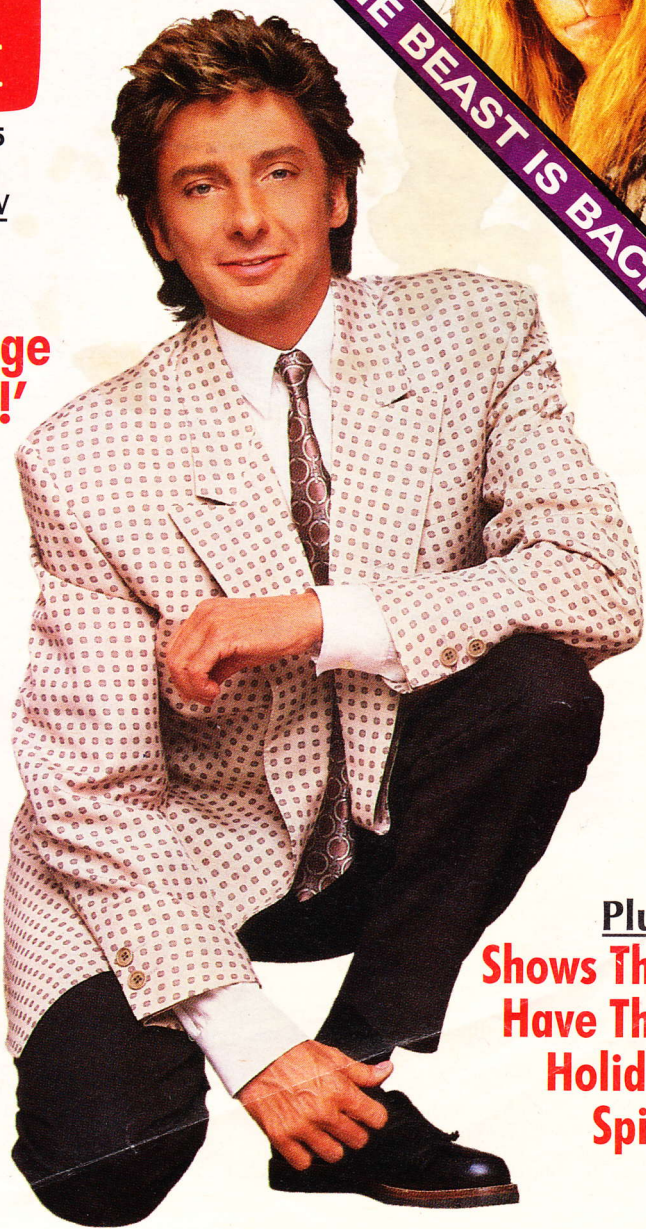
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by GLENN ESTERLY

Beastly romance is alive and well

In an exclusive interview, Ron Perlman waxes eloquently on the beauty of his show

"A roller coaster?" says Ron Perlman, echoing a question about the ups and downs of *Beauty and the Beast*, which is scheduled to return to CBS and Global Dec. 12 with a two-hour episode—"Though Lovers Be Lost..."—followed the next night by the first of 10 new shows. "Roller coaster is putting it too lightly. Where do I begin? I've been through the mill. First, trying to interpret this show and Vincent as a character. Then trying to sell this show to what was at first a very, very skeptical press—and then through the press to the public. And then all of the acceptance, the mail and, finally, getting thrown off the schedule. It's been a ride of some kind, certainly." Pause. "I'm tired."

The fourth show of this new season is being filmed, and whatever the plot holds in the aftermath of Catherine's death has Vincent with huge scratch marks on his left



During the four hours a day that Perlman (right) spends in makeup becoming his character, he has plenty of time to ponder the ultimate fate of the show—and indeed what will become of his own career.



check. Dressed casually in his own clothes before getting into Vincent's garments, Perlman has just finished with makeup artist Margaret Beserra—the usual four-hour routine—and is eating lunch at 3 in the afternoon. His makeup calls range from 4

A.M. to 11 A.M., so a regular schedule is impossible. Even though he's ready for his scenes, studying the script during the onerous makeup process, it'll be at least a couple of hours before other scenes are finished. Perlman will work into the early morning hours in this studio (converted from a factory) in Vernon, a dank industrial area east of downtown L.A., an outpost that couldn't be harder to find by Hollywood standards if it were underground. Still—despite today's imponderables about whether the show will go beyond its 10-episode order—there's an upbeat mood among the cast, crew and producers.

"You know what it is?" Perlman says. "We know that the world might not be a place that understands us. Just like the world isn't a place that understands Vincent. Strangely but pleasantly, that's very liberating. We're doing these last shows for ourselves. We've been relegated [by CBS] to a place that's other-worldly. We now do the show for our own benefit, in a very private way. There's been no press authorized here, except for you today; there aren't people from the network hanging around; and we're isolated in a part of town where you don't go unless you've had vaccination shots. But we're *here*, maybe destined never to do any more shows beyond these, and it's extremely pleasant to work that way. We are now able to do anything we want, because we've looked in the face of cancellation and laughed. What can they do to you besides cancel you? That is the worst it can get. So, let's go out swinging.

"These shows we're doing now are easily the most exciting episodes we've ever put on the air. We've taken all of the usual parameters and all of the taboos and danced on their graves. There are no rules or regulations any more—anything goes. That's exciting. A lot of the mail we got was, 'You're giving us too little; the



Jo Anderson is the new woman in Vincent's life, but Catherine's spiritual being will remain a very strong presence

characters never kiss, they never... you know...' Well, we're going to take all of those frustrations and dash them on the rocks. While, mind you, maintaining good taste and good judgment and dignity. But we have definitely pumped up the volume."

Series creator Ron Koslow echoes Perlman's sentiments: "We've fashioned a miniseries with these new shows; they have an epic sweep. The trouble we've been through has turned into a wonderful opportunity. We hope to get extended beyond the 10, but if it doesn't work out that way, we'll go out with the satisfaction that we didn't hold a thing back."

That Catherine will still be around, if only in spirit, is one thing the producers and Perlman are anxious to make perfectly clear in the aftermath of reports that the two-hour return episode would have Catherine (Linda Hamilton) being tortured for months before giving birth to Vincent's child—and then murdered. (Hamilton in real life gave birth to a baby in October.) Koslow won't divulge exactly how Catherine's presence will be sensed after her death, but says it will happen "in a number of ways." Says Perlman: "Catherine may not be there physically, but the love between her and Vincent always took place on another plane. One of the great things



about having to deal with her loss is the chance to examine her presence from other points of view. Her presence is magnanimous and overpoweringly real in all 10 shows. Vincent devotes his whole life to her memory. She very much *lives* in that way. It makes it all the more poignant to see this person who's had half of his life taken from him finding the strength to go on."

The new actress on the block, Jo Anderson (previously on the short-lived *Dream Street*), plays a special investigator looking into Catherine's death. She'll show up in the first hourlong episode, but, say people close to the series, Vincent is too distraught to deal with a new woman in any way. "Her character is very intuitive, very brilliant and has an incredibly successful track record," Perlman says. "That's all I can really say in advance."

In retrospect, it seems Perlman's career

was perfect training for his role. "I cannot put into words how fortunate I am to have found this guy. When I was thinking about becoming an actor and trying to become one, everything was directed at playing this guy. Steeping myself in the classics, from Greek theatre to the present. Having a Masters degree in Fine Arts. Seeking out repertoire companies where I worked in the classics during my formative years. Playing larger-than-life characters who have nobility—characters who take on princely, other-worldly proportions. That's who Vincent is."

The son of a TV repairman who had played drums briefly with Artie Shaw's band, Perlman's interest in acting came out of a feeling of wanting acceptance; he felt like a misfit growing up in New York, like a strange-looking kid who was fat to boot. When he applied for college, his physical exam indicated he had dangerous-



ly high blood pressure and salt levels. Put on a strict, bland diet, "I dropped from 295 pounds to 205 in a summer."

But he still regarded himself as physically inferior, and when he tried the traditional ways of breaking into well-paying jobs in New York—commercials and soaps—the notion was reinforced: "I wasn't pretty enough. I paid the rent driving a taxi and getting \$125 a week in plays."

His supposed breakthrough role came in "Quest for Fire" as a prehistoric tribesman. Filmed for eight months on the frozen bogs of Scotland, the movie required Perlman to spend most of his time on camera barefoot and nearly naked. "The director [Jean-Jacques Annaud] thought that having the actors suffer—which we did, every day—would make for a more effective film. Miraculously, none of us so much as sneezed while we were filming. We had that sheer adrenaline that takes you

through an impossible situation. When it was over, we all fell apart."

Visions of a booming film career fell apart until he got the role of the facially deformed, hunchbacked monk, Salvatore, in "The Name of the Rose." "I had chills up my spine every time I got to play a scene with Sean Connery," says Perlman. "It was a special project, but it didn't make a lot of money in America; I think it was strangely cut and sagged in the middle."

When those two films failed to provide further demand for his services, Perlman went back to theatre. Then—despite his resolve to never do another character that disguised his own face—Perlman succumbed to doing Vincent after his agent forced him to read the pilot script. He cried reading it.

On this Wednesday, Perlman breaks the plastic fork that he's using to eat barbecued chicken. Almost immediately, three be-

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hind-the-camera people are there with replacements, without the actor even asking. Perlman has only been at this star business for three years; his inclination was to get up and get himself another one before all those plastic forks popped up from crew members who know beyond any doubt who "the Big Guy" is. Asked if there's any degree to which Ron Perlman feels he's getting some revenge as a hairy heartthrob now on women who rejected him as a guy over the years, he says, smiling: "Let 'em eat their hearts out. All of them. I hope they all read this article. They know who they are."

Perlman is married to Opal Stone, a fashion designer, and has a 5-year-old daughter, Blake Amanda. The juicy fan mail he gets from female viewers is not something that's shared with his wife. "We keep that part of my life separate. She understands that has nothing to do with either one of us. If she has a feeling about the mail, she hasn't shared it with me. I think she may be worried that somehow this whole thing will go to my head. I don't think it's gone to my head, but she does not indulge any star behavior on my part.

"When you get the attention I've received, you consider that: Am I giving in to it? A few years ago, nobody cared what I thought about almost anything. Now everybody wants to know what I think about everything. The temptation is that you start to think you don't have body odor. By now, I've been on Carson and Sajak, and I'm recognized a lot more on the street as the face behind the face. The trick is to try to ignore that, to try to stay what you know you are."

Vincent, he says, has taught him lessons

Vincent, says Perlman, has taught him lessons about how to live his life better

about how to live his life better. "I've learned patience, generosity; that giving can be far more gratifying than receiving. And that receiving is a gift. Nobody owes you anything in this life, but if you position yourself correctly, you get certain things back that you've given. And—I really don't have the inner fortitude to carry this out as Vincent would—I've learned that loneliness can be spent with great dignity. Solitude, aloneness used to terrify me."

When *Beauty and the Beast* is finished, Perlman, 38, is "very curious to see what turns my career takes from here. The last three years have been so satiating that I have no

ambitions at this moment. I'm ready to go play golf and rest and wait for something special. Maybe even something where I can wear my own face."

The legacy of the show after it leaves the air? "Romance lives in the hearts of people around the world. But it's not celebrated enough in the old, simple ways. It is not corny. It's very real. It's an attribute of the human condition that separates us from the animal kingdom. It holds a special place in people's lives, a secret place.

"The letters I get about it are not one-dimensional. People genuinely open up. They write to me in all candor because I represent this great romantic figure. I would guess that Don Johnson didn't get this kind of mail. Vincent taps this secret place in people, their innermost unhip dreams, because they trust him not to downgrade whatever they have to say. It's a great experience for me. I've always felt that romance was not dead. This show and the response to it proves it. Romance is alive and well."

END