

Fall PREVIEW

TV GUIDE MAGAZINE

NCIS: NEW ORLEANS

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SUCCESSFULLY SPINNING OFF a TV series is hard stuff, so you have to admire the folks behind *NCIS* for giving themselves an instant leg up by setting their new show in the Big Easy. Although different areas of New Orleans may face different challenges, the French Quarter, at least, is often thought of as the Happiest Place on Earth for grown-ups, which might make potential viewers want to extend their time in the *NCIS* universe on Tuesday nights this fall.

Of course there will be autopsies and forensics and street chases and the myriad other tense tropes you'd expect from the procedural format...but all this and tipping, too.

"We just did a scene where the five of us [regulars] were in a bar at the end of the episode," says leading man Scott Bakula. That's not a sight you'd often see in the previous shows bearing the *NCIS* imprimatur, where either globe-trotting or angst preclude many bar hangs. "I don't want to speak too much to the mother ship," he adds, "but those characters go to a lot of different places, solve things, and then go somewhere else. We're here, focused in one place, and we're not going anywhere. It feels very intimate."

Bakula's character, Dwayne "King" Pride, was established in a pair of *NCIS* episodes last spring as a longtime friend of Mark Harmon's Gibbs. Personality-wise, the two characters couldn't be more different. "As much as Gibbs may protect his emotions, Pride is a character who isn't afraid to show them," says creator Gary Glasberg. "Part of having this incredible backdrop of a city was creating a character that in a way

speaks to the rawness and openness of that setting."

As for his team: In the female lead role, as Special Agent Meredith Brody, is Zoe McLellan, who had a key part on the series that *NCIS* itself was spun off from 11 years ago, *JAG*. It is, hopefully, a positive kind of cognitive dissonance. "When Zoe's name came up, I got excited about it," says Glasberg, "because she is an actress our *NCIS* audience is familiar with from *JAG*"—on which she played Jennifer Coates from 2001 to 2005. "To have her come in and audition and knock it out of the park just solidified the idea that to come full circle within our *NCIS* world was terrific." If viewers thought she became subliminally sexier toward the end of last spring's two-part embedded pilot, that was not an accident. "There's a professionalism to Brody," Glasberg says, "but she's looking to this city as a way of loosening up and finding herself."

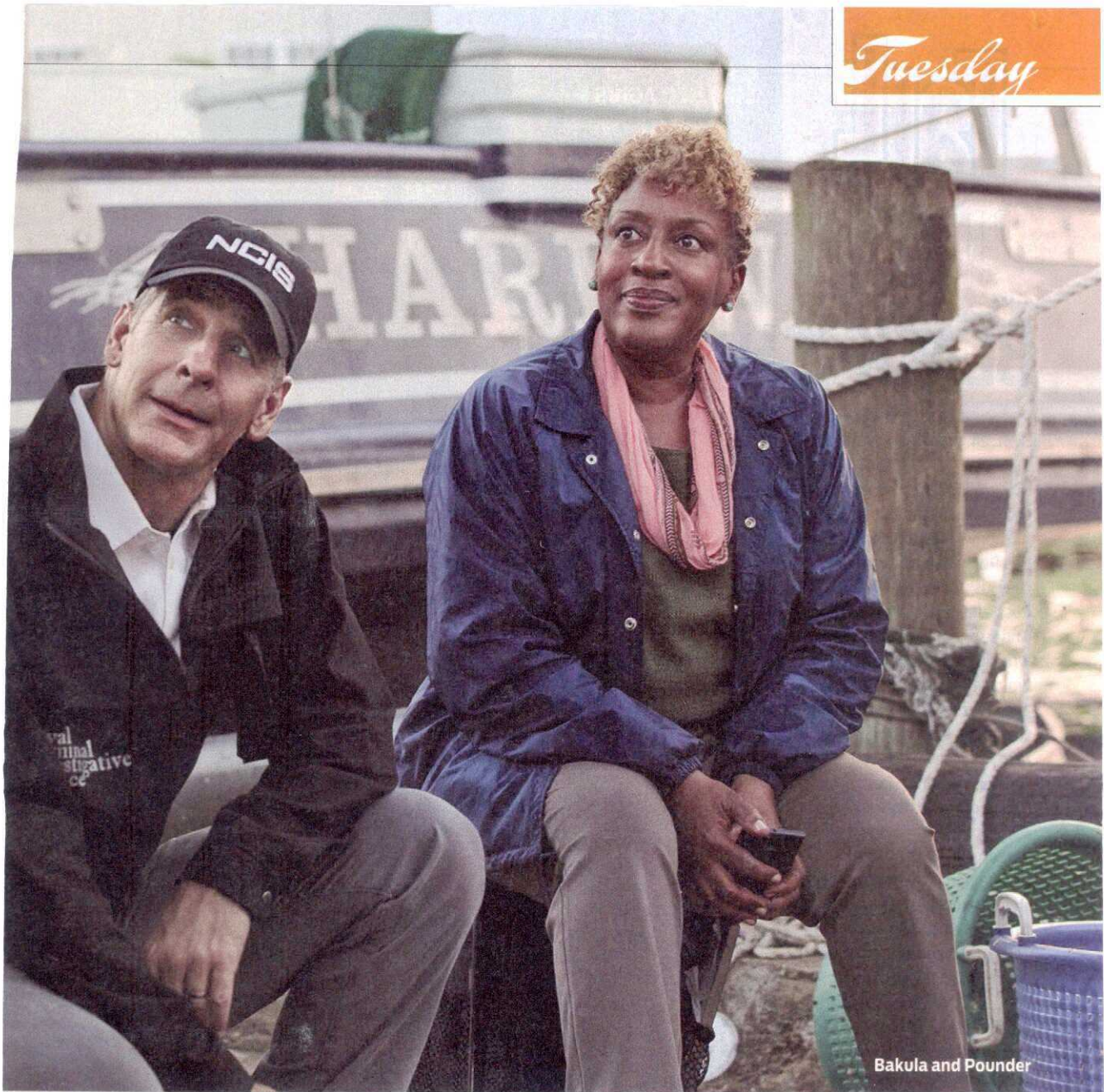
Actor Lucas Black arrives already pre-loosened, bringing what Glasberg calls "a genuine, down-home warmth" to the role of Agent Christopher LaSalle, a "character you want to have a beer with and tailgate with—but when he puts on the badge, you trust him to protect you." CCH Pounder's medical examiner Loretta



Editors' Choice

Wade may not be as down with the beer pounding, but the actress's presence certainly adds instant gravitas. And Rob Kerkovich has been brought in since the pilot as a morgue assistant, or, in *NCIS* parlance, the Jimmy Palmer to Pounder's Ducky.

In fact, David McCallum, who plays Ducky, will guest star on *New Orleans* soon, as will Pauley Perrette, Michael Weatherly, and Harmon himself. That's a big change from the early days of *NCIS: Los Angeles*, when Perrette made one prominent appearance and Rocky Carroll was recurring for a while. Harmon had



Bakula and Pounder

nothing to do with that spinoff, whereas he's an eager executive producer on this one and is clearly buddies with Glasberg, who's now overseeing both *NCIS* and the new show. While Los Angeles hasn't always seemed like part of the same fictional universe as the original *NCIS*, the hope is that the crossover feels more natural this time.

As of this writing, Glasberg wasn't even sure which completed episode would be the first to air. The cast and crew have been shooting stand-alones and feel that last spring's embedded pilot set things up well enough that they didn't need to do another origin story.

Glasberg will reveal that there's a kidnapping plotline and a Halloween-related episode in the works. That Halloween setting may dictate a return to the French Quarter, where they haven't spent much time shooting in an effort to avoid both clichés and crowds.

"When we were down here for the pilot, it was insane," Bakula recalls. "It was a relatively quiet weekend, so we only had a thousand people or so when we shot on Bourbon Street. That was a lot of people just yelling and screaming—at Harmon and at me—and it showed us what it was going to be like to be down here in certain places at certain times.

"Lately we've been in more remote places, on the docks or out on the bayou," Bakula continues, sounding pleased simply with being able to hear himself speak. "But just about everywhere, there are a lot of *welcoming* people. Which is all good. We're not trying to hide!"

—Chris Willman

MATT'S TAKE If you had a successful recipe for beignets, would you mess with it? Same rule applies for the latest transplantation of TV's most durable franchise, which benefits from landing a seasoned star and filming in such a culturally rich and diverse location.