

FALL TELEVISION PREVIEW

'NCIS: NEW ORLEANS'

# Scott Bakula joins a big franchise in the Big Easy

BY SCOTT COLLINS

One of the most recognizable faces on TV, Scott Bakula has played prominent roles on shows such as "Quantum Leap," "Star Trek: Enterprise," "Chuck," "Men of a Certain Age," "Behind the Candelabra" and "Looking." Now the 59-year-old actor is back playing Dwayne Pride in "NCIS: New Orleans," CBS' latest spinoff in its smash crime franchise. He spoke to The Times by phone from the set in New Orleans.

**Many fans still remember you for "Quantum Leap," the early 1990s show about a physicist who time travels. At the end of every episode, you'd land inside the next adventure, glance around and mutter, "Oh, boy."**

That was in the first script. That was part of the convention that Don [Bellisario, the creator] came up with, which was genius, with the "leap in" and the "leap out." That was the hook to bring people in next week. I never said it the same way twice. I know I had one "Oy vey."

**Then you stepped into another cult franchise, playing Capt. Archer in "Star Trek: Enterprise." How on earth did you please all those tough sci-fi fanboys and fangirls?**

These sci-fi fans are phenomenal in the standards that they hold you to. But I came into "Enterprise" with some notoriety in the sci-fi world, so people that never watched "Star Trek," when I got "Enterprise," all of a sudden they jumped on



MICHELE K. SHORT CBS

**SPECIAL AGENT DWAYNE PRIDE** (Scott Bakula), left, is based on a real person who ran the NCIS unit in New Orleans and is a show technical adviser.

the "Star Trek" bandwagon. It's been a good marriage.

**Now you're in the latest version of the "NCIS" franchise, this one set in New Orleans. Will this be the same "NCIS" fans know and love? (The show premieres Sept. 23 on CBS.)**

I'm trying to say to people that it's going to be the same but different. Look, the "NCIS" franchise is beyond successful. I've never been a part of anything as wildly successful as this show has been. It's the most watched show on the planet. I can't get my head around that.

**Your character is based on D'Wayne Swear, who really did run the NCIS unit in New Orleans and now serves as a technical adviser on the show. What's he like?**

The real D'Wayne is a lot like this guy that I'm playing. He's hugely passionate. He absolutely loves his job. I met him on the phone. I was getting background. He said, "I'm at your disposal. You can call me any time you want. Well, no, don't call me on Thursday, because I'm helping out on a case that's out in such and such a parish." I'm like, "Wait a minute, I thought you were retired?" He said, "Well semi-

retired. Now it's a pretty big case, and so they asked me to come in." He loves his work. He has his own way of doing it. He's a little bit of, I think "rebel" might be too strong of a word, but he gets the job done. He's not always super-worried about what the correct procedure is or the rules are.

**You're already correcting people's pronunciation of "New Orleans." It's not "Nawlins," right?**

The locals, they cringe at that. And they cringe at New Or-LEANS. It's "New OR-lins."

**You're not a Louisiana native, so how did you work on the accent?**

Well, I work with a dialect coach whom I've worked with for probably over 20 years, Jessica Drake. She's pretty famous in the business. We've done New York cops, we've done Appalachia. I've always loved dialects. I did it many times in the theater.

**You're in New Orleans shooting for five days a week, but your family is back in L.A. How's that working out?**

Well, we're all discovering that. It's a process. We're in the middle of shooting our fourth episode, and we've all agreed that we're going to be flexible and try and determine how this is going to work. Nobody is talking about what this will be long term. We've got an order for 13 episodes, and we're trying to make this 13 as great as we possibly can and see what happens.

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