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Jer Rei

Scott Bakula On Taking The Lead In 'NCIS: New Orleans'

HuffPost Canada TV | By Bryan Cairns

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"NCIS" is branching out once again with "NCIS: New Orleans." The spinoff revolves around The Big Easy team solving cases in a city known for its heritage and decadence, which often helps foster unique crimes. "Quantum Leap" and "Enterprise" alum **Scott Bakula** will be leading the unit as Special Agent Dwayne Pride, a New Orleans local who deeply believes in the justice system.

Bakula recently jumped on the phone with HuffPost Canada TV to discuss joining the "NCIS" family, what makes Pride tick and soaking up the New Orleans culture.

HuffPost Canada TV: Your career has spanned stage, feature films and a couple of TV movies since "Enterprise" ended. What made now, and "NCIS: New Orleans," the right show to once again lock yourself in as a series regular?

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Scott Bakula: There were a couple of things going on. I haven't done a show like this before. I haven't really done a procedural. It sounds boring, but in television, I'm always looking for something that might go for a while. You always look at what kind of character they're offering and what the potential is for a character to exist for a while. That is somebody who has problems and challenges. This guy has that in spades. He's got great passion. He loves his city. He loves his job. He loves his job maybe a little bit more than he loves his family and his wife. He has some issues going on there.

I was curious about doing something like this. Certainly, I've never been in a situation where I'm getting the hand-off from the mothership "NCIS" like we are. I don't know how many more shows like this there are going to be 10 years from now. I thought I would give it a shot and see how it went. I like this character and I like this world. I like the music and the passion and the food and the colour. We're trying to capture all of that. I always try to do different things and push myself to explore what I do and expand on my instrument. This seemed like another opportunity to do that. We'll see. The jury is still out.

You're stepping into an existing franchise, which you've done before with "Enterprise." As you know, fans have strong opinions, are very vocal and will probably draw comparisons. Was that a concern for you?

No more than doing anything else. Sometimes it's easier to do something brand new because there's a clean slate and a white canvas. Everybody starts painting and some people like it. The reality is we live in this world that keeps getting more vocally critical about everything. I don't think there is any place you can say, 'Oh, well this will be a safe choice and people are going to love me for sure if I do this.' You can't think about that or it's hard to do your work. When I did "Enterprise," it was 100 years before Kirk and Spock. I was able to lie to myself and say, 'See? I'm not following all those other great captains.' I tricked myself that way. In this case, we're doing something that is the same in some aspects, but also different in terms of location and the kind of office that my character runs. There's the relationship with authority and the DC folks. We're jumping off places and getting away from what people might expect.

Pride certainly isn't Gibbs [Mark Harmon] from "NCIS." How do you feel he approaches life and the job differently than his friend?

The biggest way it's different is we're not in a new situation every week. We're not leaving the town. My character has grown up in New Orleans and worked here his entire life, so he has relationships all over town. We're going to hopefully build a stable of politicians and cops and waitresses and people Pride has known, that come in and out of stories. We have an opportunity to build a family of actors and characters that we'll revisit. You can't run away from it. You make a mistake and then you stay here and have to face up to it. That's the big difference. We stay in New Orleans. We love this place and we're trying to make it better.

There was a real sense of camaraderie between Pride and teammate LaSalle [Lucas Black]. What have you enjoyed about their relationship?

We're still exploring that. That was key to me when we started this thing. You can call it a father/son relationship. You can call them partners. They work together, but there's enough of an age difference where there's a mentor thing going on. We're figuring out all the backstories still. I'm anxious to see where that all goes. Lucas is such a great actor. We get along great. These series hinge on these work relationships and how people get along. We're in great shape. Lucas is such a likeable guy. The camera loves him. I think their relationship is going to be great.

New Orleans is a character in itself for this series. How has filming on location informed the tone and look of the show?

I don't know enough about New Orleans. This is my second time shooting here and I haven't spent a lot of time here. Every time we show up somewhere, I'm still like, "Wow, this is really cool. Those drawbridges go up over this back bayou here. Those are real 10-foot alligators on the side of the swamp that we're messing around with." Then, all of a sudden, I'm on the second floor of a balcony on Bourbon Street, looking down on several hundred people, who are looking up at us. Everywhere we've been going, it's an adventure. The world has a Mardi Gras vision of what New Orleans is. We're hoping to get deeper than that. Today, we're getting ready to go out. There's an old fort and we're going to be in the tunnels under the fort. We just

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did a big scene with Navy seals coming in off the water in their boats. There are a lot of great things we're trying to get into. Then you've got the music and the vibe from the city. We have a lot of musicians playing with us in episodes.

New Orleans residents have a distinct accent. How difficult has it been mastering the dialect?

What I found is that everybody has an opinion on what the accent is, and they vary. There's hardly ever a definitive accent. There's a misconception that the Cajun sound is what New Orleans is all about, and that couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, the locals here are like, 'No, no, no. Don't even begin to get into anything like that. That's not what the sound is.' New Orleans is a combination of a lot of different sounds and a lot of different words. For me, I pick sounds that I like and I work with my dialect coach. We create what we think this character sounds like. Am I intending him to be the definitive New Orleans accent? No. I'm not worried about it.

Have there been talks about future crossovers with the other "NCIS" shows? How much of this universe will continue to merge?

It's definitely merged in the first four episodes that we've shot. I think that's going to peter out a little bit. It's no secret the network wants us to maintain as much of the "NCIS" audience as we possibly can. To that end, we've had some visits from the "NCIS" folk down here. Not just on a video screen, but in person. That's all good and it's been part of the stories and worked out fine. In fact, I'm going back Friday to shoot a scene with Mark Harmon. There's a nice relationship there, but as we settle in, I don't know how much more that will go on. It's certainly something everybody is open to and makes total sense. It doesn't feel forced or gratuitous. My office is a small office down here and we need help sometimes.

"NCIS: New Orleans" premieres on Tuesday, September 23 at 9 p.m. ET on CBS in the U.S. and on Global in Canada.



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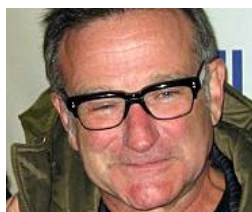
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