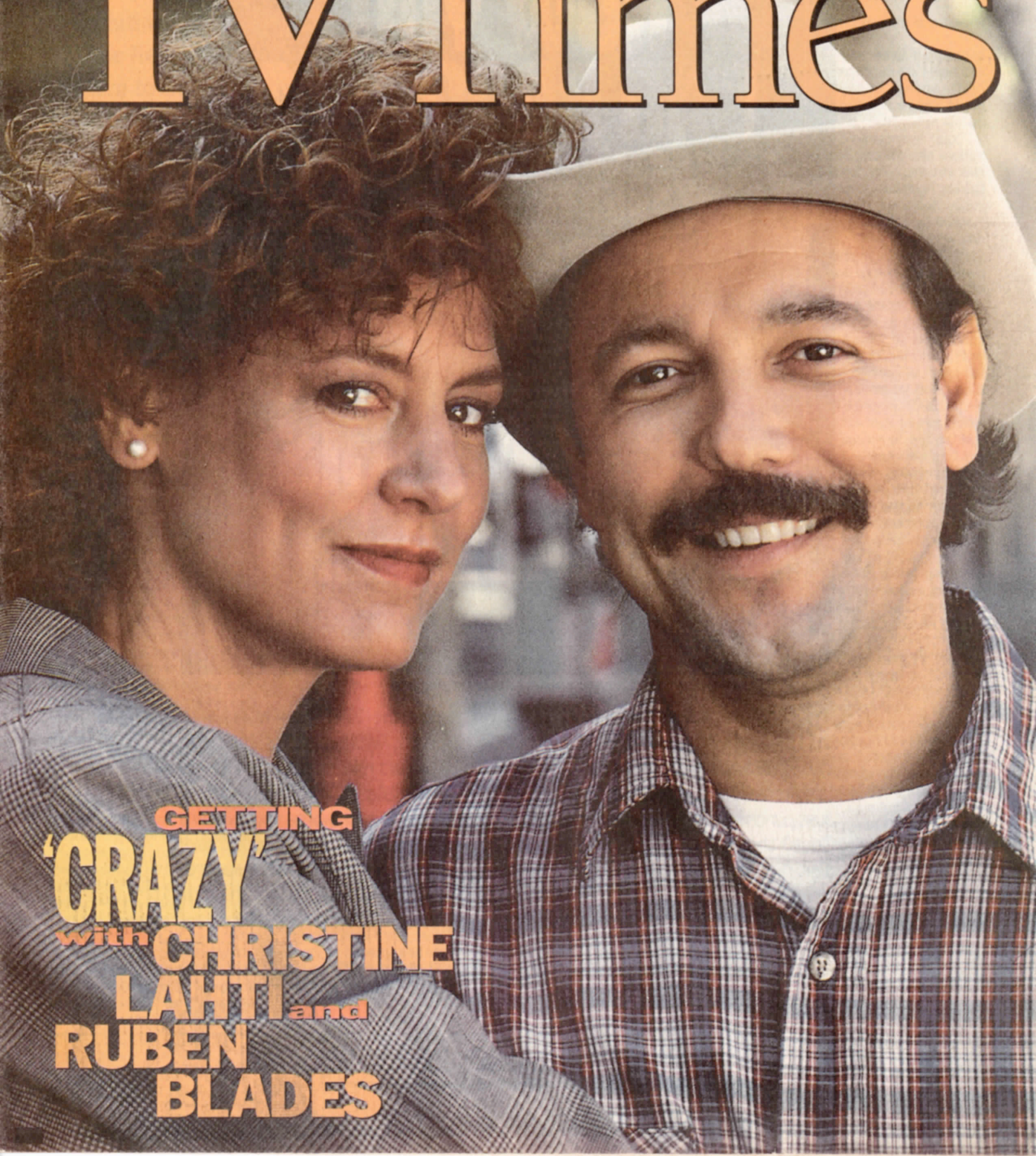


TV Times



GETTING
'CRAZY'
with **CHRISTINE
LAHTI** and
**RUBEN
BLADES**

TNT Movie Built for Two

Christine Lahti: She Relishes Return to Comedy in Film About Finding Love

By SUSAN KING
Times Staff Writer

It was one of those stifling dog-day afternoons. Christine Lahti and Ruben Blades were sitting in an old dusty truck preparing to shoot a scene from "Crazy From the Heart," their off-beat romantic comedy premiering Monday on TNT.

The temperature was hovering near 95 degrees on a barren stretch of road in Valencia; Lahti and Blades were going crazy from the heat.

Director Thomas Schlamme, who also is Lahti's husband, peered into the cabin of the truck and gave the go-ahead for the scene. As Blades drove the truck down the road, a young woman picked up the Schlamme's 3-year-old son, Willie.

"Look," said the nanny. "Wave to your mommy." Willie shyly raised his right arm. But as soon as his mother disappeared from sight, the disheveled tow-head wiggled out of the nanny's arms and began scurrying around the set.

Thirty minutes later, Lahti was running her fingers through her short curly hair, cooling off in her air-conditioned trailer. Though gracious, Lahti was a tad antsy during the interview. She just had one more scene to shoot that afternoon and then she was free to take Willie on a promised visit to nearby Magic Mountain.

While pregnant with Willie, Lahti didn't want to take much time off, so she continued working to her seventh month, starting at the Ahmanson Theatre in a production of Tennessee Williams' "Summer and Smoke."



DANNY FELD / TNT

In "Crazy From the Heart," Christine Lahti plays a high school principal who lets life pass her by until falls in love with a janitor (Ruben Blades) at her school. Film will premiere Monday at 5 p.m.

"Nine months is a long time [to be pregnant and unemployed]," she said with a small smile. "But I wouldn't do that again."

Motherhood has changed her outlook on her career. In fact, Lahti said, she isn't as concerned with her career as she once was. "I am still ambitious and still want challenging, great projects," she said, "but I don't care as much when I don't get them."

Before Willie, Lahti would always sit at home and "obsess" about the roles she didn't get. "It used to be hard for me between jobs," she said. "That's very unhealthy and very selfish and a waste of time. Now when I am not working, I don't think what I should or could be doing. I think about what I have, which is this amazing family and this child. That's really been a gift."

One of Lahti's other talents is a gift for comedy. She received an Oscar nomination for her comedic turn as Goldie Hawn's best friend in 1984's "Swing Shift," although her lighter side has been overshadowed by her dramatic work in "Running on Empty," "Housekeeping" and currently, opposite William Hurt in "The Doctor."

"I love doing comedy," Lahti said, enthusiastically. "I do a lot of comedy on stage. I did Noel Coward's 'Present Laughter' and Jules Feiffer's 'Little Murders'—a lot of bizarre, outrageous comedy, but for some reason I guess my last few movies have been very serious, and studio heads think I am in the Meryl Streep mode."

Lahti chuckled and deepened her voice: "They think I am very, very serious. After I did 'Swing Shift' I was known as a comedi-

enne and now I am a tragedienne."

So she jumped at the chance to do "Crazy From the Heart," in which she plays Charlotte, a high school principal in a small Texas town who is "letting her life go by. Everything is status quo."

Charlotte lives with her mother and has been going steady with her boyfriend, the high school athletic coach, for seven years. "She feels kind of dead inside," Lahti said. "You know how you get sometimes when you suddenly wake up and it's 20 years later and you haven't begun to reach your goals and dreams?"

When she learns that her best friend is about to become a grandmother, Charlotte takes action and decides to make her boyfriend jealous by going on a date with Ernesto (Blades), a down-on-his luck farmer working as a janitor at her school. Much to her surprise and the town's dismay, Charlotte ends up falling in love with him. "It's like having a rebirth of her spirit," Lahti said. "She finds this little soul that was almost dried up and starts to grow."

Lahti has very definite ideas about her characters and has backed out of projects when directors didn't agree with her interpretation. "If the director is not willing or able to see the character the way I see it, then we shouldn't work together," she said matter-of-factly.

When she replaced Joan Allen on Broadway in "The Heidi Chronicles," Wendy Wasserstein's feminist comedy-drama, Lahti insisted the whole concept of the production change. "It was my mission to find out what was beneath all that glib banter," she said. "The director, Dan Sullivan, agreed to explore the play on a deeper level."

"Crazy From the Heart" marks the first time that Lahti and Schlamme have worked together on screen, although she and Willie did a cameo in Schlamme's 1989's "Miss Firecracker." He directed her last summer at a theater workshop at Vassar College.

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