

HOW 'HOT SHOTS!' GOT SHOT • WHO WRITES ROMANCE NOVELS? COULD YOU?

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# entertainment **WEEKLY**

*SPECIAL REPORT*

## PEE-WEE SCANDAL & SYMPATHY

THE KID-SHOW STAR'S INDECENT EXPOSURE ARREST BECAME THE SUMMER'S BIGGEST SHOW-BIZ STORY AND SEEMED LIKELY TO END HIS CAREER. MANY ARE NOW ASKING: HAS PEE-WEE BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY? PLUS: STARS WHO FACED DISGRACE



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# 'Crazy' Love

TNT's movie *Crazy From the Heart* takes a smart, sweet, and funny look at a cross-cultural romance. **BY KEN TUCKER**

**T**WENTY YEARS ago, it was likely that a well-made little romantic comedy such as **CRAZY FROM THE HEART** (TNT, Aug. 19, 8–10 p.m.) would have been released theatrically to good reviews and done pretty well at the box office. Nowadays, the chances of this are poor indeed; a movie studio today would be exceedingly leery about putting out a silly yet subtle, low-budget, no-special-effects bit of fluff like this, featuring a pair of solid but non-star actors.

In *Crazy From the Heart*, Christine Lahti (*Swing Shift*, *Housekeeping*) plays Charlotte Bain, the principal of a high school in Tidewater, Tex.; Rubén Blades (*Mo' Better Blues*, *Predator 2*) is Ernesto Ontiveros, the school's janitor. She's a bit prim and still lives with her mother; he's very earthy and works as a custodian to raise money to prevent a foreclosure on his small farm. They fall in love and one madcap weekend sneak off to Mexico and get married, shocking everyone in their conservative little town. That's the essence of the story—a

## A New Formula for 'Baby Talk'

WHEN THE ABC SITCOM *Baby Talk*, a spin-off of the 1989 movie *Look Who's Talking*, made its debut last spring, it became an instant top 20 hit in the Nielsen ratings, but among its own cast members, the show was about as popular as diaper rash. Connie Sellecca, the show's first star, quit after the pilot. Costar George Clooney and the show's producers left shortly thereafter. Sellecca's replacement, *Newhart*'s Julia Duffy, criticized the show's infantile humor and begged off after 13 episodes, and *L.A. Law*'s Michele Greene turned the role down flat. Critics reviled *Baby Talk*, and its first taped episodes were so unwatchable that ABC sheepishly withheld them until late in the season.



**MOM TO BE:** Keller of ABC's comedy series

Yet *Baby Talk* did what *thirtysomething* and *China Beach* couldn't—it survived ABC's ax and will return this fall with a new Mom (Mary Page Keller of *Duet*), a new leading man (Scott Baio), a grandmother (Polly Bergen), and new producers who are determined to shake the stigma. "We felt the show could be more realistic," executive producer Saul Turteltaub recently told reporters. So the show's heroine, single mother Maggie Campbell, will move from a spacious loft to a smaller apartment, and the new version of *Baby Talk* will de-emphasize both the baby and the talking (although Tony Danza will still provide voice-overs) to focus on Maggie's life. Still, Keller admits to trepidation about her apparently jinxed role. "I had some very long discussions with my agent," she says. "I knew that the show had a lot of problems. But Saul and Bernie [Orenstein, his partner] have a clear sense of who this woman is." The producers even considered changing the title (they stayed with *Baby Talk* to increase its syndication value). "The show is different," Turteltaub promises critics. "And if it's still the worst show on the air, I'm sure you'll let us know." —Mark Harris with Alan Carter



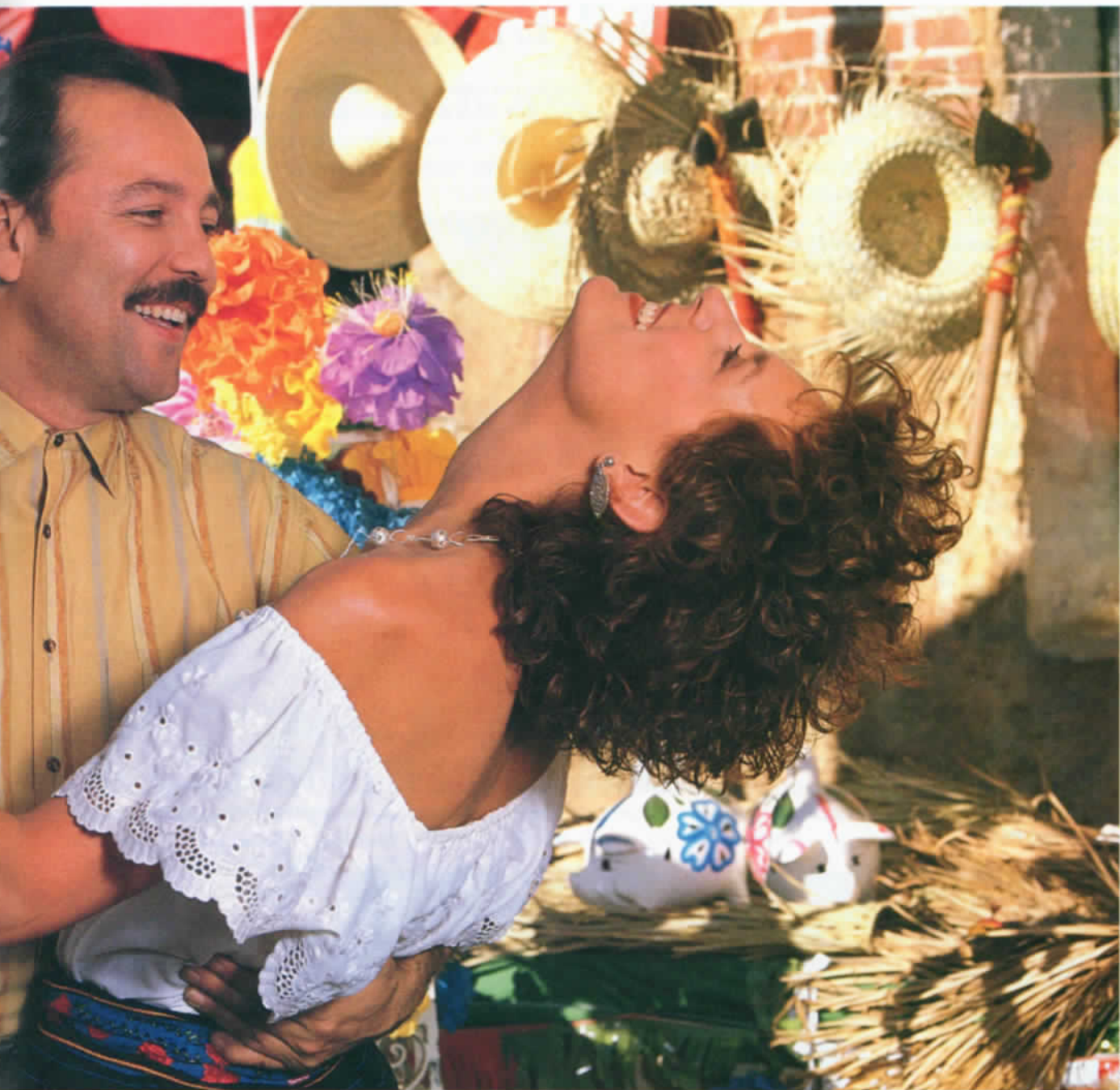
**GOTTA DANCE:** Rubén Blades gets teacher Christine Lahti into the swing of things

string of movie clichés—yet it doesn't begin to suggest the small but significant pleasures of the script by associate producer Linda Voorhees.

Lahti specializes in playing intelligent, middle-class women who are capable of much more than their circumscribed lives have permitted them to reveal. In this sense, her Charlotte is a typical Lahti character, but what's nice about Voorhees' script is that she has surrounded Charlotte with women who are just as smart, acerbic, and frustrated as she is.

These women range from Charlotte's





best friend, played by Mary Kay Place with the wisecracking cynicism of an Eve Arden for the '90s, to a school-board president (Bibi Besch) who makes her exit from a meeting by saying, "You'll have to excuse me—I have a group of parents waiting for me in my office who want to burn our biology textbooks."

*Crazy From the Heart* is much less timid about issues of class and race than most TV movies, and for a comedy, it minces few words. Summing up Tidewater's objection to the marriage of Charlotte and Ernesto, one character remarks, "A principal, Southern born

and bred, does not associate with a Mexican custodian." On the other hand, Ernesto's lawyer daughter (Kamala Lopez) accuses Charlotte and all her friends of racism, and tells her father that Charlotte treats him "like a nigger"; she is as unpleasant—and wrong-headed—as any of the other bigots in the town.

*Crazy* gets a lot of comic mileage out of the disparities between Ernesto and Charlotte's longtime boyfriend, the high school football coach, played by William Russ (*Wiseguy*). Russ' Dewey Whitcomb is one cheesed-off good

ol' boy when he hears of Charlotte's abrupt marriage, and he doesn't want to listen when Charlotte explains that their lengthy courtship has become stale and boring. He likes it even less when Ernesto proves to be such an articulate, sensitive, romantic man—everything Dewey is not. "Quiet yore damn *la boca!*" he screams when Ernesto makes an eloquent speech about his love for Charlotte.

As *Crazy From the Heart* barrels along to its de rigueur happy ending, there's no plot twist you won't recognize a mile away, but nearly every scene



yields unexpected details. Ernesto's relationship with his angry, militant daughter is unsparingly painful; so is a subplot involving Mary Kay Place, whose high school-student daughter becomes pregnant by a young man whom Place's character considers beneath their station in life—"white trash" is her blunt phrase.

Director Thomas Schlamme (*Miss Firecracker* and Billy Crystal's forthcoming *Sessions* series on HBO) films Charlotte and Ernesto's Mexican idyll as a vivid dream that avoids Vaseline-lensed sentimentality—I particularly liked the way Lahti started howling like a coyote after drinking too much tequila.

As for Blades, he has never seemed more confident on the screen. This singer and songwriter has had a successful but highly uneven acting career over the past decade, but *Crazy From the Heart* uses the musicality of his speaking voice and the mournful quality in his eyes to great effect. His Ernesto is as believable in a work shirt, pushing a broom, as he is in a suit and tie, wooing Charlotte with murmured sweet nothings.

*Crazy From the Heart* cannot entirely overcome the triteness of its plot, but most of the time its very familiarity is comforting, its small surprises endearing. **B+**

## THE WEEK

All reviews are by ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY TV critic **KEN TUCKER** and **MARK HARRIS**. Capsules are by Benjamin Svetkey. All times are Eastern daylight and are subject to change.

### 16 FRIDAY

**E.D.J.** (syndicated, weekdays only; check local listings) I freely admit base motives on this one: I tuned in to this overhaul of the dreadful *Personalities* prepared to sneer. Its new name, *Entertainment Daily Journal* (with initials you're supposed to pronounce as "edge"), is a combination of the pretentious and the ridiculous that I assumed would carry over into the show's content.

I was wrong. For a celebrity-news half hour, *E.D.J.* is smart, nervy, and enterprising. For example, the show recently chided Columbia Pictures for erecting a self-serving billboard on Sunset Boulevard congratulating itself for being brave enough to release *Boyz n the Hood*. *E.D.J.* pointed out that the studio then left director John Singleton alone at press conferences, without any Columbia support, to defend his film

against charges of inciting violence.

*E.D.J.*'s recent four-part series on AIDS in Hollywood was notable for its frankness in presenting the testimony of HIV-positive people in all areas of the industry who have felt discriminated against and even blacklisted.

Oh, sure, there are the usual two-minute, movie-plugging interviews with superstars, but at least some of these are conducted by columnist Liz Smith, and when it comes to lobbing softballs, no one does it with more blithe charm.

I came to mock, but it turns out that *E.D.J.* is the celeb show I've been waiting for. Do large numbers of viewers want to see their idols treated with skepticism and even, occasionally, a certain healthy sarcasm? I hope so. **B+** —KT

### 17 SATURDAY

**BLACK RAINBOW** (Showtime, 9-10:45 p.m.)

Before turning up as a "Showtime original," this halfhearted attempt at a suspense thriller sat on the shelf for two years awaiting theatrical release, and it's easy to see why: Since *Black Rainbow* reveals its shocking final plot twist in its first five minutes, the element of surprise in what follows is somewhat scarce. Rosanna Arquette plays Martha Travis, a revival-show medium who specializes in hearing voices from the beyond. Under the thumb of her alcoholic father, Walter (Jason Robards at his raspiest), she goes from town to town serving as "God's... telephone exchange" between the departed and the deluded. The movie fudges the issue of whether Martha is sincere or scamming, but when she starts "seeing" the deaths of workers at a power plant before they happen, we're supposed to take her very seriously. Arquette gives a solid performance, as does Robards, even when he has to chug from a flask and intone "This is the real spirit world." Too bad Walter has to die at the end—but then, you already knew that; *Black Rainbow* is about as exciting as a mystery novel whose last page comes first. **D+** —MH



BURNING UP PARIS: Scott Glenn and Juliette Binoche in Henry Miller's *Women & Men 2*, Sunday