

# TV GUIDE

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May 26-June 1, 1984  
50¢

## Campaign '84 Will TV Stars Influence Your Vote?

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Daniel Hugh-Kelly  
and Brian Keith in  
*Hardcastle  
and McCormick*

Brian Keith, the 62-year-old actor, comes busting into his favorite Studio City, Cal., restaurant, one of those dark, under-lit affairs with the piano bars that, under-18 style 30 years ago, looking as if he were in training for the next episode of his ABC series, *Hardcastle and McCormick*, a car-crash-cum-crime show in which the actors compete for attention with the screech of tires and the crunch of metal.

Keith is, as they say in acting class, really into his character today. As he deftly maneuvers his 225-pound bulk around the matre d' and heads for a corner booth, there's that familiar we're-here-to-eat-so-damn-it-where-s-the-table look in his eye. He snucks his coat, revealing a plaid shirt that you probably wouldn't wear to the Four Seasons, sits, picks up the menu,

scrutinizes Today's Special and peers glumly out into the dining room as if at any moment he might read his fellow diners their rights.

Keith and Judge Milton C. (Hardcastle) Hardcastle are obviously of the same nonsense school of social behavior. The judge believes in a certain primordial order of things. If the crooks done it, they gotta get it, preferably in the neck. Hardcastle acts as a self-appointed committee of one to help the process along.

At the moment, Keith is feeling particularly Hardcastle-ish. In a weak moment, he has agreed to be interviewed, an odious but necessary task, which he rates just one step above root-canal work. "They always ask the same old questions," he

grouses to the press agent. "Why can't they ask me something sensible for a change?"

Sensible? OK. So how does a famous star of television, loved by millions, a proven veteran of five-count 'em, five-series, and with a bankable name who can also act the cover of the script, end up in this car opera? Isn't this the same fellow who, after five successful years of *Family Affair*, in which he played straight man to an overweight butler and three scene-stealing kids, boasted he was so rich he would never have to work again, and who, after two years of *The Brian Keith Show*, blew himself to a \$2.5-million house on Diamond Head, Hawaii, in which to "retire" with his Polynesian wife and his children?

Keith looks as if he had just smelled something bad. "I get tired of sitting home and doin' nothin'," he says at last, with the air of a man whose death sentence the governor has just failed to commute. "I'm doing something eight months of the year. I don't mind loating the other four. But, lately, I've been finding fewer and fewer movies I'd like to do. And when that happens, I get hard to live with. Then, this thing came along.

"I read it. I liked it. This character, Hardcastle: I figured I could live with him for five years if I had to. There was something going on there. You don't get a helluva lot of character in series TV. They're more likely to star the car...."

He pauses to order lunch. Ham and eggs, once over easy. Coffee, and lots of it. Despite his best efforts, he concedes, *Hardcastle and McCormick* stars the car, or series of cars, most of them painted flaming red, which populate the omnipresent car chases. Does he find all this horsepower aggravating?

"I don't pay any attention," he says, pawing at the air. "The stunt people take care of all that. All I do is get in and out of the Coyote, which is no mean trick. You can't get into the S.O.B. without bending yourself into a pretzel." He frowns. "Me, I'd rather drive a pickup."

So, why does he let himself in for this

torture? Keith sighs and sucks on his first cup of coffee. "You learn to read a pilot script. A pilot isn't designed to be good, but only to spell out to the network what it is that's going to make people tune in. Everything has to be either stark drama or screamingly funny with everybody dropping their pants all the time. You read most pilots and tell yourself, 'no, no, no, that's not life! So you go with the character and ignore the hardware.'"

Keith's attitude toward the creative talent is equally liberated. *Hardcastle and McCormick* was the invention of a one-time ski instructor named Patrick Hasburgh, who first surfaced as a writer for *The Greatest American Hero*, and, more recently, as a producer of *The A-Team*. Hasburgh, a lean, dark, Alan Alda type, offers no apologies for *Hardcastle* of which he is co-executive producer. "I love cars," says the enthusiastic owner of a 1984 Porsche Carrera, a VW GTI, and a Formula Russell/Pro-Mazda racer. He and his boss, Stephen J. Cannell, concocted a story "about an ex-car thief who gets arrested, and a judge who uses him as a fast gun, father-son stuff, with the 'father' who lives strictly by the rules and the 'son' who wants to bend them a little."

It turns out that Keith was not the first actor they thought of. They were considering Jack Warden, Keenan Wynn and Fred Astaire, among others, when Cannell came up with Keith, who was clearly born to tell off the younger generation.

Naturally Keith declined to read for the producers. Figured he didn't need to. "I never heard of these guys," he says. "Of course, I can be talking to 40 Academy Award winners and never know the difference. The people in Muncie, Indiana, probably know more about them than I do." He smiles for the first time. "But I figure what the hell, if they're smart enough to hire me they must have something."

They were also smart enough to hire Daniel Hugh-Kelly to play the upstart Mark (Skid) McCormick. Hugh-Kelly, who trained in soap opera, was supposed to be "the new Tom Selleck" (which is what everybody is looking for in TV these →

# Brian Keith Doesn't Respect the Star

The crusty actor plays second fiddle to a sports car on *Hardcastle and McCormick*—and says he'd rather drive a pickup

By Dwight Whitney



continued

days), but turned out to be more of a "new" Jim Garner. "The kid's got a way with a comedy line," Keith says idly. "Good-lookin', but not too good-lookin'. We work well together. That doesn't always happen. That's the luck."

As a result, Keith became less curmudgeon than pussycat, a joy to his bosses, they say. "He's never late, he doesn't goof, and if he complains there's usually some sensible reason for it," swears Hasburgh. "I wish they were all that easy." There were moments, Keith concedes, when he actually liked what he was doing, despite having to shoot the judge's "god-damn midnight baskets," which he hates. But then the whole thing defies logic. "We're supposed to be in jeopardy every week, jeopardy? We're not going to die. We have another show to do next week."

Keith claims that while he was born in a trunk in Bayonne, N.J., of touring actors—his father was Robert Keith, the original Doc in "Mr. Roberts," his mother, Helena Shipman, who began in stock circa 1910—and first appeared on stage at age 1 month, and made his first movie at 3 years, the romance of show business eluded him.

Growing up in East Rockaway, N.Y., where his mother went after she divorced his father, was no picnic either. Not for a young man eager to "eat up" the world. He "marked time," he says, as an aerial gunner in the Pacific. He turned down a chance to study acting on the GI Bill. He ran an elevator at Macy's.

He got into the theater only because no one else was making him any offers. What started it was a chance to do "Junior Miss" in stock in Connecticut. Eventually he landed in his father's play, "Mr. Roberts," and rose from walk-on in New York to playing Mannion in the Chicago company. Then television reached out and grabbed him.

The so-called Golden Age was on. His New York successes in live drama led him kicking and screaming, he would have you think, to Hollywood and an endless stream of movies. Superstardom, alas, eluded him. But in TV series? That was another matter.

He became a series junkie. Didn't matter what it was, he did it. In *Crusader* (1955), he helped oppressed peoples flee dictatorships. In *The Westmer* (1960), an early effort of Sam ("The Wild Bunch") Peckinpah, he was a cowboy with a yellow mongrel dog named Brown.

*Family Affair* was more in tune with its audience. The money was fine—"I thought of it as a tugboat with dollar signs attached," Keith once remarked. But Keith and his co-star, cuddly Sebastian Cabot, did not see things the same way. "Sabby loved everything I hated. He'd cut ribbons in supermarkets, throw out the first ball in Little League, anything to get noticed," Keith declares.

*Family Affair*, a perfect blend of virtuosity and schmalz, never did falter in the ratings until its last season. In 1971, CBS vice-president of programming Fred Silverman, then at the height of his powers, found the show "too soft" and killed it off. "What sold in 1971," Keith says, "was Archie Bunker."

Originally called *The Little People*, *The Brian Keith Show* (1972) paid lip service to women's lib in a Hawaiian setting by putting an unmarried pediatrician (Keith) in loving conflict with his daughter-doctor (Shelley Fabares). In *Archer* (1975), he was a rumpled Sam Spade-like detective who thought his way to the solution, which was perhaps one of the reasons it was canceled after only six shows.

The show caused a flurry, however, when it was reported that Keith had had his "skin tightened, his neck wrinkles ironed out and his bald spot refurbished" in apparent anticipation of one last fling in the Cary Grant glamour department. To remind him of this causes him to bellow like a wounded water buffalo, "Why would I do a damn fool thing like that?"

But it is getting late and Keith is getting fidgety. He concedes that he liked making films for Disney (he made seven all told): "I didn't have to play the same guy all the time, which drives me nuts."

His life style? He admits to being a homebody and Irish, and to living in a rented, four-bedroom house (no pool) →

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in Bel Air, Cal., with his present wife, actress Victoria Leialoha Young (she played Nurse Puni in *The Brian Keith Show*) and their two children, Robert, 15, and Daisy, 14. (His daughter by Judy Landon, Miri, 22, is a dancer with the San Francisco Ballet.) When pressed, he will admit that he lifts weights between takes in a miniature gym the studio built for him in his dressing-room trailer.

The details are off-limits. Mention of his personal life causes him to start mumbling about how he has to meet his son, Robert, 10 minutes ago.

Still, tantalizing bits of information keep trickling through. There was the time in 1955, for example, when he was seeking a divorce from wife No. 1, actress Frances Helm, in order to marry wife No. 2, ballerina Judy Landon. He got into a noisy wrangle with the judge over the court's stubborn refusal to allow him to pay Frances \$250 a month alimony. It was a scene right out of *Hardcastle and McCormick*. Also pure Keith. No one fiddles

around with the inherent *rightness* of things without hearing from him. And as he saw it, Frances was entitled.

He can't say as much for his fans, his network bosses, or heaven knows, those rascals from the media. They're all crazy, he thinks. "Never believe what you read in the paper," he warns. "Bette Davis was supposed to render you and dismember you and have you for lunch. Not so. We couldn't have gotten along better."

He reaches for his jacket. "I'm not one of those guys who has to have it all spelled out in print," he declares. "I don't care how curious they are about me in Muncie, Indiana. What they think doesn't mean that much."

How about that tugboat full of money? He frowns. "It's a crapshoot. People get hired because the producer couldn't get the guy he really wanted for the part." He smiles for the second time today. "If I'd been casting *Family Affair*, I would have hired Gig Young," he says, as he sprints for the door. **END**

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