

Entertainment Outlook

Talking with ALEC BALDWIN

STAR SPEAK



FRANK SANELLO

Alec Baldwin is hot. After a string of standout supporting roles in films like "Married to the Mob," "Working Girl" and "Beetlejuice," the 31-year-old actor has finally landed the lead in a major film, "The Hunt for Red October," opposite Sean Connery.

In the \$50-million film, based on the Cold War thriller by best-selling novelist Tom Clancy, Baldwin plays a CIA researcher who is forced to give up his cushy desk job and fight the Soviets in a submarine battle.

Baldwin grew up in Massapequa, N.Y., where his father taught high-school civics and riflery. He shared a crowded house with four younger brothers and a sister. After studying political science at George Washington University, Baldwin changed majors — to acting — and colleges — to New York University.

His first major acting break came on the daytime soap "The Doctors." Moving over to prime time, he had a notable run on "Knots Landing" as a minister. Switching gears, he played a West Point cadet accused of a homosexual murder in the miniseries "Dress Gray." Right now, Baldwin is appearing on stage in "Prelude to a Kiss" at New York's Circle Repertory Co. His next film, due out later this month, is "Miami Blues," in which he plays a mentally deranged ex-convict.

Q. "The Hunt for Red October" is an incredibly technical film. What kind of research did you do?

A. I went to the naval base at Groton, Conn. We re-enacted the flooding of a submarine, which, next to a fire on board, has to be the worst thing that can happen on a sub. By the way, I failed the re-enactment test. They shot water in our faces at an incredible rate. I guess when it comes to surviving a sinking sub, I'd be a washout!

Q. Was the flooding as horrifying as it sounds?

A. It wasn't scary at all. The only scary time was when the producer assigned me the cabin in the sub under the catapult. All night long, the room shook as the catapult launched test missiles. It was scary because I was exhausted and needed a good night's sleep. It was actually the producer's cabin, but he wouldn't sleep in it. He made me take it.

Q. With peace breaking out in Eastern Europe, hasn't the thrill gone out of Cold War thrillers like "The Hunt for Red October"?

A. Events in Europe have perhaps altered the impact somewhat, but I think the political backdrop isn't important. First and foremost, the movie is a heck of an adventure story.

'I wouldn't mind playing a villain. I'm interested in people's behavior. I'll play Al Capone or St. Francis of Assisi.'

— Alec Baldwin

Q. You have impeccable liberal credentials as an environmentalist, and you are a crony of Jane Fonda. Did you have any qualms about playing a CIA agent in the film?

A. If I let my own politics into the roles I play, it wouldn't be a good idea. My political beliefs shouldn't stop me from playing a CIA agent. For the same reason, I wouldn't mind playing a villain. I'm interested in people's behavior. I'll play Al Capone or St. Francis of Assisi.

Q. You made five films in 1988 and three the following year. Why such a hectic schedule?

A. The best thing about acting is you get to examine things you'd never be exposed to in normal life. In "The Hunt for Red October," I learned a lot

about submarines. And I had to play a character not too far from my own personality — politics aside. I had to learn how to play myself and still be interesting without hiding behind a wig or beard or accent.

Q. Do you think your male-model good looks have limited the roles you can play? I mean, you'll never get offered the nebbish roles Dustin Hoffman gets or play monsters, like Jack Nicholson.

A. I take hope from Jane Fonda. She's a good example of beauty and talent. She's famous as a fitness guru, and yet she's gotten a lot of Oscar nominations playing against type. Her last Oscar nomination was for playing a down-and-out alcoholic actress. No typecasting there. I can assure you. She shows that you can be fabulous looking and a fabulous actor.

Q. You reportedly get \$2 million a film, and a national magazine recently proclaimed you the hottest actor around. Why do you play so many supporting roles?

A. Because they are offered to me, and I want to work. I take the best roles available to me. I'd rather have a supporting role in a good, interesting film than star in a mediocre one.

Q. Your younger brother Stephen stars on TV in "The Young Riders," and two other siblings work in films. Did you inspire them to become actors?

A. Actually, my brother Stephen always wanted to be an actor, even before I did. As for inspiration, I think my brothers got together and said, "If this Bozo can make it as an actor, then we can do it too!"

'Glory' depicts blacks in Civil War

By Robert DiMatteo

In Movie Theaters

GLORY (R) Since most movies are formulaic, we have learned to settle for style in our entertainments. Movie X may just be a buddy flick, but if it's reasonably well done, we'll take it. Yet what we really want, and all too seldom get, is a movie that is about something new or important — a movie with real content.

"Glory," the Civil War epic directed by Edward Zwick ("About Last Night"), is such a movie. In fact, it has the opposite problem: The subject is richer than the treatment.

Matthew Broderick stars as Robert Gould Shaw who, at the age of 25, became the commanding officer of the first infantry unit of black soldiers. Under Shaw's strict leadership, this 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry disproved the bigoted preconceptions of the time about the efficacy of arming blacks to fight for the North. Ultimately, Lincoln credited the regiment with turning the tide of the war.

Based partly on Shaw's wartime letters, "Glory" is about pride — the pride of a pint-sized white colonel for his at-first uniformless troops; the pride of black soldiers for a country that has enslaved them. After all the pictures that portray blacks as pimps, hookers and drug addicts, it's a pleasure to see one that honors the heroism they have often mustered in the service of this nation.

The cast is full of good black actors. Chief among them are Morgan Freeman as a wisecracking gravedigger who enlists late in life; Denzel Washington

as an insolent runaway slave; and Andre Braugher as an educated, intellectual recruit who learns that when you're dark-skinned in a white society, you can never be smart enough.

Of the two white leads, Cary Elwes (star of "The Princess Bride") fares better than Broderick. Elwes is sturdily effective as a fellow officer of the regiment who watches his good friend Broderick grow starchy and officious. Broderick, meanwhile, remains a thoughtful actor who brings a conceptual freshness to every performance, though he continues to indulge vocal affectations and a kind of misplaced "stage diction." Here, it's hard to tell if Shaw is meant to be as small and pompous as he comes across, or if Broderick simply can't manage the character any other way.

There's also another problem. Despite its eye-opening historical subject, the script's emphasis on Shaw makes this one more movie about blacks in which the central protagonist is white. Add to this some stiffly staged scenes, and you have a movie that misses being great. From the start, we can see where it is going. But where it goes is often powerful. With stunning battle scenes and a sweeping musical score, this is a Hollywood epic graced by some lyricism and eloquence. **GRADE: ★★★**

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