

Bill Fiset

... About Television

'Hong Kong' on the American Plan

Inside the broken down old ferryboat beached at Sausalito the television company was hard at work. Cameras were in place and floodlights made the interior living quarters a blaze of light. On the walls were a dozen abstract paintings—all quite bad—and bit players and extras were dressed as semi-beatniks.

Jorge Morel, an extremely talented young guitarist, sat in the center of this Bohemian scene listening to Jules Bricken, the director.

"We've got to record a wild track for background," Bricken was saying. "Everyone in here will be quiet. Play something slow. No camera, just for soundtrack. Play a slow Spanish dance."

Moral raised an eyebrow but said nothing. The money was good so why should he tell Bricken that Spanish dances for the guitar aren't slow.



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An assistant director called for quiet and Morel began improvising, playing a hauntingly beautiful and melancholy melody. The 20-odd people inside the boat sat in total silence, listening.

"Fine," said Bricken when Morel finished. "Now we're going to do the scene and you're to synchronize your hands with the recording we just made."

They called for quiet and then action and the cameras rolled. The guitar music just recorded began playing back over a loudspeaker and Morel's fingers moved in perfect tempo. The camera stayed on Moral for a moment and then panned along the room to a door at one end, reaching the door just as it opened and Barbara Rush entered. With her was Glenn Evans, the flashiest newspaperman in the history of TV fiction.

Glenn Evans? Of the old "Hong Kong" series? But in Sausalito instead of Hong Kong?

Right. But things are a little different now. "Hong Kong" was canceled but so many letters poured in that 20th Century Fox and Rod Taylor, who played Evans, are shooting a pilot for a new batch of episodes. But because of legal complications they can't call the new series "Hong Kong." It'll be "Dateline San Francisco."

And Glenn Evans will be "Chris Andrews" and instead of Hong Kong the show is set in San Francisco with Andrews a columnist for the fictitious "San Francisco Observer."

Otherwise, everything is just the same as before, right down to the trench coat and cleft in Rod Taylor's chin.

The cast and crew have been shooting the pilot this week and the Sausalito scenes were yesterday. The opening story finds Chris Andrews, the flashiest Paris correspondent the "Observer" ever had, back in town to resume his hard-hitting daily column and help the paper's sagging circulation.

He's a bachelor, naturally, calls the publisher by his first name and lives in the Fairmont Hotel. Which proves the show is fiction.

The premiere script has everything. The publisher's beautiful daughter (Barbara Rush) is upset because she's killed a man in a hit-run accident. Rod Taylor is slugged on the head with a gun butt and almost killed by thugs, in true "Hong Kong" style. There's a corrupt judge and an underworld baron.

And get this: At the end Chris Andrews proves Miss Rush didn't really kill a man. The victim WAS DEAD BEFORE SHE RAN HIM DOWN. It seems the hoods shoved the victim out from behind a tree right in front of her car.

Of course anything goes in a story about newspapermen, and I don't complain at this. But the script stretches credibility a little where the city editor in the show is telling Andrews: "If a boy has what it takes he doesn't stay a copyboy long on the Observer."

The youngest copyboy I can think of on any San Francisco paper just got a gold watch for 25 years' service.

But otherwise "Dateline San Francisco" promises to be a pretty good series, and rumors are it's almost certain to be bought by one of the networks for this fall.

And that Rod Taylor is a great image for a columnist—broad shoulders, vigorous, crusading, trench coat, surrounded by pretty girls, respected by his editors, looked up to by readers, handsome, full head of hair, big expense account, fancy hotel suite, his picture on newspaper racks, cleft in his chin.

I have the feeling I was just shut off.