

TV CANDIDS

by
Terrence O'Flaherty

A good percentage of today's television stars are pretty boys with forgettable names and forgettable faces. Today's viewing public has a hard time telling which is which—if they care to know at all.

One of the exceptions is Rod Taylor, the star of "Hong Kong," and one of the few television stars to have any humor in his face. Actually it may be more mischief than humor.

Taylor has been in San Francisco shooting the pilot film for a new series called "Dateline: San Francisco," which will be a kind of Stateside version of "Hong Kong" featuring the adventures of a newspaper reporter in a glamorous locale.

I tracked down Taylor at the Fairmont Hotel recently. This is not an unlikely place to find an actor. But it is the most unlikely place for a newspaper reporter to live. (This is Taylor's fictional home in the new series "Dateline: San Francisco.") Newsmen will get a laugh out of this, but I'm sure most viewers will think it sounds perfectly okay. There's no reporter I know who could afford even to sleep in the back seat of his car in the Fairmont's garage, let alone occupy one of the establishment's view rooms.

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Taylor is a rugged guy who looks much shorter than the five feet eleven that his publicity man claims. I suspect that he is quite a ladies' man, but he has a fine healthy, open face that makes him interesting to the males in his audience as well. He was born in Sydney, Australia, and studied to be a painter.

"I put in several seasons as an artist, complete with easel and several lady patrons," he explained. "And then one day I saw Sir Laurence Olivier, who toured Australia with the Old Vic Company, and decided to become an actor."

In 1954 he went to Hollywood and landed a small part in "The Virgin Queen." Several roles followed and he got a part in "Giant," playing Elizabeth Taylor's fiance, a job that many people would like to get — and have.

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From there he jumped to television and finally "Hong Kong," a series into which he put some of his own money and which attracted the eye of sponsor Henry Kaiser, a man who builds aluminum window jams and island empires with equal success. He and Taylor hit it off right away. They call each other "Dad" and "Son." No other actor I know enjoys this kind of friendship with a former sponsor. Kaiser formerly sponsored "Hong Kong," which is now in its third time around and still popular. Twentieth-Century Fox stopped making the series last year because of a legal hassel over title ownership. At that time Kaiser turned to "Follow the Sun."

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"The new television series, 'Dateline: San Francisco,' is based on a newspaper man just like you," said press agent Frank Neill, who doesn't fool me for a minute. I bet he tells that to all the boys. Besides, I think we'd better wait until the show gets on the air to find if it's a compliment or not.