

because it brought the show into a whole new level – with all these different possibilities.

BH: Right, and I wanted to make sure that people didn't get ahead of the show because you always want to make sure that people aren't getting ahead of you. But it's especially important when you're writing God because God can't be a character that you can predict, you know? When you're trying to characterize God it's very tricky because God is unknowable and God is a mystery and if he became too predictable then it would become unbelievable in a way.

JC: Yes, well that's one of my favorite things about the show. It keeps you guessing. I mean, for me, I get the impression that you have some kind of a vision of where you want certain characters to go. I get the feeling from watching the show that Joan has some

kind of big mission that she's supposed to accomplish. I don't feel like you're picking ideas out of a hat. I feel like you've really got a kind of road where you're taking this show.

BH: Well, the show kind of works on two levels which is, we always work thematically, so you start from where I want to write a show about revenge or I want to write a show about vanity, and then you just put it in a real human level. You just do a story that you could do on any show whether or not God was in it, and then you sort of wrap it around the equation of God. These shows are so thought out, the writers spend so much time. Another thing that happens in the process of writing is that you can have an outline down to the nth degree and then when you're writing it something else happens. It just always surprises you.

CT: Without revealing any specifics, how do you envision *Joan of Arcadia* evolving?

BH: Well, we have a built in evolutionary device which is that she's going to graduate high school, so what we confronted this year was how does the world look different when you're a junior as opposed to a sophomore. It's

things like now you're thinking about college and so we're dealing with issues like they're starting to think about their futures and those kinds of things. The show will mature along with her. But I don't know. I tend to think of shows one season at a time. When we come back, I sit down with the writers and talk about what is this season going to be about what do we want to accomplish by the end of this season, and it tends to work pretty well. It worked on *Judging Amy* and I hope it's going to work here.

JC: So Joan, Adam and Grace are in their junior year now in high school?

BH: Yeah. They're all in physics this year instead of chemistry.

CT: We noticed that Curtis Armstrong, who played Bert in *Moonlighting*, played God in one episode.

BH: He did. (In the episode *Saving Grace*)



Photo courtesy of: arcadiacaps.com

Chemistry works with teenagers, too. Adam and Joan are the main reason people are watching (Besides Joan talking to God).

They're (Amber Tamblyn and Christopher Marquette) so disarming. Both of them. I think for a lot of people, it either speaks to teenagers now or people remember what that was like.

CT: Do you have any plans to have other *Moonlighting* actors guest star?

BH: You know, I haven't thought about that but now I will (chuckles).

JC: Cool!

DM: Wouldn't it be interesting if *Cybill* showed up as God?

JC: Yeah!

ALL: (Laugh)

BH: A lot of decisions have to be made when you're doing a show that has some sort of metaphysical conceit. You have to sort of make up the rules of your universe, and obviously one of the things we were tempted to do and thought about doing was stunt casting God. But then we suddenly decided, "No, God needs to be anonymous." You can't be thinking, "There's Bruce Willis!" You know what I mean?

ALL: (Laugh)

BH: And it's also the fun of never knowing if it's God or not.

CT: Yeah. That's a good choice because, for me, it felt a lot more real.

JC: You feel like you can relate to God more because otherwise you just think, "Oh look! Bruce Willis is starring as God."

BH: Right. Exactly. You know what's funny is that in hindsight it looks like all those things are "Oh yeah, that makes sense." But these were the decisions that I just felt so

confronted with like a million things like that that I had to decide before we could even get going, you know?

DM: Yes, sometimes stunt casting is almost like desperation, because it's not like you need the ratings.

BH: Yeah, it has to be organic. I mean, we have some really interesting casting coming up but just because it's good casting and not because we're trying to sort of wave a flag. But we have Cloris Leachman coming up in an episode, which is exciting, but she's not playing God.

CT: Are there any plans for the 1st season of *Joan of Arcadia* to be released on DVD?

BH: Yes. That's in the works right now.

JC: The fans will be very happy to hear that. That's a very popular question on all the *Joan of Arcadia* message boards.

BH: Well, I tried to get the DVD and the CD to come out last year but there were rights issues and I think that they have finally gotten sorted out. But that's going to happen.

CT: Are there going to be any extras like commentary?

BH: Oh yeah. We were just talking about that yesterday, about what we wanted the extra bonus material to be, so there will be some things from the actors and then we'll do a commentary.

JC: Oh that's great.

CT: Well, besides being an accomplished writer, you're also a singer and musician. Tell us about your band *The Enablers*.

BH: *The Enablers* has sort of been going about six, seven years but it's been changing. It started out as a blue grass duo, but now it's a rock band. It's a five member, sometimes a six member, band and we play around LA and we just finished a CD, which we've been trying to get distribution for.

CT: Is it going to be on an independent record label?

BH: Right now we're on an independent record label. We did it ourselves but I would like to try to get somebody to pick it up for distribution because the hard part is done. We made the record, you know? But now I would just like to find a way to get it out there where I don't have to be pedaling it. Mainly because it's so time consuming.

DM: In regards to your band, how often do you get to play?

BH: I'm shooting for like one gig a month, but maybe not because I can't do more than one a month. One gig a month is at least one rehearsal and it doesn't sound like a lot, but it's actually a lot to put together because you also have to email people and get people to the gig and all that kind of stuff. It can be time consuming.

CT: Do you write your own songs or do you have people writing songs? Do covers?

BH: I write my own songs. The CD is original. Actually, we do one Woody Guthrie cover and then sometimes when

we play live we'll do covers just for fun, but mainly the set is original stuff.

JC: Will you ever write a song for *Joan of Arcadia*?

BH: I did! It was last year. It was a song called *Mystery* and it was playing when Kevin and Joan were talking and she was eating ice cream. It was the yearbook episode. I think it was at the end of the second act. That's my song.

JC: Anonymous.

BH: Ok.

CT: Oh wow!

BH: And I want to do more because it's really fun.

JC: Oh yeah!

CT: Is it going to be on the *Joan of Arcadia* CD?

BH: If we ever get the CD together, I would certainly lobby to have it on there.

DM: By the way, do you check the *Joan of Arcadia* boards to see what the fans are writing?

BH: I do. Where I go is *Television without Pity* because it's just such an honor to be liked by them.

DM: Oh yeah. That's a good one.

BH: And they write such interesting commentary on the show.

JC: Yeah they do.



Photos courtesy of: arcadiacaps.com

Amber Tamblyn (Joan) and Christopher Marquette (Adam) pull off a Maddie and David moment in *No Bad Guy*.



BH: Yes, I'm always surprised. I did, however, feel (good) about the show when I pitched it and when I developed it. When it came on air my attitude was always "Let's not do the show unless we're going to do it. We're not going to do a version of this show. We're not going to go halfway there." And the network to their credit agreed from the beginning and they kept their word and they always just let me do the show that I wanted to do. So my feeling about the show was that people

will either want to see it or they won't and we'll know right away because it's not like it's going to grow on people (laughing).

DM: Did you pitch it to Les Moonves? (now Co-President, Co-Chief Operating Officer of CBS.) I mean, did you actually end up talking to him about it?

BH: I pitched it to Nancy Tellem (President of CBS Entertainment, at the time) and they pretty much bought it in the room or the next day, and when I was giving interviews for the beginning of the year, everybody wanted to hear the network nightmare stories and there just weren't any, you know? I have other nightmare stories, but it didn't come from the network.

JC: How is it working with the rest of the cast like Becky Wahlstrom and Mary Steenburgen?

BH: They are just the greatest cast. I

DM: They're an intelligent bunch over there.

BH: Well, I don't check the other boards much. The reason, the only reason I don't is I don't want be influenced. It can drive you crazy. I just want to be sure that I'm doing the show that I want to do. But it's always fun to check in and make sure that people are liking it and finding out what they're liking and what they're responding to.

CT: Are you surprised that *Joan of Arcadia* has been such an instant hit?

...the main thing about this cast is how much they love the show and they are so enthusiastic about it, and I feel like that shows up on the screen.

mean, part of it is they're great together and they are great people. I mean, these are people I would hang out with and that's always nice. But the main thing about this cast is how much -they love the show and they are so enthusiastic about it, and I feel like that shows up on the screen.

JC: It does.

BH: And that's all true with the crew. You just can't believe how much people love working on the show, you know? And that means a lot.

JC: That's great! You mentioned the CD and the way you use music on the show, and I've noticed that in certain scenes you use music somewhat like *Moonlighting* did. It's not only background music. It tells what's happening in the scene between the characters.

BH: Yeah. Well, of course, music is

something that I really care a lot about and think a lot about and the approach to the music on this show is that we have three levels of music. We have a score and we have background music which you don't necessarily hear the lyrics to, but we play it through out a scene which is sort of an unusual approach. I wasn't sure we could do it in the beginning, but now I like it and it's become sort of a signature thing. And then we feature a song sometimes in a scene and the feature song tends to comment more on the scene. Sometimes you want to comment and sometimes you want to play against it. It just depends on the moment. We just put a lot of thought and time into picking the songs for the show.

DM: Our last question – what do you think about the landscape of television today with reality and scripted TV?

BH: Well, I'm as disturbed as anybody by the way reality TV is cutting into my job. But in a way, I try to look for

the positive. So when any time a paradigm changes, and I've been in television long enough that I've seen it when comedy was dead and drama was dead and then everything's dead and then it was going to be game shows. It's cyclical so you kind of have to wait it out. But in the meantime, I think what people like me have to do... It's incumbent upon me to counter program with something really thought provoking because, you know, it's fine if there's that whole arena but we have to counter program that and really raise the level of their game.

JC: Well thank you, Ms. Hall. It was a pleasure.

CT: Thank you very much.

DM: Yes, thank you so much and we will be in touch.

BH: Ok. Talk to you later.

SPECIAL NOTE: Sadly, CBS has cancelled *Joan of Arcadia* after its second season.

B A R B A R A H A L L ' S	
F I L M O G R A P H Y	
W R I T E R	P R O D U C E R
Movies/ TV Series	Movies/ TV Series
"Joan of Arcadia" (2003) TV Series (creator) (writer)	"Joan of Arcadia" (2003) TV Series (executive producer)
"Judging Amy" (1999) TV Series (developed by) (writer) (episodes: <i>Hold On Tight, The Last Word.</i>)	"Judging Amy" (1999) TV Series (executive producer)
"ER" (1994) TV Series	"Chicago Hope" (1994) TV Series (consulting producer)
"Chicago Hope" (1994) TV Series (writer)	"Northern Exposure" (1990) TV Series (consulting producer) (episodes: <i>Baby Blues, Bolt from the Blue, A Cup of Joe, First Snow, Hello, I Love You, Mite Makes Right, Mr. Sandman, Northern Hospitality, and Una Volta in l'Inverno.</i>)
"Northern Exposure" (1990) TV Series (teleplay) (episodes: <i>Baby Blues, Grand Prix, Northern Hospitality.</i>)	"Moonlighting" (1985) TV Series (producer) (1988-1989)
M I S C E L L A E O U S C R E W	
"Northern Exposure" (1990) TV Series (creative consultant)	
"Newhart" (1982) TV Series (story editor)	
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