

# DAILY NEWS Television

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## What's 'Mission' is respect for a classic

IT WAS a familiar voice emanating from the tape on my telephone answering machine.

"Good morning, Mr. Bianculli," it said. "Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to explain why it is you're so angry about the new 'Mission: Impossible' movie — without spoiling the fun, or the ending, for those six or seven moviegoers who haven't seen it yet."

"As always, should you or any of your Daily News colleagues receive hate mail in return, the editor will disavow any knowledge of your assignment. This message will self-erase in five seconds. Good luck, David."

This is a tricky assignment, because I feel so strongly about how much this new Tom Cruise movie has betrayed the "Mission: Impossible" TV series and its fans that I almost want to spoil the ending on principle.

But I won't. I will say, though, that "betrayed" is the key word here. What this movie does to Jim Phelps, the stoic IMF leader played in the original series by Peter Graves (and in the

movie by Jon Voight), is heinous. At the same time that it uses Jim Phelps to help launch a blockbuster movie franchise, this big-screen "Mission: Impossible" desecrates his memory — unforgivably.

The hypocrisy and snobbery evident here — from producers Paula Wagner and Cruise, director Brian De Palma and the film's gaggle of writers — is astounding.

Cruise's goal was to star in an action blockbuster, pulling in at least \$100 million in box-office receipts. That means getting about 20 million people into the theaters — and if there's anything that draws such a

crowd easily, it's television. Especially old TV classics. So, while "Mission: Impossible" is a pre-sold entity, this movie doesn't care at all about being loyal to the premise, and the characters, that made it so beloved in the first place. The old series was a team effort, not a star showcase. Teamwork and trust were the keys, but this movie throws those keys in the Dumpster, with callous and almost contemp-



CHARACTER ASSASSINATION: Peter Graves (left) as Phelps in the TV series; Jon Voight in the film.

tuous disregard.

In other words, Hollywood is eager to capitalize on the audience and interest generated by TV. It just doesn't want to respect it.

Would Cruise's incorruptible character of Ethan in this "Mission: Impossible," if we revisited him 25 years from now in a sequel, be morally different? Or, to cite other Cruise characters, would his truth-seeking lawyers in "A Few Good Men" or "The Firm" be less noble?

If not, then why treat TV characters from the past with any less regard?

If it would sell tickets, some Hollywood movie makers apparently would think nothing about putting Columbo on the take, or making James T. Kirk a Starfleet traitor, or having Perry Mason play the race card. After all, it's only TV.

On the other hand, a big-screen "Maverick" was true to both the spirit and character of the original TV series. So were "The Addams Family"

films. "The Fugitive" was a fine movie, even if it upset the balance of the original by allowing Tommy Lee Jones to steal the show as L. Girard. (That was like watching a "Perry Mason" movie remake stolen by the guy playing Hamilton Burger.)

So it can be done. The "Mission: Impossible" movie, though, completely failed in that regard. With its \$50 million opening week, it has earned its blockbuster status — but not my respect.



DAVID BIANCULLI

## Sheridan acts as the spirit moves him

By CHRISTY SLEWINSKI

Daily News Staff Writer

JAMEY SHERIDAN sounds stumped.

"Honey, why did I want to act?" the actor yells to his wife, Colette Kilroy, during a phone chat yesterday.

No answer, and the clock's still ticking.

"I have no idea," he mumbles. Then he laughs. "Why does a man jump off a cliff?"

Suddenly, the answer — to the question of his career choice, at least — hits him.

"I think it was because other

people moved me," he says.

When talking about Sheridan, dance moves seems the operative word. A one-time dancer and choreographer, Sheridan, who spent this past season as a "Chicago Hope" doctor, originally found he best communicated through movement. While he dabbled in theater, it was dance he leaned toward as a career. Until he saw an Irish acting troupe perform.

"They were so physical, so immediate and so poetic," he says. "Frankly, I think I decided that night."

Since then, Sheridan has definitely been on the move.

First he hit Broadway, appearing in "Bluxie Blues," "Long Day's Journey Into Night" and "All My Sons," for which he earned a Tony nod.

In 1990, he came to TV to star in NBC's "Shannon's Deal." Last season, he joined "Chicago Hope." But he's moving on again, having just left the CBS series.

"The character wasn't getting off the ground," he says. "I think John [Tinker, 'Hope's' executive producer] saw that

my eye was shifting, and we both have other places that we want to go."

Sheridan's new direction: the big screen. He recently finished the family flick "Wild America" and now is filming Ang Lee's "The Ice Storm."

In retrospect, Sheridan is surprised he had any difficulty deciding between dancing and acting. "I can't believe I had that debate in my head for as long as I did," he says. "It's been a great life as an actor, and I can see I'll be acting until I die."



NO 'HOPE': Jamey Sheridan



THERE ARE THREE specialists tonight that are perfect choices for the family. Almost predictably, all three — a Harry Anderson magic show on CBS, a tasty documentary about ice cream on PBS and a Linda Eder documentary on Nick at Nite — are shown at the same time.

8:00 p.m. (CBS) "Harry Anderson: The Tricks of His Trade," in a special as proudly lowkey as you can get, Anderson demonstrates some of his old tricks, and makes room for a lot of old friends, with the ease and enthusiasm of a fun-loving birthday-party magician.



'BODY TRAP': Ederbee & O'Donnell

8:00 (13) "An Ice Cream Show." There's no fighting it. You might as well plan ahead and have some ice cream, and preferably a sugar cone or two, on hand before watching this Rick Sebak documentary. Sebak is the same guy who did that wonderful PBS special about Pennsylvania diners, and he's just as savvy when it comes to getting the good scoop on good scoops. It starts off with a visit to Bassett's ice cream at the Reading terminal market in Philadelphia — my own favorite ice-cream haunt — and from there, hits everything from a giant Ben & Jerry's to a tiny, cone-shaped Dairy Dome drive-through.

8:00 (Nick) "Nick News Special Ed-

tion: The Body Trap." Rosie O'Donnell is Linda Ederbee's special guest for this special, which begins by profiling two young girls with body-image problems. Then comes a look at the media, and some very frank talk by some kids themselves. A wonderful program, and a perfect starting point for home discussion.

9:00 (Y11) "VH1 Archives." This fine new series unearths old TV shows featuring rock stars. Tonight's opener first shows Janis Joplin in her 1969 appearance on "The Dick Cavett Show," and the second half shows Elton John in a 1970 BBC-TV concert special, taped months before his live "11-17-70" album. (See review page 67.)