

My  
Fair



Mackenzie

By Diana Maiocco



Our  
**EXCLUSIVE**  
interview  
with  
Director  
**Will  
Mackenzie**

I interviewed Will on the evening of November 25, 2002. Make note of that month and day because you will discover there is a significance to it that is quite ironic and fateful. It was such a pleasure speaking to Will. Like everyone else *Moonlighting Strangers* has interviewed, he was so proud to talk about his work on *Moonlighting* and the contributions he made that helped make the show a television classic. As you know, Will directed two highly acclaimed episodes, *My Fair David* and *Atomic Shakespeare* and he shared with me all of the "fun and frolic at the Blue Moon Investigations" (to quote David in *My Fair David*).

**DM: How did you get the job directing episodes of *Moonlighting*?**

**WM:** Glenn Gordon Caron and I had the same agent. I still have the same agent, in fact. I think Glenn left. Well, he went back to New York, anyway. But, we had the same agent. Glenn was looking for directors that year and I hadn't done a lot of single camera. I do mostly 4-camera comedies, and I had done *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, *Remington Steele*, and a couple of others. But, you know, *Moonlighting* was pretty hot, and they were looking for some different directors, especially people who'd get along with Cybill and Bruce. So, I went to lunch with Glenn and we hit it off, and I did my first one, and it worked out great. After that, I

did quite a few of them.

**DM: Yes. The first one you did was *My Fair David*.**

**WM:** Yeah, that's right, and it won a couple of awards. I think I won the DGA Award for that one, too. And, I got an Emmy nomination, too, so that was a nice beginning. You know, quite honestly, I got along with Glenn very well. He did a lot of things at the last minute. He'd rewrite the script and give it to everybody very much at the last minute, and I work well on my feet. I think well on my feet, and a lot of directors have to have lots and lots of preparation and time, and I don't really need that, and I think he

appreciated that, and so that was one of the reasons. And plus, I get along with actors very well.

**DM: Yeah, because you were an actor before you started to direct, right?**

**WM:** I was an actor a long time ago, and so I understand where they're coming from, and some of the times they get a little crazy, so I understand what's going on psychologically with them. So, I got along with Bruce and Cybill very well, and I think Glenn appreciated that, too.

**DM: So, in terms of going through the process from the time the actors see the script to rehearsing and shooting it, did you guys have read throughs, or table reads, or it never really got to that?**

**WM:** No. We didn't have any table reads. It was just too last minute. I mean, he rewrote everything, Glenn.

**DM: Right.**

**WM:** You know, they had other writers like Reno and Osborn, and, oh, what's her name?

**DM: Well, there was Debra Frank...**

**WM:** Yeah, Debbie Frank. That's right. You know, I was thinking

of the two sisters.

**DM: Oh, Karen and Barbara Hall?**

**WM:** Barbara and Karen Hall are wonderful writers, you know? They were good. All the writers were wonderful, and they'd write these scripts, but then Glenn would take them, and totally rewrite them in his own lan-

**Glenn telling me, and telling all of the directors, that he really wanted that pace. And, you know, even to this day, I still direct all the shows that I do with that pace... the Moonlighting pace.**

guage, you know, in his own way. I mean, that was his voice, Cybill and Bruce both, and of everybody, and so we'd have to wait, and wait, and wait, 'til he got done with his rewriting. A lot of times, not only did we not get a full script, but we would get the first page of dialogue the night before... And then the second group of pages the next night... And the third group of pages, and then, eventually, you'd get a full

script. But you'd be three or four days into shooting before you'd get a full script. I mean, you never got it until he rewrote it, so we never saw the first draft. We'd see an outline, and we'd know basically for the set, and for prep that there was an outline, and the story was about whatever... a concert pianist gets murdered, and so and so... but there wouldn't be any specific dialogue, or anything like that. Quite honestly, I'm doing quite a few *Scrubs* right now, and it's being done the same way. There's just no preparation. This is what's happening a lot in the business. They write them very much at the last minute, and we have to scramble to try to get them done in time, and it's tough. But, yet, if you work well on your feet, and you trust your instincts, you can do okay. I think you can probably always do better if you have a little more time. Oh, God, I never had a full script on *Moonlighting*, and we never sat down and had a table reading.

**DM: Okay. Now, one of the hallmarks of the show was overlapping dialogue, which was in some of your episodes. Can you get into a little bit of how that was done?**

**WM:** That was just Glenn telling me, and telling all of the directors, that he really wanted that pace. And, you know, even to this day, I still direct all the shows

that I do with that pace... the *Moonlighting* pace. I mean, I want that in everything. I think it's fabulous, and, you know, people overlap in real life. They don't wait for somebody to finish a complete sentence. You know, as soon as you hear the key word to a sentence, you start talking. You and I will do it, or I do it with my wife, or whoever that you're talking to. That's just a way of life. I think they also got a rapport, you know? A sort of a sync, a sympathy, going to each other that made for that kind of dialogue to just go fast. And, you know, most shows were doing almost 60 seconds to a page, and we were taking 30 seconds, 35 seconds to do a page, and it was great, and I think it's wonderful 'cause a lot of the shows we did were... I don't know, 90 pages long, and most of those hour

shows are, maybe, 70 pages, and our shows were 90, 95 pages. That's just 'cause we got them to talk fast. And they both did. I mean, they both loved doing that overlapping dialogue, and that's a tremendous thing to have, and it also was, I think, one of the things that made the show so appealing, and people loved that.

**DM: Yeah, because they're talking at the same time, and they're both expressing different points of view, so you really have to listen closely to what each side was saying.**

**WM:** Oh, yeah, and it's a kind of show you can listen to two or three times, and pick up something each time you listen to it.

**DM: So, when you're shooting a scene, did you have any flexibility, or did you make any suggestions to change a line?**

**WM:** No. Glenn wouldn't want you to change the line. I mean, you could, if it was small word, or something

like that, but if you had a line change, you'd really have to call the office. He would either get on, or one of the writers would get on with you, and discuss whether it was really important, but very rarely. The dialogue was so darn good that very rarely did it come up that we had to change this, or, you know, she couldn't say it this way, or he couldn't say it that way.

**DM: Or a better way of saying it came about?**

**WM:** I mean, he would come down sometimes, and watch a rehearsal, which is normal. But you stage the rehearsal before you light it, before you set it up and shoot it, and he would see the rehearsal. But, from what I remember in *Moonlighting*, he really wanted you to stick to his dialogue. And it had such a rhythm, and there was something so novel about the whole thing, and unique, that you really had to have a major, major reason to change something. He would come down to the set to watch a rehearsal, and if Bruce, Cybill, or I said something like, "This line doesn't make sense," or, "I don't think this sounds right," he'd certainly listen to us. Then he would rewrite it in his own way, and then give it the dialogue. But he was pretty rigid about keeping it the way it was, and, as I remember it, everybody felt it was so unique anyway that nobody was dying to change it.

**DM: Yeah, 'cause I guess for a lot of people**



**Pets usually end up looking like their owners.** Petruchio and his horse don their glasses as he searches to "wive it wealthily in Padua" in *Atomic Shakespeare*.

**it was so new, in terms of what he wanted to do.**

**WM:** Yeah, and that was his baby. Man, I'll tell you, he is the sole responsibility that that show was as effective as it was. I mean, the fact that he did get Cybill and Bruce, and they had a tremendous chemistry with each other.

**DM: So, it sounds like Glenn was very involved in every aspect. How were your interactions with him while you directed?**

**WM:** My interactions with him were fantastic. Just fantastic. He's a big teddy bear of a guy, and very lovable, and very brilliant. I haven't seen him in a long time, but I saw him two years ago in New York. I was doing a series with Christine Baranski, and he was setting up a show on the next stage, and I couldn't believe it. So, I went over, and we had a nice reunion together.

**DM: Now after an episode is shot, can you describe what the director's job entails in order to get the episode ready to air?**

**WM:** The process normally is that the editor puts it together, and does what's called an "Editor's Assembly." That means, he, the editor, takes it and assembles it basically. He doesn't try to make any cuts. He doesn't try to pull it up in any way. He just puts together how

he feels you tell the story the best way. You know, you open on this particular shot, and then you cut to a 2-shot, and then a single, or whatever, and he uses as much footage as you've given him. He tries to give you the takes that you think are the best takes, if you've marked them in the script, the script supervisor's takes, which are the best, then he puts those in. So, after you get an "Editor's Assembly," you get it usually delivered to your house. Then you look it over. Then you spend usually a good part of a day with the editor going through it, and saying, "Let's pull this up," meaning, let's give it more pace. Or, "There's too much air in between these lines." Or, "I could cut a couple of lines here, and it would move it along a little better." Or, "There was a better take when she did such, and such." Or she said a line in a funnier way that you remember. Any of those things... or you don't like the particular angle that the editor did. So, you just go in, and you do it, and then you finish, and that's called "The Director's Cut." The "Director's Cut" usually goes to the producer, Glenn, and then he will take a whack at it, and he'll make cuts. He'll try to get it on time. In other words, if the "Director's Cut" is 55 minutes long, and the show has to be 45

minutes long, then he'll take the 10 minutes out, and he'll get it to time. Then he'll send that cut to the studio, and the studio will look at it and make comments. Then the studio will send it to the network, and they'll make comments. Then it will eventually come back with all of these fixes and stuff to the producer, to Glenn, 'cause it's basically his responsibility to get it on the air the way he wants it, and pleasing the director, pleasing the studio, and pleasing the network, too. So, it goes through five or six incarnations, I must say, but it still has his stamp on it. Then it'll finally go on the air. But in *Moonlighting*, one of the funniest things was that, with the Shakespeare episode, which was the most famous one that I did,

**I think that the director's job in the television business is to bring as much to that script as you possibly can. A lot of times the staging isn't written into the script, and that's the director's job...**