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FOR TWO DECADES, the Manhattan soundstage of television's *Law & Order* was the place where the biggest stars on Broadway would squeeze into a guest-star gig on the small screen. To supply the cop show with 20 seasons' worth of suspects, New York City newcomers were welcome, too—including, in 1993, a rising star named Julianna Margulies. Now, after *L&O's* cancellation in 2010, it's Margulies' own series, *The Good Wife*, that has become, as actor Denis O'Hare explains, "the new show where every New York actor knows he or she will have a job at least once."

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVE BRODNER



From left: Peter Gerety as Judge Timothy Staneek; Linda Emond as Judge Leora Kuhn; Jerry Stiller as Judge Felix Afterman; Denis O'Hare as Judge Charles Abernathy; Ana Gasteyer as Judge Patrice Lessner; Michael J. Fox as attorney Louis Canning; Martha Plimpton as attorney Patty Nyholm.

*TV's smartest drama taps
into New York talent*

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The Good Wife, says casting director Mark Saks, benefits greatly by tapping into its hometown's unique talent base. According to Saks, 85 percent of *The Good Wife*'s guest roles are populated by either stage veterans or recent graduates of the nation's best theater programs, who tend to migrate East. "In New York, there is less quantity, but more quality," he says. "The general thinking is that most people move to Los Angeles to be movie stars, but people move to New York to be actors."

But, Saks admits, there is a downside to casting in New York. By age 30, many actors have succeeded and headed for Hollywood. That presents an added challenge when he's trying to fill an older part without using the same performers more than once.

To solve this dilemma, *The Good Wife* casts L.A.-based stars when needed, many of whom tend to keep their NYC apartments for precisely these occasions.

And Saks does have one more lure: the possibility of accolades from appearing on a top-notch show. "Some actors tell me, 'I just want one great episode that I can win an Emmy with,'" Saks says. After all, Alan Cumming began as a *Good Wife* guest star before joining its regular cast, and has been nominated for an Emmy for the past two years—the first time, in the Outstanding Guest Actor category. And undoubtedly, some September soon, another stellar *Good Wife* guest star will take home some gold of his or her own. — *Jim Colucci*

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CASTING COUPS

Prestige players recall their gigs as *Good Wife* guests

BY JIM COLUCCI



MICHAEL J. FOX
(attorney Louis Canning)

"I've had so much fun on *The Good Wife*. The character is complex and calculating, and the Kings and the writers add a new layer every time. And, of course, the cast is amazing; Julianna Margulies' excellence seems effortless."

MICHAEL BOATMAN
(law partner Julius Cain)

"After *Spin City*, I had done a bunch of sitcoms, and I was glad to make my way back into drama, particularly playing a guy like Julius, who could be a bit of a heavy and seemed morally ambiguous. Working on *The Good Wife*, you're among a group of real professionals. It makes you want to step up, and be as good as they are."



SARAH SILVERMAN
(client Stephanie Engler)

"There are a handful of shows that are so great, I allow myself to watch them only on the treadmill (because it gets me on the treadmill). *The Good Wife* is one of them. I've been wanting to do more straight acting, and I knew I was lucky to get that opportunity on a show that's not just popular but has such awe-inspiring actors. *The Good Wife* turned out to bring a totally new viewership for me—and a big one."

DENIS O'HARE
(Judge Charles Abernathy)

"I thought, 'Oh, a judge. Aren't they usually older character actors?' But when I saw the script, it had this fantastic opening scene where my character made everyone have a moment of silence for people suffering in Darfur. That was when I realized I knew who this guy would be. The writers make the judges on this show individuals, and real human beings."



JERRY STILLER
(Judge Felix Afterman)

"As I see it, Judge Afterman had forgotten his hearing aid, and so he closed his eyes trying to concentrate on the testimony. But everyone thought he was asleep. In fact, on the street ever since, I'm always in shock when people come up to me and say, 'You were asleep!' For the few minutes I was on, it's amazing to get such feedback."

ANA GASTEYER
(Judge Patrice Lessner)

"I loved that they had my judge in a cast—it was a funny way of indicating a lack of control from a supposedly very controlled person. Fans often come up and quote my line, 'In my opinion ...'—and it's a wide cross section of men, women, even teenagers. It's because the show is smart and complex. And I love how the female characters are bright, and challenged, and not all good, and not victims, but living in a really modern world."



Meet The Good Wife's scene stealer MAMIE GUMMER

TOP GUMMER

LET'S START WITH the 17-time Oscar-nominated elephant in the room: Yes, Mamie Gummer's mother is Meryl Streep. And yes, it's kind of impossible to talk to the 28-year-old actress without bringing this up.

"I'm cool with it," Gummer says of the countless times she's been asked about her superfamous mom. "I'd be really cool with it if one day the requisite question wasn't asked, but I completely understand at this point. It's a small price to pay."

Mary "Mamie" Willa Gummer, who lives in Brooklyn with her actor husband, Benjamin Walker, got her start in the 1986 movie *Heartburn* playing the daughter of Streep and Jack Nicholson. (She was credited as Natalie Stern to avoid press scrutiny.)

"I think it's some of my best work," the self-deprecating star says today with a laugh.

Twenty-six years later, the Northwestern University graduate, who made her off-Broadway debut in 2005 alongside Michael C. Hall in *Mr. Marmalade*, has gone on to appear on stage (including *The Water's Edge* in 2007, for which she received a Lucille Lortel Award nomination), in movies (such as *Evening*, playing her mother as a young woman) and on TV (the critically acclaimed 2008 mini-series *John Adams*).

But it's her recurring role as attorney Nancy Crozier on *The Good Wife* that has tongues wagging these days. "She's interesting because she's kind of grown and evolved a bit," Gummer says of her character. "She came in pretty green in the first couple of episodes. She was a bit more naive, but she's figured out how to harness how people perceive her to get what she wants."

Gummer, who finds herself drawn to female-driven shows such as *Homeland* and *Nurse Jackie*, has been a *Good Wife* fan since Season 1. "The writing is so strong," she says "It holds its audience in high esteem. It's challenging to the viewer, but also comforting because people get invested in the characters and their stories. It's a well-balanced show. It doesn't pander to anyone, and as a viewer I appreciate that."

Even better? The show's soundstages in Brooklyn make for a quick commute. "I love it," she says. "It's pretty wonderful not to have to hop on a plane to Albuquerque." — Alison Prato

GUMMER: ERIC OGDEN/CORBIS OUTLINE