

watch!

YOUR EYE ON ENTERTAINMENT

SEX! LIES! SUMMER!

A *BIG BROTHER*
RETROSPECTIVE

WHO ARE YOU?

MEET THE
WOMEN BEHIND
THE WORLD'S
BIGGEST SHOW

HOW **BRITNEY
SPEARS** MADE
CRAIG FERGUSON
TAKE BACK
COMEDY

CSI ■ **EMILY PROCTER**
TRADES THE MIAMI HEAT
FOR SILVER SCREEN GLAMOUR
HOLLYWOOD

\$2.99 US
\$3.99 CAN

VOL. 2 ISSUE 3
AUGUST 2007



BEHIND EVERY TWO AND A HALF MEN... THERE ARE THREE REALLY FUNNY WOMEN

They add a girlish touch to what is probably the most boy-centered sitcom in a decade. As a mother, an ex-wife and a housekeeper, they exist just to complicate the lives of their show's titular males. But over lunch on an outdoor patio at the Four Seasons hotel in Beverly Hills, it's the ladies taking center stage. Holland Taylor, Marin Hinkle and Conchata Ferrell—"Everybody who knows me calls me Chatti," she starts off explaining—sit down with *Watch!* to talk about being the women of *Two and a Half Men*.

By Jim Colucci • Photography by Cliff Lipson

Watch! What's the appeal of *Two and a Half Men*?

Conchata Ferrell: We're doing *Sex and the City* for men. We're a show that's breaking all the rules. We're funny, we're raunchy—maybe some critics don't appreciate that, but ...

Holland Taylor: But the public really eats it with a spoon, as the ratings demonstrate. And I have never in my career gotten so many compliments from people on the street as I do about this show.

Marin Hinkle: All three of us go back and forth to New York a lot, and I end up seeing the show on American Airlines. And I see people of all ages, races and backgrounds watching it and laughing so hard—sometimes even if they don't have the earphones on, which says something about the physicality of the show. Jon Cryer is such an expert at physical comedy and pratfalls. Nobody does it like he does.

Holland Taylor: And nobody can handle this kind of dialogue and ride the audience like Charlie Sheen does. He's a master, and he makes it look like it's nothing.

Watch! Wow, right away such admiration for Jon and Charlie. How do your characters feel about the boys?

Conchata Ferrell: At first, I thought my main relationship was going to be with Jon's character, Alan, because we're really antagonistic with each other. We're such different people—he's fussy and my character, Berta the housekeeper, is laid back. And we're both in competition for who's first and foremost to Charlie. But now my favorite

relationship in the show is with the child, Jake. It's so unusual and fresh, it's a gold mine. We mean a whole lot more to each other than either one of us would ever admit. Secretly, I love Jake—he's a kid after my own heart. He eats too much, he's messy ... he could have been my son.

Holland Taylor: Very early on, Chatti pointed out that both Berta and my mother character, Evelyn, love Charlie but hold him in no regard. That has been my watch phrase ever since. That dynamic allows our characters to have a friendship, too, because we both feel the same way about him.

Marin Hinkle: My character, Alan's ex-wife Judith, has changed a great deal since the show's pilot. Originally she was very nervous, insecure and fragile. Then a couple of weeks went by, and the writers said they were going to try out different kinds of personalities. They landed on someone who was very different from me—she has a real angry quality.

Watch! How did you each get cast on the show?

Marin Hinkle: I don't know, Chatti and Holland, if you know this, or if I've ever put this on record, but here we go. I had just been let go of a leading role in another pilot. I was pregnant at the time, and that, with having been fired, put me in that place where you can just figure, "Whatever. I have something more important in my life." So although I usually do a lot of preparation, I went in to meet with Chuck Lorre, and I think my ignorance allowed me to just be this woman. Then I went to the callback to test with Jon, and we just clicked together. I can't put my



Holland Taylor (Evelyn), Conchata Ferrell (Berta) and Marin Hinkle (Judith) know how stand up to the guys on *Two and a Half Men*.

finger on why, but I just looked at him and a little part of me could believe that we would be married.

Conchata Ferrell:

When I went to audition, there were over 30 crack-jack character women outside, in every size and shape. Some were names and faces you'd recognize. Berta was supposed to be on for only a two-episode arc, starting from the first show after the pilot. They wanted her to have some kind of accent, so I went in prepared to do it Russian. But to me, the rhythm to the writing felt more "down home" instead. I figured the only way I'm going to get this job is if I do it the very best way I can, so I took a chance and asked if I could do it "trailer park" instead.

Holland Taylor: That was a brilliant call. That got you the part.

Conchata Ferrell:

Yeah, but it could have just as easily not gotten me the part. I did eight shows that first year, and then they made me a regular. And then I became absolutely convinced that they were going to regret their choice and fire me. But what has happened is, Berta has become the voice of the audience. Because I'm the one who goes, "Will you look at what these silly rich people are doing?"

Holland Taylor: For me, my mother had just died, and so I can scarcely remember the casting process. But another actress had had the part, and the fit just wasn't right. So they recast, and

we had one very quick meeting. There was no question in my mind that the show would be a hit, with the track records of the writer, the actors, the director behind it.

Watch! How has being on a hit show impacted your lives?

Holland Taylor: In the early years of the show, I was on, let's say, "the shady side of 50," and I realized I didn't have much self-knowledge. A friend of mine had taken her master's in psychology at the University of Santa Monica and had found it had given her the equipment to tackle life. So I did that for two years. This year, I've been going back to New York almost every week off to rebuild my life there.

"I remember one tape night, when they introduced our co-creator, Chuck Lorre, to the audience and mentioned some of the shows he had worked on before, I turned around and said to him, 'Roseanne, Grace Under Fire and Cybill? No wonder you're doing a show about boys!'"

—Conchata Ferrell

That's where my family and all my oldest friends are, and when *Two and a Half Men* is done, I'm going to focus on the theater. It's great to have the time and resources to do all that—but to tell you the truth I would like to work more on the show. I am one of those people who gets my identity very much from my work, and I feel very weird when I'm not in an episode.

move past it, or change the bad habits that you so enjoy. That's what Charlie has done.

Marin Hinkle: Speaking of the guys, though, we haven't sung somebody's praises yet, and that's Angus. Oh my God is he great.

Watch!: Tell me about working with Angus T. Jones, who plays Jake. After all, there is that old actor's adage to avoid working with kids and animals...

Conchata Ferrell:

He has amazing parents who keep him pretty real. I was at a party one night, and Angus was there with his dad, who treated him the way my own dad would have treated me. If I got a little loud, my dad would have said, "It's time to calm down." His dad was like that, and stayed on him, but in a very kind, very supportive way. His mother works with him, too, and as a result he's a real kid, who happens to be a very funny actor.

Marin Hinkle: I can be nervous before the front door opens and I get to say my lines. And Angus always tells me some sort of joke, or tickles me, or does something that really relaxes me. And the kid has never been nervous. He's so at ease.

Marin Hinkle: I can be nervous before the front door opens and I get to say my lines. And Angus always tells me some sort of joke, or tickles me, or does something that really relaxes me. And the kid has never been nervous. He's so at ease.

Watch!: What would you like to see your characters get the chance to do?

Holland Taylor: Evelyn can be such the mother lion protecting her cubs that I'd like to see that happen in a realistic way. Restaurant scenes are my favorite with her, so it would be fun if she made some spectacle of herself at a restaurant on their behalf. I also would love to have more scenes where we see



Marin Hinkle

that with the generation gap between Evelyn and Jake, they're really on different planets. Like the time he tried to explain to me who Spongebob Squarepants is, and I just couldn't get it.

Marin Hinkle: That was my favorite moment in the last four years.

Conchata Ferrell: I would really like to see three of us women at odds with each other, each trying to get the guys to be on our side. Because they aren't men who like to be in the middle of women going at each other.

Marin Hinkle: Maybe they could bring us to therapy. And I would love to have a sleepover with Jake at my house where the frailty of my mothering starts to show, and so it all flips around and I actually need help from one of the guys. For Judith to admit that she might need them would be a devastating turnabout.

Watch!: What do you think the future holds for *Two and a Half Men*?

Holland Taylor: For me, the increasingly fun thing about our show is having this kid who was a tiny little peanut but who is changing radically every season. And therefore, the writing changes radically. We're watching a guy go from 8 to 12 to 15 to 17. There was a moment recently when Jake was so naive that when a girl gave him the go-ahead to taste her strawberry lip gloss, he dabbed it with his finger rather than kiss her. That's my idea of brilliant powers of observation and brilliant writing.

Conchata Ferrell: If the show ends, the perfect way would be to have Jake bloom. The last image I can see of the show is that he's no longer "half," but a whole young man, with a certain charm that just shocks everybody. ♣

Holland Taylor



"In a primordial way, Alan and Charlie both need their mother in their lives, because they're so immature."
—Holland Taylor

Marin Hinkle: It's like your family is celebrating a holiday ...

Holland Taylor: ... and you're not invited.

Watch!: Would the guys be able to live on their own without the three of you?

Conchata Ferrell: I believe, and this is both me and Berta talking, that unless Charlie fell in love with a whole woman, who could live a full life with him, he can't live without me.

Holland Taylor: And they need a foil like they have in Evelyn. In a primordial way, Alan and Charlie both need their mother in their lives, because they're so immature. It's a very human thing that as long as your mother or ex-wife remains the enemy, and you can rail against her for turning you into the monster that you are, you don't have to get over it.



Conchata Ferrell