

# Making

# M\*A\*S\*H

*Making Mash*, produced for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) by WTTW, Chicago, is made possible by Public Television stations and ARCO--Atlantic Richfield Company

## Acting in M\*A\*S\*H

FOR ACTORS, WORKING IN "M\*A\*S\*H" IS NOT LIKE WORKING AT ALL,  
SAY CAST MEMBERS IN 90-MINUTE SPECIAL, "MAKING M\*A\*S\*H"

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Broadcast, Made Possible by ARCO and Public TV Stations,  
Scheduled for Weds. Jan. 21 on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)

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"Every day is Thanksgiving or Christmas," says veteran actor Harry Morgan about playing Colonel Sherman Potter in the immensely-popular and long-running television series M\*A\*S\*H.

Morgan's comments and those of his M\*A\*S\*H cast member colleagues are to be found in the 90-minute special MAKING M\*A\*S\*H, to be presented at 8:00 PM, ET, on Wednesday, January 21 on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

(Editors: Please check your local PBS station schedule for correct area broadcast time and date.)

MAKING M\*A\*S\*H, a behind-the-scenes close-up of the people -- actors, producers, directors, film editors, writers -- who together create the series, is made possible by grants from Public Television stations and from ARCO -- Atlantic Richfield Company. The special, narrated by Mary Tyler Moore, was produced by WTTW, Chicago's Public Television station.

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On MAKING M\*A\*S\*H, Mary Tyler Moore says that "watching M\*A\*S\*H being filmed, you're struck by the fact that everyone actually enjoys what they're doing, both cast and crew. Fact is, there's no way they could put so much energy into it, rehearsal after rehearsal, and take after take, if they don't enjoy it and enjoy each other. Unlike many other shows, no one hides in his dressing room waiting for someone to come and get the star."

Alan Alda, who plays the irreverent and breezy Hawkeye whose tolerance of the inhumanity of war and the idiocies of the military is low, says that one of the show's great strengths is that the actors know the characters they play very well. To illustrate the point is a scene from the "Preventative Medicine" episode shown on MAKING M\*A\*S\*H, in which Hawkeye and B.J., played by Mike Farrell, argue over doing an unnecessary operation on a gung-ho officer who is careless of his men's lives.

"I agreed that the operation was wrong," Alda says. "But I felt that the characters were under such stress that my character would do it because he felt that it was the only way to save dozens or hundreds of lives."

"The interesting thing is the real doctors who really did take out the appendix never argued about it in real life. They just went ahead and did it. But it was important to take Mike's position and play out that soul searching in a heated way. It gave us one of the best scenes we had all season because we knew something real had happened among the real actors."

From the beginning, M\*A\*S\*H has emphasized individual characters, their motivations, feelings, backgrounds, and style. But in the

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history of the series, perhaps no character has gone through as many changes as Major Margaret Hotlips Houlihan, played by Loretta Swit. Hotlips started out a by-the-book, utterly humorless, military-obsessed martinet to her subordinate nurses and the goat and butt of humor to those who took military life less seriously.

In a segment from an episode called "The Nurses" shown on MAKING M\*A\*S\*H, Swit sees a major breakthrough in the way Hotlips was characterized. In that episode, Margaret, during a confrontation with her nurses, "is finally allowed to reveal what a lonely woman she is and how difficult it is to be in charge and to be in command. And we are allowed to see for the first time that she was really a very vulnerable, lonely woman."

Although Swit has been with the series since it went on the air in 1972, many cast members have left because of the grueling nature of acting in a weekly series or for other reasons.

According to M\*A\*S\*H's executive producer Burt Metcalfe, "cast defections have ultimately worked to our great advantage." It does not mean that the people who have been replaced were replaced by people who were better. "They've all been wonderful," Metcalfe says. "But merely the fact that an actor left, and we had to bring in somebody new changed the chemistry of the show, changed the whole relationship between that character and all the others, and enabled us to generate a lot of new stories."

David Ogden Stiers was one such replacement. He came into the series after Larry Linville, the Major Frank Burns character, left.

"I think that Larry Linville had a very difficult job," says Larry Gelbart, the principal writer in the first four years that

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M\*A\*S\*H was on commercial television. "We saddled Larry with a very narrow sort of character." Linville agrees: "Frank Burns was never allowed to grow. If he suddenly became liberalized or humanized or acquired a genuine sense of humor, the character would dissolve, change into what is no longer a technical comedic contrivance."

When Linville departed, Stiers took over as Major Charles Emerson Winchester III, a multi-dimensional character and a more formidable adversary for Hawkeye, played by Alan Alda. Stiers portrays Winchester as an effete snob, a man of means and substance who disdains the puerile capers of co-workers. Coming into such a series as M\*A\*S\*H, Stiers says, "there's that initial worry that a show that's been very popular and very strong is going to take a dive because you've joined it."

Stiers points out that Farrell had the same worry: If the show were cancelled after he joined it, Farrell believed, his career would be over -- everybody would say, "that guy sank M\*A\*S\*H single handedly."

Farrell, who has the highest regard for Harry Morgan both as a man and as an actor, says that what went through his mind while watching an intensely moving scene in which Morgan broke down when he was toasting fallen comrades was "how much I love the man. How stunned I am by the fact that we can say these things, portray this kind of real human emotion that's going to go out and be seen and shared by millions and millions of people, by the sort of revalidation of the essential statement of the value of humanity, and by how incredibly lucky I am to be here."