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It's a prime time for Sam Jacobs

By DEBRA ROSEN
Staff Writer

The television blares with the highlights of a Saturday morning football game.

"I love football," Sam Jacobs says as he settles into an overstuffed chair in the living room of his Carpinteria tract home. "Up until I got the job on the show, I never missed a single Warriors game."

Behind him, at the dining room table, his youngest son, Ian, pours himself a bowl of cereal.

If it wasn't for his handsomely-made white sweatshirt with "The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers" written in black script across the front, no one would guess this graying family man is a member of the controversial talk show.

Jacobs himself still finds it hard to believe.

"This is the biggest break of my life," he says, "and the funny thing is I wasn't looking for it."

Less than five months ago, Jacobs was content as the associate director of the Camarillo State Hospital's nursing program.

Today he is the music co-ordinator of the "The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers."

The Big Break

Depending on how you look at it, Jacobs' big break came overnight or it's been a long time coming.

A singer, composer and musician, Jacobs has been performing since he was 5 years old. But when the call came for the Rivers show, he had one night to decide if he would accept it or not.

Mark Hudson (remember the Hudson Brothers variety hour?), music director for the talk show, asked Jacobs in August to join his crew as music coordinator.

"He called me on Tuesday night and told me if I wanted the job I had to be in Hollywood by Wednesday morning," Jacobs said.

The two men had met and become friends during the recording of Jacobs' album entitled "Requiem."

Jacobs wrote the title cut, "Requiem in Black Stone," as a tribute to Vietnam veterans after visiting the traveling wall in Santa Barbara.

During the recording, Hudson was hired by the Rivers show and subsequently asked Jacobs to join him as the music co-ordinator.

His first day on the set, Jacobs was overwhelmed with the amount of talent Hudson had assembled for the show's 17-piece band.

"The band is probably the most incredible ever assembled," Jacobs says. "When it comes to pulling a band together, Mark is a genius."

Queen Of Comedy

His praise of the band and its leader dims in comparison to what Jacobs has to say about his new boss and the star of the show, Joan Rivers.

"I'm in love," he repeats over and over again when talking about Rivers.

"She is the most caring, honest, hard working, loving human being I have ever met."

He then recounts story after story of Rivers' kind gestures.

"One night she noticed a young girl in a wheelchair sitting in the front of the audience," he recalls. "After the show, Joan went up to the girl, introduced herself and then gave the little girl all the gifts she had received from her guests on that night's show, including a year's supply of popcorn from Orville Rodenbacher and an autographed book by Jane Seymour.

"That's just the way Joan is," he says. "She's the typical Jewish mother. She's concerned about everyone and always takes time to find out how the crew and their families are."

Jacobs recalls another occasion when he invited his family down to watch a filming of the show. Jeremy, Jacobs' eldest son, had just broken his arm.

"When Joan saw Jeremy with his arm in a cast, she came right over and asked how it happened and if he felt all right," he said.

"Most people don't understand that the Joan Rivers they see on screen is an act."

To illustrate his point, Jacobs recalls one particularly harsh monologue Rivers delivered about Beverly, the band's "tramp."

After Rivers had finished her opening, she headed directly over to Beverly and asked her if the jokes had been too much.

"No," replied the musician.

"Well, if it ever does get to be too much," Rivers said, "you just let me know and I'll stop."

A Women's Vanguard

"Joan takes a lot of potshots," Jacobs said, referring to the highly publicized fight with Johnny Carson over hosting her own show. "Yet, she's a vanguard for women and I think she's great."

When asked if the Carson controversy had placed extra pressure on Rivers and the crew members to prove themselves, Jacobs admitted it had.

"Sure we have something to prove," he says. "We're proving that a theme can always be improved upon. But Joan is also pushing to make the show an hour-long party. She's not just plugging books up there."

Yet, while Rivers has been hurt over the loss of a friend, Jacobs adds that the publicity actually worked in the show's favor.

"A lot of people tuned in to see what all the fuss was about," he says.

Not All Fun

Working with Rivers and the rest of the highly skilled crew members is a coup in Jacobs' career, but it doesn't make the day-to-day rigors of putting a live show together any less difficult.

The Rivers show is Jacobs' first experience with prime time television. And, since it's a new show, there are a lot of behind-the-scenes problems that must be handled before each taping.

By the time Carpinteria viewers tune in to the 11 p.m. nightly airing of "The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers," the cast and crew have already put in a full day on the set.

The hour-long show, which is taped at 8 p.m., is divided into four segments. Each segment is devoted to a different guest and each guest, along with six commercial breaks, must be introduced with music.

It is Jacobs' job to find the music for each introduction and for each performance. And he must have the music arranged and delivered to the band in time for it to practice.

The job has been tough at best, Jacobs says. Unlike the "Tonight Show," which has years of musical arrangements filed in its music library, the Rivers show has only Jacobs, who must create his own library.

When he's not searching for music, Jacobs is practicing. He, along with Mark Hudson, Mavis Vegas Davis and Clint Holmes, sings background vocals for guest stars and occasionally performs as one of the "JoanTones."

"That (the singing) is really a lot of fun because it's what I do," Jacobs says. "But I like the daily challenge of putting a live show together."

Twist Of Fate

Unfortunately, Hollywood hasn't always been so kind to Jacobs and he doesn't always have such nice things to say about the people he's worked with.

He briefly refers to an earlier experience with a well-known pop rock band that left him so embittered he left the music field for his 9 to 5 job as director of the state hospital.

An otherwise open man, Jacobs refuses to go into details about that time in his life other than to say he's glad he took his parents advice and learned a trade besides music to fall back on.

"My nursing education allowed me to support my family so I didn't have to be at the whim of show business," he says.

It was his wife Pam who turned things around for Jacobs and made him take up music again.

A year after the couple were married, he gave in to her gentle persuasion and went back to the studio.

"Pam made me 'cop to my talent' again," he says. "She told me I couldn't turn my back on my music."

He began recording what he calls a middle of the road rock album when Pam again intervened.

"She tricked me into going to see the traveling wall, which was visiting in Santa Barbara," he recalls.

A Vietnam veteran, Jacobs now admits he had spent years trying to suppress the feelings the war had left him with instead of dealing with them.

"That day at the wall, I broke down," he says. "I realized there was something I had to do."

With the help of a Montecito attorney, Homer Sheffield, the Requiem Project was established to fund support programs for survivors of the Vietnam war.

Proceeds from his "Requiem" album will go to support the project.

Oddly enough it was the demo tape from that album that first brought Jacobs to the attention of Geordie Hormel, who funded the album, and introduced Jacobs to Mark Hudson.

The title song and video will be aired with another song from the album in the "Welcome Home Concert" due out later next year.

Family Ties

With all that has happened to Jacobs recently it would seem only natural for him to get caught up in the excitement of it all. But that's an old trap he carefully watches out for.

"There are times when you can get washed over with ego," he says. "But when it happens, I sit down quietly with Pam and I think 'big deal, this is where it's really at.'"



Carpinteria musician Sam Jacobs has traded in his bongos for a pair of headphones as music coordinator of "The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers." *photo by Mike Eliason*

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Auditions held for 'Devour the Snow'

The Seaside Theatre Company will hold auditions for an early 1987 production of "Devour the Snow" at 7 p.m. on Dec. 15 and 16 at the newly remodeled theater next to the library.

This stark, period courtroom drama written by local author Abe Polsky is set at Sutter's Fort in 1847. The play is based on the harrowing saga of the ill-fated Donner party.

Seven men and two women — plus one young girl between the ages of 6 and 14 — are needed for the cast. All ages and backgrounds will be considered for the nine adult roles. Prior experience is not required.

Under the direction of Michael Ian McNab, "Devour the Snow" will be staged Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights for four successive weekends from Feb.19 to March 14.

Rehearsals for this two-act drama will begin on Jan. 5.

For more information, call 684-2469 after 6 p.m.

'Music Man' to be aired on channel 18

The Carpinteria High School Muses' recent production of "The Music Man" will be aired at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday on Channel 18.

The musical is directed by Ray Hill, principal of Carpinteria High, with the assistance of Jeanne Keatinge. Musical direction is by Elise Unruh.



Professor Harold Hill (Kevin Kimple) tries to break the ice with Marion, the librarian, (Kerry Dickey) during the Muses production of "The Music Man," which finished its five-night run at Carpinteria High School on Sunday. *photo by Mike Eliason*

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