

John McEnroe is not known for keeping his cool.



Big Mac certainly used to being in the 'hot seat'

LOS ANGELES
Tennis great and sports commentator John McEnroe is playing a new game for ABC: He will host The

Chair, a reality series touted as "the ultimate test in self-control." Contestants will be quizzed while connected to a heart monitor, with

prizes going to the person who is electronically shown to be keeping his or her cool. A debut date was not announced.

—Associated Press

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MIRRORED

Local restaurateur finds similarities to real-life character role

By Ted Shaw
STAR ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Whether he's playing host to dinner guests or playing on stage and screen, Dhirendra Miyanger makes a study of life's roles.

The 41-year-old actor and Windsor restaurateur wears his acting hat in a new CBC-TV movie, *Jinnah On Crime: Pizza 9-1-1*, Monday at 8 p.m. (channel 9, cable 10).

Miyanger, who goes by the stage name Dhirendra when he acts, appears as a crime-fighting investigative journalist in Vancouver. The character was based on real-life newspaper reporter, Salim Jiwa, who has written about crime for the Vancouver Sun and Province.

Known in home-town Windsor as simply Dhiren, he operates the successful westside restaurant, *Man-so-Girardot Alan Manor*, 3203 Peter St., with his wife and fellow actor, Mislal Alan. The business was started 17 years ago by Mislal's father, Turkish-born Fouad Alan.

It's a safe bet most patrons of Alan Manor, attracted by gushing media reviews or its many international awards, don't know both Dhiren and Mislal are British-trained actors. In fact, hardly a week goes by that either one doesn't get a call about auditions from their agent, Roger Carey, based in London, England.

The two met on stage while touring with the British-Asian Theatre Company. And Mislal, who doubles as a playwright, even penned a one-man play for Dhiren, *Raj*, in Edmonton, which he toured throughout Britain.

But when they're at the restaurant, they're low-key about their other calling. There's just one playbill on the wall, a moody black-and-white photograph of Dhiren for *Raj* in Edmonton. And they haven't done dinner theatre for guests.

But Dhiren says the two careers are closely linked. "It's all theatre," he said. "In the restaurant business as in theatre, what's relevant is that you honour your commitment to life through integrity."

And success often comes with good notices in the media. "You can work very hard, have all the confidence and self-esteem in the world. But when you see it in print that someone appreciates what you have done, it's rewarding and gratifying."

"I don't care what some actors say, that reviews don't matter. A good review is the fuel for you to carry on and achieve even more. It's like getting a child on the back for a job well done."

Jinnah On Crime: Pizza 9-1-1 is bound to produce raves for Dhiren's performance. While the production itself suffers from sluggish pacing and flat characterization, it's Dhiren's portrayal of the charming but inebriated Jinnah that shines through.

He invests the character with much more than the script calls for. And some of that is probably due to the friendship he struck up with Salim Jiwa.

"My challenge was to play the human being behind the journalist," Dhiren said. "One of the things I noticed first about Jiwa is that he takes his work home. He is highly ethical in a world where ethics are sometimes set aside for the sake of a good story."



Actor Dhirendra Miyanger, shown here, and his wife Mislal Alan, also an actress, operate the Alan Manor restaurant in West Windsor. Photo by Scott Webster

UNCANNY

Some similarities between actor and Windsor restaurateur Dhirendra Miyanger and real-life newspaper reporter, Salim Jiwa, who has written about crime for the Vancouver Sun and Province:

- Both were born in Tanzania.
- Both attended the same schools in Dar es Salaam.
- Both hung out as adolescents at the same cinemas.
- They are roughly the same age. Jiwa is six years older than Dhiren.

The storyline of *Pizza 9-1-1* is based on the unsolved death of a Sikh restaurant owner about 10 years ago. It has been fictionalized for TV. Dhiren's character is a Muslim who is a friend of Vancouver's Indian and Asian communities.

Dhiren hopes *Jinnah On Crime* develops into a weekly show or series of made-for-TV movies. There is also interest from BBC about showing it in Great Britain. "They like it because it doesn't marginalize the character by keeping him in the Muslim or Hindu communities," Dhiren said.

Since landing the role, Dhiren has learned of some uncanny similarities between him and Jiwa. Both were born in Tanzania, both attended the same schools in Dar es Salaam, both hung out as adolescents at the same cinemas, and they are roughly the same age. Jiwa is six years older than Dhiren.

Yet Dhiren nearly didn't get the part. He learned of it only after an eight-month search for a lead turned up nothing.

"I was a real wildcat when they hired me. I mean, whoever heard of an actor with Indian heritage living in Windsor, Ont.? Windsor isn't exactly seen as the hub of creativity in Canada."

Dhiren's agent learned of the role over the Internet and called him. Producers were still skeptical, however, until Dhiren went and dined there at his restaurant last summer. They even rollerbladed along the Detroit River.

"They came to have a real appreciation for this city and its people," he said. "They learned about the Windsor I know. Here you can walk from one end of Sandwich Street to the other and probably hear 50 different accents."

Later on set, Dhiren met several former Windsor people, including the movie's lighting director, who are working in the Vancouver film industry.

Alan Manor was given an award of excellence for its wine list by *Wine Spectator Magazine*. The September 2001 edition of *Northwest Airlines* in-flight magazine devoted a whole page to the restaurant.

The feature generated dozens of reservations from Americans until Sept. 11, then interest fell off entirely. Dhiren began seeing more American reservations just before Christmas, and he hopes they'll keep coming back once the restaurant re-opens after its annual New Year's break on Jan. 15.

"That's the day after the movie airs," he said. "There's no rest for an actor."

LOCAL FILMMAKER HOPES FOR GRAND 'SLAM'

By Craig Pearson
STAR ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Windsor filmmaker Justin Adam is more than a man with a DV cam, he's a man on the move.

Adam's 10-minute short, *The Man With A DV Cam*, which he directed and produced with Mike Hawley, is the only Canadian film accepted for competition at the eighth annual Slamdance film festival in Park City, Utah. Another Canadian film, *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter*, by Ottawa filmmaker Lee Demarbre, will premiere in the non-competitive Filmmakers' Lounge series.

Adam and Hawley managed to make their creation with only a hundred bucks and a borrowed digital-video camera.

Their accomplishment seems even more impressive given that only 12 features and 12 shorts (plus 22 non-competitive films) were accepted for the independent-minded Slamdance 2002, which received a record 2,468 submissions. Slamdance's "Sparky" dog awards, plus cash prizes, will be handed out next Thursday. The festival runs today through Jan. 19, while *The Man With A DV Cam* premieres Monday.

"It's a big thing so we hope to take advantage of

it," says Adam, 27, who graduated three years ago in communication studies at the University of Windsor before attending the Vancouver Film School in the city where he now lives.

"We got an e-mail from 20th Century Fox and they want to see the film. So we're starting to see the magnitude of what we've done so far."

The *Man With A DV Cam* was filmed over three weeks-ends on a digital-video camera, and edited over three months. It stars James O'Sullivan as Lindsay Farnsworth, an eclectic film poet who uses a digital camera to capture his odd view of the world. As the Slamdance Web site says: "Watch him learn to express himself in increasingly colourful ways."

Adam figures the Slamdance jury was impressed by an engaging story as well as the movie's purposefully plastic look.

"Everybody can see themselves in Lindsay Farnsworth, especially artists and filmmakers," says Adam, who teaches at the media arts school



Justin Adam

Center for Digital Imaging and Sound. "He's kind of a bumbling goof, but he ends up coming up with some good stuff. It's charming."

"Also, the look is very surreal, with supersaturated hyper colours. We tried to make Lindsay Farnsworth a live-action cartoon."

Slamdance, which bills itself as "by filmmakers, for filmmakers," started in 1995 by a group of writer-director/producers as an alternative to Robert Redford's successful and more mainstream Sundance Film Festival. Slamdance focuses on first-time directors whose films do not yet have distribution, though the festival has grown in its own right.

Slamdance has launched the careers of several notable filmmakers, including Memento director Christopher Nolan, *Monster's Ball* director Marc Forster, and Academy Award-winning director Steven Soderbergh, who won the 2001 directing Oscar for *Traffic*.

"We hope this (Slamdance recognition) will help us get people with money to give us more," Adam says.

"We want to take our ideas and develop them into bigger things. The next step, I imagine, would be a feature project."



Rockers Stefani, Rossdale will wed later this year

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.
Rockers Gwen Stefani and Gavin Rossdale are getting married.

Rossdale, the 34-year-old lead singer for Bush, proposed to Stefani, the 32-year-old lead singer for No Doubt, on New Year's Day. Stefani spokeswoman Terry Wang said.

The pair will set a wedding date later in the year, Rossdale publicist Laura Gold said. It will be the first marriage for both singers.

Actor Moriarty treated after beating outside pub

VANCOUVER
American actor Michael Moriarty best known for his role on the hit TV series *Law & Order*, was in hospital Wednesday after he was beaten outside a Vancouver-area pub.

Moriarty, 60, was admitted to Right Meadows Hospital in Maple Ridge after the early morning fight left him unconscious with non-life-threatening injuries.

The Emmy Award-winning actor's Vancouver-based agent confirmed Moriarty was involved in an altercation outside a Maple Ridge bar.

His publicist spoke to a 19-year-old Spokane Small confirmed Moriarty was treated and released some time on Wednesday, but could not comment on his injuries.

Moriarty was one of two men assaulted in what RCMP called "an unprovoked attack."

Agent Tyrnan Stewart did not know whether Moriarty had been drinking or whether that led to the altercation.

Stewart said Moriarty is currently working on a television series based on author Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*.

Black Crowes on hiatus; singer seeks solo career

NEW YORK
The Black Crowes have flown the coop.

The Atlanta-based rock band announced it has gone on "hiatus," with lead singer Chris Robinson deciding to break out on his own and drummer Steve Gorman leaving the band.

In a brief statement, the band said: "For the time being, Chris Robinson is pursuing a solo career. Steve Gorman has left the band for personal reasons."

The message, also posted on the band's Web site, told fans to stay tuned for news about Rich Robinson, who is Chris Robinson's brother.

No further details were released. Chris Robinson, 35, married then 21-year-old Almost Famous star Kate Hudson on Dec. 31, 2000.

Sheen and Richards get engaged, publicists say

LOS ANGELES
One of Hollywood's most notorious bachelors, Charlie Sheen, is engaged to actress Diane Richards.

Publicists for both confirmed the engagement but did not reveal a date. It will be the 36-year-old actor's second marriage and the first for his 29-year-old fiancée.

Sheen, who stars on the ABC sitcom *Spin City* is the son of Martin Sheen of NBC's *The West Wing*, and brother of actor Emilio Estevez.

Richards has appeared in *Wild Things*, *Drop Dead Gorgeous* and the most recent *James Bond* movie, *The World Is Not Enough*. She's also done guest spots on *Spin City*.

Sheen was named in the early '90s by former Hollywood madam Heidi Fleiss as having spent more than \$50,000 on her call girls.

—Star News Services