

## Interview: ‘Parenthood’ Star Dax Shepard Strikes with ‘Hit & Run’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 21, 2012 - 10:49am

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CHICAGO – “Parenthood” star Dax Shepard has written, co-directed, and stars in the upcoming “Hit & Run” with real-life love Kristen Bell, Bradley Cooper, Tom Arnold, Beau Bridges and more. The Tarantino-esque comedy/action flick marks a giant leap forward for this often-supporting actor who now finds himself in the spotlight. The Michigan native recently sat down with us to talk about his inspirations, his past, and the hardcore fans of his NBC drama.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** Do you have that specific “I want to be an actor” moment in your memory banks?

**DAX SHEPARD:** I never had that “I want to be an actor” instinct when I was growing up. I was into drag racing and thought I was going to be a race car driver. But I was obsessed with movies and certain actors. I loved Nicolas Cage. And I did think, “Wow, if THIS guy can be an actor, maybe I can. He’s very average-looking and goofy.” He was somebody who made me think there was a spot for me in movies or TV. There was no epiphany. I knew I wanted to do something with comedy because that’s what came easiest to me. I thought I would go to L.A. and do sketch comedy. I thought maybe “Saturday Night Live.” Then I got into The Groundlings and my peers were acting in commercials and so I did that. And then I got called in for an audition for “Punk’d.” I took advantage of every opportunity that then came my way based on that.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** I think Cage is an interesting role model because he does broad comedy and then segued into darker material and I think this movie is a dark transition for you.

**SHEPARD:** This is the first time that I’ve been able to create my sensibility from beginning to end. I made the movie I want to see. There was no studio. I wasn’t trying to figure out what America liked. I’m gonna make a movie that I want to see. It’s going to involve tons of fast cars, super hot chicks, lots of real dialogue — I’m really drawn to movies that are dialogue-heavy. I got to put all those things that I like into a blender.



Hit and Run

*Photo credit: Open Road*

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** Coming out of the screening I went to, there was mention of “True Romance” and “Death Proof” so was Quentin Tarantino an obvious inspiration for you? Is that something you did intentionally?

**SHEPARD:** I think it goes without saying that Tarantino is the best living director. There's nobody better. More than he's even the BEST director visually, he's the undisputed champ of writing. He's the best writer alive. I read "Django Unchained" and I was just furious while I was reading it that I couldn't write that well. And then he's a great director on top of it. And that makes for a great recipe. He's who I aspire to be. Not just thematically. On a business level, he's been very committed to directing only what he writes and he delivers movies with a very modest budget, which is something I believe in. People love working with him. I like the business model as well



Hit and Run

*Photo credit: Open Road*

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** He only directs what he writes — do you only want to direct your own scripts?

**SHEPARD:** That's the goal. As an actor, I've taken low-hanging fruit many times. I'm a guy with a mortgage like many people. I like to think that I've learned from that. I'm not in a position now where I have to do that which is great. So, in a dream world, I won't have to do that ever again and I can be patient and direct what I write. They make it hard. I'll probably have made more on "Employee of the Month" than I will make on this whole thing for directing, writing, and acting. I went down to New Mexico for six weeks for "Employee of the Month" and I came home and had made more than I ever had in my entire life. This was one solid year, every single day — writing, prep, shooting, editing.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** Did you write it for this specific cast?

**SHEPARD:** Everyone but Beau Bridges. He was the only person that I didn't have a relationship with and didn't write specifically for. I know what all of these people do and how to use them in a movie. I know Tom [Arnold]'s sweet spot, where he's in the zone and endearing and funny.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** It's funny how many great writers do that — Quentin writes for the same people over and over again. Martin Scorsese and his recurring cast members. Do you see yourself having a similar recurring cast?

**SHEPARD:** These are almost all of the same people who were in my first movie ["Brother's Justice"]. It's such a luxury. I've written things for studios and I didn't know who was going to be in it and it's just so much harder. What ends up happening is that most of the scripts that you read are a little generic because they are written in a way that will allow any number of actors to come in and play the role. The role I wrote for Tom — I don't know anyone who would have done it quite the same. I don't know anyone who would have played the role quite like Kristin. Or my role — I'm a unique mix of elements.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** And your relationship with Kristin impacts how you view the film.

**SHEPARD:** Yes.



Hit and Run

*Photo credit: Open Road*



**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** Did “The Freebie” change how this movie came out? The first scene has that kind of one-on-one intimacy and emphasis on dialogue that reminded me of that movie.

**SHEPARD:** Visually, yes. Work methodology, no. “The Freebie” was 100% improv. That whole movie came from a 3-page outline. This was an excessively long script — it was 138 pages. Ours was more mapped out to a tee on the writing end. It was different in that our scenes were all written and mapped out but you’re right in that when I was plotting this thing out in prep that I said that we basically have three movies happening here — Kristin & Dax are in an indie, we have Tom Arnold who is in a broad comedy, and we have Bradley Cooper who is in a Michael Mann movie. All three of these things weave in and out of each other with enough connected tissue to make it feel like one movie. The only thing that unifies all of these things is my sensibility and the writing.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** I do a lot of TV coverage as well and I hear all of the time from fans of “Parenthood.” People love that show. The ratings are up and down but the audience that’s there is insanely loyal. Why do you think that this?

**SHEPARD:** I would say it’s Jason Katims [the creator]. I say that not because I’m super-aware of how great my show is or isn’t — I’m biased — but “Friday Night Lights” [which Katims also created] is one of the top three shows of all time that I’ve ever seen in my life. And I hear that people like our show to the level that I liked “FNL” and I have to think it’s Katims since he’s the common denominator. To me, it’s deceptive because the demographic that “Parenthood” targets happens to be my demographic. It reaches a very educated, middle-class crowd. That who the show appeals to for whatever reason. And so I run into those people and so I feel like I’m getting a disproportionate response — it feels like our shows our “Friends” because I’m running in the circle of people who watch the show. I’ll visit my mom in Oregon and a very high percentage of people that we walk by say “I like Parenthood.” It’s certainly not the percentage of the Nielsen ratings.. But that’s Oregon. My mom will say, “It has to be a bigger hit than people think.”

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** I think it’s also a very vocal fan base. I’m not on the show but every time we do a radio segment or online piece on the “Best Show People Aren’t Watching,” the FIRST comment is going to be about “Parenthood.” Every single time.

**SHEPARD:** That’s nice to hear.



Dax Shepard  
Photo credit: NBC

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** I think people feel attached. People watch “NCIS” regularly but they don’t really care about it. It’s junk food. This show breeds emotional attachment. “Friday Night Lights” never had numbers other.

**SHEPARD:** Ours are deceptive as well because we’re always in the top of the most-DVRed shows. We have the exact demo that advertisers want but that demo also DVRs the most. We end up being a 2.8 eventually and then add the Netflix viewership — I think that’s why our orders are changing as episode numbers are getting more in line with Netflix or cable runs.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** Do you like that more or would you rather do a full 22?

**SHEPARD:** Well, paycheck-wise I’d rather do 22. If “Hit & Run” does well and I get to make another movie in February, I’ll be very grateful that we had a shorter run. It’s too subjective. I like to work. If I can work on that show and still do a movie a year, I’m in heaven.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** Do you see yourself bouncing back and forth or committing to film or TV? Let’s say “Parenthood” ends and Katims comes to you with another show — are you in?

**SHEPARD:** I am interested. Also, it depends. If I’m making hit movies, I prefer directing to acting. By far. I’d way prefer to direct than act. And not because of any accolade or ego but simply if you’re on-set as a director for 15 hours, you’re working all 15 hours. If you’re there as an actor, you’re MAYBE saying lines for an hour out of those 15 hours. It’s just more stimulating. For that reason, I would prefer to direct,

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** Ever see yourself directing an episode of “Parenthood”?

**SHEPARD:** I am directing episode 12 this year.

**HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM:** How has being a TV actor made you a different filmmaker?

**SHEPARD:** I got super-lucky by ending up on “Parenthood” because we move faster than any show on television. We’re based on the model that Jason and Peter Berg created for “Friday Night Lights” — they shot that show in 6-8 hours a day. 12 hours is a very long day for us. We shoot three cameras. It’s very much a living organism. It’s not overly structured. It’s pretty chaotic. We have the coverage to capture the good moments. I’ve seen the results. My preference is always to capture magic through chaos. As a director, I’m not of the David Fincher school of filmmaking. I’m of the Steven Soderbergh model — let’s try to capture lightning in a bottle. I have a lot of faith in the people I work with that they can deliver that.

**See how Dax Shepard captures lightning when “Hit & Run” opens tomorrow, August 22, 2012.**



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