

## Too "New York-ish" for a Hispanic:

# DAVID LABIOSA

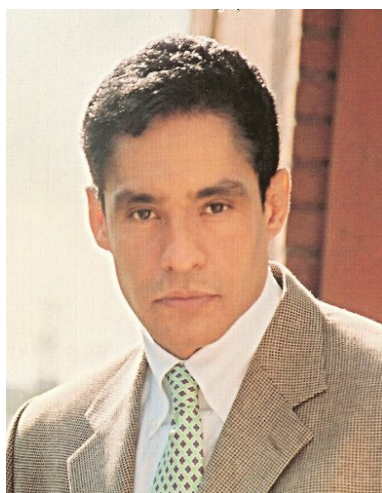
### On His Accent Trouble on *The Vintage Years*

#### Interview by

**THOMAS J. PUCHER** (*German FALCON CREST Fan Club*)

When I asked David for an interview, he e-mailed me his phone number, and we set up an appointment for a phone conversation. I realized very early in our phone call that he was really easy to talk to.

#### How He Became Mario



David was surprised to hear about my friendship with Earl Hamner; he was not actually astonished about my friendship, but about the fact that Earl was still alive. He explained that he had met the *Falcon Crest* creator in 1981: "I was very young when I did the pilot, and he seemed like an older man... I don't know, he was maybe 60 at that time. He had gray hair and was an older gentleman." David was amazed and happy to hear that Earl will turn 89 on July 10, 2011. "I think I was 19 when I did the pilot," he added.

"So how did you get your rôle in *The Vintage Years*?" I wanted to know.

"I don't know. I never auditioned. I never met anybody," David started to describe the unusual process how he got to play the son of the Mexican family working at what was called the cottage vineyard in the script of the predecessor — the setting that would later become the *Gioberti Estate* on *Falcon Crest*. "I was sitting in my house in New York City," David remembered, "and my manager called and said: 'They want to fly you out.' And I said: 'When is the audition?' And he said: 'No audition!'" The actor explained that *Lorimar* had seen him in a movie he did the year before. "I was a child actor before. I had already done all these other things. I had done a very good movie for television with a famous American actress," he referred to *Death Penalty*, in which he played

opposite Colleen Dewhurst, who portrayed the lawyer trying to save his character's life from the death penalty. "So the *Falcon Crest* producers saw that."

Other memories from around that time that coming to his mind were: "I put my face on the cover of *Variety* magazine." He laughed and mentioned that his manager thought he was crazy because the manager could have gotten David publishers. "At that age, I didn't know what to do with the money," the actor said about what he had earned when he filmed the TV movie. "I thought it would be a good idea to put myself on the cover, and sure enough, somebody in Hollywood saw it... And they watched the movie, and from that, flew me out to *Falcon Crest*! So I made all the money back — at least for the pilot."

"Did you get anything else besides the shooting script to prepare, like a story outline or a character bio, or did any of the producers talk to you about future character developments for your part?" I wanted to know.

"No, I didn't get any outlines," David answered. "It was pretty much talking to Earl, and that was it." As he stated, there was no detailed character description at that time, and it was rather doubtful if the writing staff had much of an idea where to go with his character or the show in general before it was carved in stone that the network picked it up for a whole season.

"I think we had a table reading," David added, "at some hotel." He described the usual read-through, usually taking place shortly before filming begins. It is a situation when the script is read by all actors and actresses with speaking parts while the non-dialog parts, such as scene headings and stage directions, are usually read by an additional person — sometimes someone from the producing staff, the company or network executives. The major aim of such a reading is to see which parts have to be trimmed down or changed.

### Accent Trouble and Other Problems

The actor came back to *Death Penalty* and what might have attracted *Lorimar* about his part: "Anyway, they see me in that movie,... and I am playing that New York character — you know, very street-tough, young kid, troubled... New York!" he said about his character, Carlos Rivera.

"So I come out to do *Falcon Crest*, and they are like: 'You sound like you are from New York!' And I said: 'Yes, I am, I am very proud.' And they said: 'No, you are not New York, you are Mexican! You have to be a totally different sounding Mexican! Haven't you been practicing? We sent you a teacher.' And I said: 'Yes, I've been practicing every day.' They said: 'Okay, when we get to the time, you better be perfect.' And I said: 'It will be.' But it never got perfect — there was no time," he explained about his pronunciation with the

Mexican accent and that the producers were not satisfied with it.



David and Jamie Rose in a scene in *The Vintage Years*.

I mentioned that we have an archival copy of *The Vintage Years* in our records and that I did not find anything wrong with his voice.

"Oh, that's not my voice, I am sorry," David regretted. "They took somebody else's voice, that's not me!" He explained that he never saw the finished product, but that he thought he was looped in *The Vintage Years*.

"This is me now. This is how I really sound," he added.

"Anyway, that's what happened: They hired me sight unseen. They should have auditioned me. I probably could do it now. I've done many Mexican rôles. You can learn that." Then he came back to the production of the *Falcon Crest* predecessor again: "I had a teacher, and I worked with her, I just never got it right. And they wanted me to loop," he explained about post-production, but he said it did not work out. He was not sure if he was already busy with another movie or there was another reason.

"So that's how I lost the part. And I talked to Earl about it. I remember they even told me before I left that I wasn't coming back. And I had a long talk with Earl. He was the only one who was nice to me. He said: 'Don't worry about it. There'll be better things for you. This show is never going to go any way.' I thought: 'If you think that's not going to go, that's fine.'" David laughed.

But although *The Vintage Years* per se did not survive CBS program developers' critical observance, *Falcon Crest* — as the series that it was redeveloped into — became one of the most successful prime time dramas in television history alongside *Lorimar's Dallas* and *Knots Landing* as well as Aaron Spelling's *Dynasty*.



David in a hospital scene after a fight with Lance at a bar.

"I never saw the pilot so I don't know what I looked like, but they kept saying that I kept putting on too much make-up. So it was like... they didn't like my voice, they didn't like my make-up... What else did they say...? That I was partying too much,... that I would tend to be on vacation — which I was because I had never been out of the Bronx. The other

movie I did with Colleen Dewhurst [*Death Penalty*] went to Pittsburgh, which is horrible and worse than the Bronx. And then I was in the fame school, and I have never traveled and I was 'very New York'. And then I come out to this country, you know, Napa Valley — and I am like: 'What the hell?! Where's all the buildings and people? I was horrified. I hated it, and so I started drinking, and I guess they saw me drinking by the pool. And when I wasn't working, [I had an affair with the wife of someone from the set]. It was a horrible drama behind the scenes! Me and [the other guy] made up — she came on to me," David laughed.

Another incident was that he fell asleep at the table when the cast and crew of *The Vintage Years* was having dinner. "I probably had too much to drink," David laughed about his youth.

## Redeveloping the Predecessor

We talked a little bit about how *The Vintage Years* was revamped and recreated so it later became *Falcon Crest*.

David, who never watched the series after his involvement in the predecessor, said he had heard about the negative response from CBS concerning the original pilot.

"I wasn't the only one, you know," he referred to the major recasting that followed the production of *The Vintage Years*. "A lot of really well-known, famous actors," he commented about the ones who were let go. He first named Samantha Eggar (Maggie), then Clu Gulager (Charles — or Chase). "He was older, a Jimmy Stewart type," he confirmed the rumors that I had heard before — Gulager was simply too old in contrast to Jane Wyman. They were supposed to be nephew and aunt, but Gulager somehow seemed to be too close to Wyman's generation.

## Experiences with the Cast

That brought us to the cast in general.

"I remember him being very nice to me," David said about Clu Gulager.

"And then, me and Lorenzo [Lamas] became friends. I worked with him like five times, you know... these weird TV shows, *Renegade* and *Air America*... There were so many other shows he had. I was on all of them because he was very nice to me."

David explained that the fact he did not have to audition for the part on the *Falcon Crest* predecessor was quite exceptional for him. He pointed out that he was never a series regular, but had a lot of guest starring rôles — in the 1990's including *Murder, She Wrote*, and in the 2000's various *CSI* series, just to name a few. "So I have to audition for everything. I had an audition yesterday. Lorenzo didn't have to audition for anything after *Falcon Crest*. Now, he has to, everybody has to," the actor underlined how the times changed. But he thought that auditions also have a positive effect because "they know what they are getting, and you feel that you earned it and that you won the part."

"What was it like to be on the same show with Jane Wyman?" I asked.

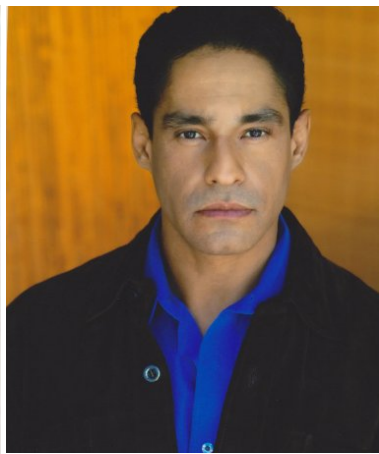
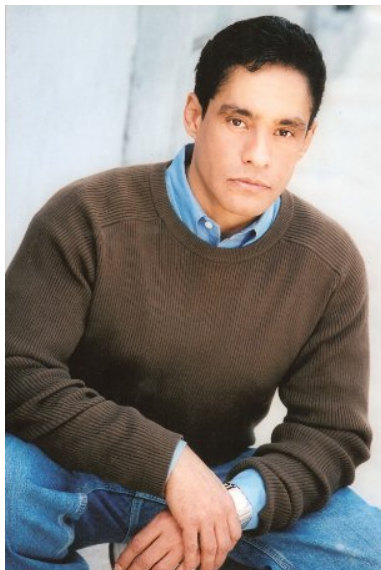
David said that he and Jane did not really work together in any of the scenes, but that she was a very professional actress. "We were all on the same plane," he mentioned about the transportation to the filming location, "I didn't know her at that time and didn't realize who she was until I became older. I was a young kid then." He pointed out that Jane Wyman's movies were not the kind of things he saw at that age and that he regretted that he did not use the opportunity to get to know her better. "She was a star. All the movies she did... and she won an *Oscar*," he said about her admiringly. But he emphasized that he would not be obtrusive to get older colleagues into personal talk — something that would probably have developed naturally if he had stayed on the show, but nothing you would do in a rather short time of filming when you join a new project. "I was there for two weeks," he added about being on location in the Wine Country.



"Jamie was nice," he remembered his on-screen love interest, Jamie Rose. "Her father took us out for dinner."

Jamie Rose and David in a scene in the living room of the *Gioberti House* (photographed at *Chateau Chevalier* north of *Spring Mountain Vineyards* back then).

Then he came back to Samantha Eggar: "Samantha was heart-broken because she thought she was going to, you know, get a revival in her career. She was so happy." He explained that she cheered him up with a friendly "Oh, don't be pessimistic," when he guessed that *Lorimar* might not want him back for the whole season.



David was very pleasant to talk to. He is a very busy actor and had various guest rôles over the past few years, including *CSI* and *CSI: Miami* as well as *24*, *J.A.G.* and *The Closer*.

He just finished working on a movie *El Tio Sam* and played in the 2010 horror movie *Megapiranah*.