

8/19/01

TV Sunday

Another 'General Hospital' hunk stands on the edge of music stardom. Who was the last one? Ever heard of a guy called Ricky Martin?

The hit factory

By MICHAEL GILTZ

ABC's "General Hospital" has an unmatched record for featuring pop stars in its cast — from Rick Springfield in the early '80s to Ricky Martin in the '90s. Now the iconic TV serial — famous for the love match between Luke and Laura — may be hitting the charts again thanks to the debut album of the show's heart-throb Jacob Young due out Tuesday.

Young plays Luke and Laura's son, Lucky Spencer, on the show, a moody teenager who works as a photographer for his mom's cosmetic company and occasionally strums an acoustic guitar. But in real life, Young's consuming passion is music.

"I'll be making music until I die," insists the 21-year-old actor, who is talking from Los Angeles where "General Hospital" is filmed.

Young won a Daytime Emmy for his role on "The Bold and the Beautiful." But when he switched to "GH," the show's celebrated musical past wasn't an influence on him.

"I didn't even know the history of the show," admits Young. "But my mom filled me in. She told me about Rick Springfield and all these guys on the show in the past."

"GH" and pop stars are a natural fit, according to Kristin Gallagher, a senior editor at Soap Opera Digest who covers the show.

"General Hospital" has an incredible history with music and well-known performers," points out Gallagher. "Given that, I would definitely look to 'General Hospital' as a place you could thrive and flourish. It's a great proving ground. Part of the

image of a pop star is to be sexy and romantic and what better place to foster that than soaps?"

Billboard magazine thinks Young could have what it takes. Senior editor Chuck Taylor reviewed his debut single, "Life is Good," by saying it sounds "like Jimmy Buffett doing John Mellencamp. With a bold promotional push and a colorful video clip that showcases Young's square-jawed, pretty-boy demeanor, who is to say that the soaps haven't lathered up another guitar-toting idol?"

Other soaps have featured pop stars (such as one-hit wonder Michael Damian on "The Young & the Restless"), but none have the glittering track record of "GH."

It exploded in 1981 with Rick Springfield, who joined the show as Dr. Noah Drake only to see his slumbering pop career (he'd had a Top 20 hit in 1972) take off with the No. 1 hit "Jessie's Girl." Sixteen Top 40 hits would follow, but after he left the show in 1983, Springfield had only one more Top 10 hit.

Jack Wagner — who played Frisco Jones throughout the '80s and at times in the '90s — also scored a big smash with the No. 2 hit "All I Need."

There was also the novelty single "General Hospital" by Afternoon Delights. Finally, Oscar and Grammy winner Christopher Cross had his last Top 40 hit with "Think of Laura," an ode to Young's TV mom Laura Spencer.

"I didn't know that," laughs Young. "That's crazy."

The show even has a recurring storyline about a



The Brad Pitt-ish Jacob Young plays Luke and Laura's son, Lucky, on "GH" — and is ready to speed off on a music career.

record company. That gave Ricky Martin an excuse to strut his stuff on screen. But Young wants to keep his careers separate, afraid that using the show to try and launch his album might compromise both.

"I don't have to use the show to get my music out there," says Young. "Not that that would be a bad thing, but it isn't something I need."

That's why, apart from a quick romantic ballad sung to his girlfriend — a song also performed by Jonathan Jackson, the last actor to play Lucky — Young hasn't played the rock star on the show. Still, "GH" has been smart enough to make some use of his talent — as long as it fits with the character.

"Each year, they have the Nurse's Ball," explains Gallagher of Soap Opera Digest, "and one of the things they do is have the characters perform. It's like a talent show. This year, Jacob performed 'Up on the Roof' with his on-screen half-brother."

"A lot of the younger actors brought onto soaps nowadays are triple talents — they're actors and singers and so on. You frequently find out that acting isn't their only passion. Jacob is a perfect example."

"Jacob is absolutely an actor, but music is something he loves. So it's a great forum for him. Fans already like him as Lucky. Then they say, 'Oh wow, he sings, too? Great. Let me find out about that CD.' It's a built-in audi-

ence, and that can translate into big success."

In fact, Latin telenovelas often feature rising pop stars on the soundtrack and in the casts. A recent Billboard article about that trend said new artists can see their record sales grow 10 times what they were before such exposure.

Obviously, linking with rising pop stars gives those telenovelas a boost in profile. And it can also give "GH" a leg up on the competition.

A powerhouse in the '80s, the show has come back strong recently, even if the lower-rated "Passions" has been getting all the mainstream press "General Hospital" used to garner. Still, there's no denying the show's staying power. "GH" has won the Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Drama five of the last seven years.

It also snagged Favorite Daytime Serial by Soap Opera Digest four years in a row, from 1997 through 2000. And TV Guide's 40th Anniversary Special Edition pegged it the "All-Time Best Daytime Soap."

So the show is used to winning come awards time. Now it wouldn't mind winning again by watching another pop star spring from its ranks. For-



As they looked when they were on the soap, "GH" crooners Rick Springfield and Ricky Martin.



mer Menudo member Ricky Martin is the most recent success story. He left the show in '95, went on to Broadway's "Les Miz" and exploded in '99 with "La Vida Loca." Can Young put "GH" back on top with the "TRL" crowd? He seems fated to make it.

"My mom was nine-months pregnant with me, and she went to a Kenny Rogers show," he says. "So I've always felt this strange, weird bond with him. I grew up in a very backwoods area of Washington [state], and my family was really into country music. I was raised on that and later progressed into rock 'n' roll. The first

album I ever bought was Clint Black album. I must have been 12 years old, something like that. When I got into middle school started skateboarding as got into Nirvana and everything changed after that."

Now he's looking forward to more movie auctions (he scored the lead role in Sylvester Stallone "Driven" but couldn't get the time off from "GH" working his first album and maybe filling in his record collection with the efforts of other "GH" stars like Rick Springfield.

"I don't own his 'Greatest Hits,'" admits Young. "But I saw it advertised on TV the other night!"