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TV Sunday

The star of 'Full House' has an ABC show tailored to change his image from boy to (wimpy) man

JOHNNY Stamos is working on the fourth episode of his new ABC TV series, "Thieves." It's a Friday-night romantic comedy about two glamorous criminals, Johnny and Rita, who are dragged into working for the government. They pull off dramatic heists while trading banter in the "Moonlighting" tradition.

Stamos looks likely to pull off a career makeover by trading in his lightweight persona as one of the stooges on the sitcom staple "Full House" for the image of leading man: sexy, intelligent, and sophisticated.

By MICHAEL GILTZ

licated. (Johnny knows his way around vintage champagne.)

Stamos jump-started the series with his own idea to update *The Thomas Crown Affair*. Then he found the talent he could work with and sold the pilot to ABC when other people wouldn't give him a chance. So the 38-year-old actor should be flying high. But how does he feel?

"Tired," says Stamos. "We're on episode four today, and I feel like I've done 40. I'm in a haze. I'm like Mariah Carey: I'm depressed, I'm exhausted, and I need to check myself in somewhere."

"It's crazy," he says, talking about how much more work there is on an hour-long show—especially one with the extensive location work of "Thieves."

"I knew it was going to be tough, but it's just been insane," he says. "I'm waiting for it to settle into a groove, and it hasn't yet. I'm waiting for the newspapers: 'John Stamos finally goes back to work and checks himself into the hospital after three days!' But I'll get through it. Once the show starts airing, it'll mean more."

Stamos has good reason to hope "Thieves" will flourish. The pilot is a charmer, with Stamos showing flair as a romantic lead and sparking immediately with co-star Melissa George.

They're loners who reluctantly pair up for a job, only to find it's a setup by the government. To avoid jail time, they have to perform elaborate crimes — with the government insisting they work together, since Rita's impulsive demeanor complements Johnny's tendency to look twice before he even thinks about leaping.

"She's the first one that didn't put up with all my crap," says Stamos about actress Melissa George. "It's funny, because I was watching the audition tapes, and I could see my body language change. I sat up and said, 'Oh, this girl's going to put me in my place.'"

That's exactly what her character does on the show, since Stamos is the sort of criminal who would rather flee than fight.

"We started out with *To Catch a Thief* and *The Thomas Crown Affair* in mind. But as the script came along, it turned out to be about a guy who wanted to be those guys but wasn't quite smooth enough, which is perfect for me," he says.

Indeed, Johnny wants nothing to do with guns, and even flinches when Rita starts blasting away. If there's a need for hand-to-hand combat, Johnny will happily step aside, giving him the same vulnerable charm of Jim Rockford, a Friday-night staple from the '70s in "The Rockford Files."

"It hurts when you hit," laughs Stamos. "I likes to rob places when people are



Hangin' with John Stamos

asleep. If they wake up, I run. I don't like to get myself into much trouble."

Though a strong female following is a given — thanks to his track record on "General Hospital" in the early '80s and those boyish good looks — he's been thrilled with the research showing guys will enjoy the show, too.

"They like a [wimp]," jokes Stamos. "It makes guys around the country feel better about themselves. It's fun to play that guy. People say, isn't it weird having a girl kick ass? What do I care? My wife kicks everyone's ass, too."

There's a chance that "Thieves" might kick a little ass, as well. Friday night has traditionally been a haven for escapist fare — from "Wild, Wild West" and

"The Rockford Files" to "Spenser: For Hire" and "Miami Vice." Even "Nash Bridges" ran for four years on CBS. And "Thieves" is practically the only hour-long show on any network that offers a little light entertainment.

It is an answer to people who thought he would never escape the bonds of the long-running but bland sitcom, "Full House."

"When they talked to me about 'Full House,' it was a show from the guys who did 'Bosom Buddies.' Then it turned out to be what it turned out to be. All of a sudden I was in for a ride for eight years that I couldn't get off of."

As he quickly points out, the benefits — especially financial — were many.

"I also never discount what it did for my friends and my family. Everybody had

a good run on that show," he says. "Following Matthew Broderick in Broadway musical 'How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying' should have been a turning point."

"The reviews were great, and everybody kind of talked about it," says Stamos. "But it didn't really launch. I think it started people looking at me differently, but it didn't explode. I still to keep doing my own thing. So I'm producing television shows for myself."

That led to a number of TV movie deals including his producing chores on *Beach Boys: An American Fan*



John Stamos and Melissa George (above and going down, left) spark immediately on ABC's new "Thieves."

which told the tumultuous life story of the band Stamos has been friends since the mid-'80s. (He played drum some of their recent albums, directed music video of theirs and played bo in the video for their last Top 10 sn "Kokomo.")

Now, Stamos hopes he's found a home back on Friday night with "Full House" began. He'll happily ensconced there for the next five years even if his personal lodgings are not in the air.

"We're moving, actually," says Stamos about him and his wife Rebecca Ror Stamos. "We live in a nice place, but Rebecca said, 'I want my own house.' So we're building this place when she found a ranch close to us with an old barn on it. So, we're moving there now to old whorehouse."

A bordello? With a series of tiny rooms? "Yeah, exactly. We had to build down some of the walls to make it bigger rooms," he says. "We'll have whores at our house now, instead of six that it used to be able to hold."