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TV Sunday

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What's really nice guy Seth Green doing with this fuzzball? Very nicely, thanks



By MICHAEL GILTZ

ACTOR Seth Green may have grown up appearing in Woody Allen movies (Radio Days) and guesting on "The Tonight Show," but that didn't mean making friends was easy.

"Fame is just an odd thing to have happen and get accustomed to," says the 28-year-old Green, who is about to get more of it: his ribald new sitcom, "Greg the Bunny" (Fox, Wednesdays at 9:30) had a smashing debut last Wednesday by building on the lead-in from the red-hot comedy "Bernie Mac."

"It's really simple. When I was growing up, I wasn't a popular kid. I didn't have a lot of friends and I wasn't a cool kid. You get a weird thing when you're young and you're an actor.

"If you're successful, the kids... you don't know how to talk to them because you just want them to be normal and they don't know how to talk to you because there's this feeling they have, like they think that you're under the impression that you're better than them.

"I had a lot of people come to me as if I was standoffish and be standoffish to me. And when someone's jerky to you, you're jerky back to them."

Though he's been working steadily since he was young — appearing in everything from an infomercial for John Denver to movies such as The Hotel New Hampshire and My Stepmother Is An Alien — fame really became intense for Green in '98.

"I had three things happen at the same time and that made people aware of me," he says. "Becoming a regular on "Buffy" [in which he played the laconic werewolf Oz]; I had this movie Can't Hardly Wait, which I did a ton of press for and it was popular with the kids; and then Austin Powers did really well on video [the new Austin Powers comes out this summer].

"All three of those things happened in the same year. A lot of different people in a lot of different age groups suddenly became aware of me."



Seth Green was a child star (above), growing up by appearing in Woody Allen movies and "The Tonight Show."

"It was really strange. Suddenly I had a lot more name recognition instead of just, 'Do I know you from somewhere?'"

So how did the drollly amusing Green react? Did he flip out and started acting huffy — disdainful fans, demanding to cut to the front of the line whenever possible, and generally acting the star?

Well, he did don leather pants, attend some celebrity events and try to act as cool as people thought he was. But Green's main problem was that he became nice. Too nice.

"I really felt obligated to be everything to everybody," says Green, who has been linked with actress Chad Morgan. "If somebody stopped me on the street and wanted an autograph, I'd spend 20 minutes finding out all about them so they'd walk away feeling we had a wonderful experience together. I'd really over do it."



"I kind of lost a sense of self. I became this celebrity instead of a person who happens to be an actor and be recognizable. That's really what I've spent the last year reclaiming — a sense of normalcy in my private life."

So how did Green find a new balance for himself? Since he wasn't the sort to deal with fame by acting up or indulging in drugs, it's no surprise he gained stability through religion.

"I'm talking about genuinely finding my own faith and establishing my own spiritual identity," says Green, who's been quoted talking about going to temple again but now decides some things don't have to be shared.

"You know what, I'm pretty private. The more well-known I get, the more I have to protect the things that are important to me."

He's equally protective of his co-stars



Green had hair in "America's Sweethearts" (left) and his early TV days (above), but now the fuzz is on Greg (top).

on "Greg the Bunny," a series about the making of a kid's show, with Green as Jimmy, the lay-about son of the show's director (Eugene Levy), who lives with Greg the Bunny, a sock puppet and unexpected new star.

Greg is a puppet (they prefer the term fabricated American) and he may just be a sock with two buttons for eyes to you and me, but Green has developed a real closeness and doesn't even seem to mind getting second billing.

"Greg and I have a really great relationship. It's a really easy, trusting friendship relationship," says Green, who grew up yearning to be on "The Muppet Show." But he's smart enough now to know there are boundaries and that you don't have to be best buddies with everyone you work with.

"I mean, I don't call him late at night when I need to cry to somebody."