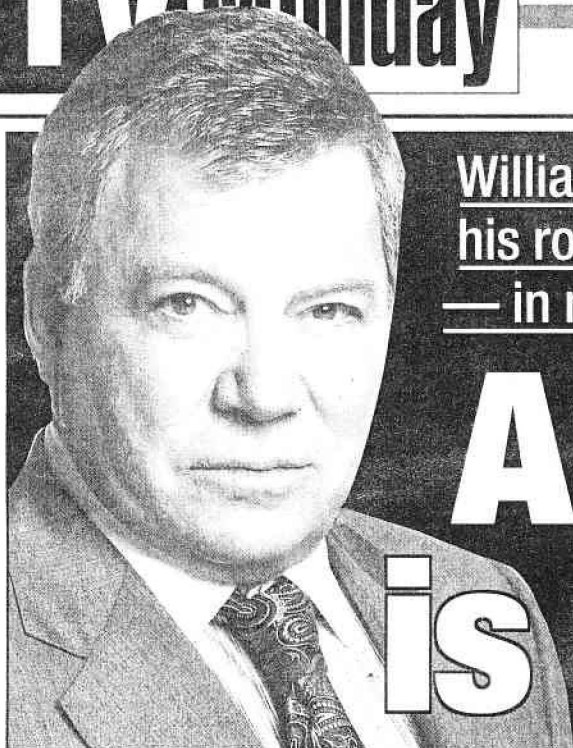


TV Monday



William Shatner hasn't forgotten his roots — or a sense of humor — in making a 'Legal' comeback

A 'Star' is reborn

By MICHAEL GILTZ

WHEN William Shatner won the Emmy last month for guest starring on **"The Practice,"** he joked, "What took you so long?"

He may not have to wait long again for the recognition he obviously enjoys.

Shatner's wily — or just plain nutty — Denny Crane is no longer a drop-in but at the heart of **"Boston Legal,"** the new David Kelley drama that debuted last night.

The show has been a critical sensation. And if it's a ratings hit, expect to see a lot more articles like this one — marveling at Shatner's ability to recreate himself so thoroughly.

Just to tempt the fates, he's got a new CD called

"Has Been" — his first in decades — coming out tomorrow. Yes, things are going well — something Shatner has dealt with just as often in his career as things going not so well.

"You can't do anything else but laugh and roll with the punches," says Shatner by phone from Louisville, where he and his wife compete on a world class level with their American saddlebreds.

So what's with Denny Crane? Is he senile or smart?

"The senility may be at a balancing point where a guy could appear befuddled and in the next instant be absolutely sharp," he says. "I think the fun of the character is [guessing] when is he a little bit fuzzy and when is he not?"

No matter what, says Shatner, it's nice to be offered a plum role for a change, rather than fighting to make projects happen, like the cable series **"TekWar"** that was based on best-selling novels Shatner wrote.

"Yes, that's great," says Shatner, 73. "There is a difference between a genius like David Kelley and his support system to have scripts of that quality is so unusual, that I'm luxuriating in it.

"They have fresh flowers on the set. You would think a bouquet of flowers would be made of silk or whatever. But not on 'Boston Legal.' They're fresh flowers and they get changed every three days. It's the kind of quality that David Kelley wants."

Shatner is surrounded by similar quality on the

CD **"Has Been"** (Shout; \$18.98), which is produced by Ben Folds and features artists like Aimee Mann, Joe Jackson (on a blistering cover of Pulp's "Common People"), Henry Rollins, Lemon Jelly, Adrian Belew and Brad Paisley (who had a hit video with "Celebrity" that featured Shatner in a hilarious cameo).

Numerous tracks are filled with humor, like "You'll Have Time" in which Shatner intones, "I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you're gonna die" and goes on to name check Johnny Cash, JFK, "that guy in the Stones," and Joey Ramone.

But the album isn't camp or novelty — Shatner has one track dealing with the drowning death

of his then-wife, Nerine, in 1999 that will shut up anyone who thinks he's just kidding around.

And of course, there's always **"Star Trek."** It seems inevitable Shatner will play some sort of guest spot on **"Enterprise"** in an attempt to boost the franchise's latest TV series.

Because **"Star Trek"** always comes back to Kirk and despite the fun Shatner has had with the fame — like that classic **"Saturday Night Live"** skit in which he told fans to get a life — he's never tried to disown or walk away from the show and its impact.

"You and I are talking," says Shatner. "And I never forget that you and I are talking in 2004 because of something I did in 1966."