

Grammer tries to recreate glory days of 'Frasier'

BY DAVID BAUDER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — There's a lightness to Frasier's step these days. Following a difficult year, the NBC sitcom "Frasier" has engineered an off-camera reunion in an attempt to recreate its glory years, and wring a few more laughs out of the final season. At the producer's suggestion, "Frasier" brought back the writing team of Christopher Lloyd and Joe Keenan, who had left three years ago. Some critics, and the star, have already noticed an improvement. "We'd lost a little bit of the amiability of the character of Frasier," said Kelsey Grammer, who is going into his 20th year of portraying the preening psychiatrist. Last season, the show's 10th, was the first to produce whispers that maybe "Frasier" had overstayed its welcome. Certainly viewers sensed something. The show's weekly

audience dropped to 12.6 million, down from 15 million a year earlier. In the 1998-99 season, when its five-year Emmy-winning streak as best comedy ended, the show regularly had 22.5 million viewers. Last week's season premiere was seen by 14.5 million people, way below the 21 million who watched the season opener in September 2002. "American Idol" cut into its audience, and NBC didn't help by scheduling weak shows around it, said Jeff Zucker, NBC entertainment president. ABC's "According to Jim" has also become a surprisingly tough competitor. But "Frasier" bears part of the blame for the sinking fortunes. "It was an off year creatively," Zucker said. "All shows go through that, especially if they've been on the air for 10 years. I'm thrilled to have (Lloyd and Keenan) back, and I think Kelsey would tell you the same thing." With story lines like brother

Niles Crane's heart problems and Roz Doyle's departure from Frasier's radio station, the show occasionally forgot it was a comedy, Grammer said. "We spun our wheels a bit too long last year, that's all, and now we're back on the right footing," he said. "There's just a lightness again. There's a frivolousness about the tone of the show that I think was always there that was kind of muted last year." He doesn't want to exaggerate the decline; Grammer said he confronted a critic who wrote that the writing last year stunk. "I've seen our worst shows, I know which ones they are," he said. "And then I've seen some other shows that are supposedly their good ones. There's no problem for me." Grammer, a three-time Emmy winner for best actor in a comedy, scoffed at the notion that "Frasier" stuck around too long. Grammer's own interest in milestones may have fed that per-

ception. His 20-year run playing Frasier Crane — the character was introduced during the third season of "Cheers" — ties James Arness of "Gunsmoke" for the longest stretch playing a character in prime-time TV. It was also important to Grammer that "Frasier" last at least 11 seasons, the same duration as "Cheers." "I'm a driven, competitive man," he said. "I used to be in denial about that, but I'm OK with it now. Coming from 'Cheers,' there was always the onus of 'Cheers' hanging over us. I thought if we could equal 'Cheers,' that would be just right." The rare spinoff that has succeeded, "Frasier" has eclipsed "Cheers" in quality, Grammer said. "We did it in a way that was a lot more challenging creatively," he said. "Cheers" had the great insight to realize that they could retell the show by adding new characters. We have not done



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Read more about the show and its characters at www.nbc.com/frasier

that." His only regret over the years is that "Frasier" dealt only tangentially with the fallout from the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. At the time, entertainers debated whether to address it or provide the country with a respite. The only response from "Frasier" — a story line where Frasier was angered when a neighbor's flag draped over his balcony — was so subtle viewers may not have known there was a connection. "There was this big, giant elephant in the room," Grammer said, "and we didn't acknowledge it." Although "Frasier" will stop producing new episodes next spring, the show will live on for many years in syndication, enriching Grammer beyond his dreams. It also means as an actor, he will be competing with himself. Grammer, 48, said he plans to take about a year off, then continuing acting. He's talked about a future in politics, musing on Fox News Channel last week about running for the U.S. Senate in California, but said that's several years in the future. He doesn't expect a melodramatic end to the series, only to leave the characters "in a place where we can hopefully imagine them going on to someplace else." Will Frasier Crane himself ever be happy, ever settle down? "I think Frasier is going to find true love," Grammer said. "But I don't know if it's going to be this season."

Friends, fans of Springsteen create personal appeal for charities

BY LARRY MCSHANE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Without picking up his guitar, Bruce Springsteen sounded a chord for charity. A double CD of Springsteen songs, featuring cover versions from 37 artists spanning his 30-year career, was released this month to raise money for two charities close to the Boss's heart. All of the net proceeds and the artists' royalties from "Light of Day: A Tribute to Bruce Springsteen" will be evenly divided between the Parkinson's Disease Foundation and the Kristen Ann Carr Fund. "It's really a terrific record," said Springsteen pal Garland Jeffreys, who contributed a moving version of the Boss' Oscar-winning "Philadelphia." "It's nice to be a part of something like this — a good thing."

Jeffreys brought something personal to his track: a close friend suffers from Parkinson's. But personal connections were an integral part of this project. The Kristen Ann Carr Fund was started in 1993 by Carr's parents: Barbara Carr, Springsteen's co-manager, and Dave Marsh, Springsteen's biographer. Springsteen visited 21-year-old Kristen in the hospital before she died of sarcoma, a rare and deadly kind of cancer; the fund began with a Springsteen benefit show at Madison Square Garden and has since raised more than \$3.5 million. "Kristen knew Bruce from early childhood," Marsh writes in the "Light of Day" liner notes. "She loved his music intensely." The Parkinson's Foundation is tied to Bob Benjamin, a New Jersey shore music scene fixture who first met Springsteen in

Buffalo before a 1978 concert. Seven years ago, the 44-year-old Benjamin was diagnosed with Parkinson's, a degenerative disorder of the central nervous system. This year, he became one of the driving forces behind the tribute CD. When the disc was finished this summer, Benjamin managed to slip a copy to Springsteen. The two later crossed paths before Springsteen's September shows at Fenway Park in Boston. "I saw him a couple of weeks ago, and he said that he liked it a lot," Benjamin said. "He knew that I'd been working on it for a year." Springsteen put his musical imprimatur on the project in May. After hearing Elliott Murphy's version of "Better Days," a track from 1992's "Lucky Town," Springsteen invited Murphy — a friend of 30 years — onstage to play the song in Madrid.

Bruce

"The Boss" — a rock 'n' roll icon for almost 30 years and symbol of blue-collar pride — has spent most of his career singing about American places, people, hopes and frustrations.

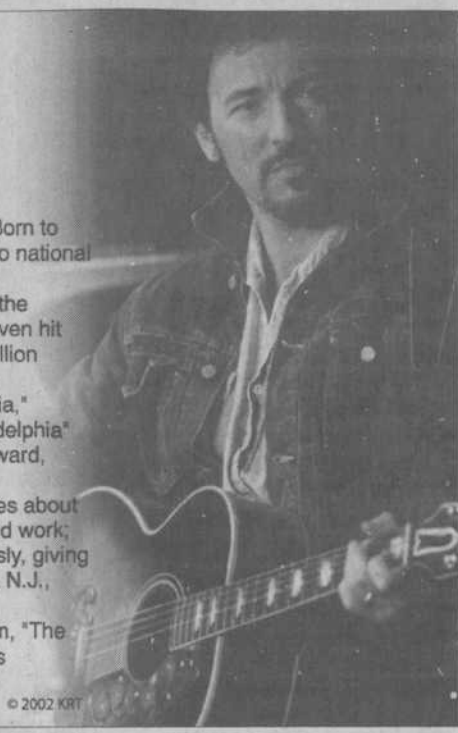
Vital statistics

- Born: Sept. 23, 1949, in Freehold, N.J., to middle-class parents
- Early missteps: Tried his hand at Dylan-style folk singing, song writing in New York's Greenwich Village after high school; returned to New Jersey, playing with several Asbury Park rock bands
- Fame: Inducted into Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, 1999
- Family: Divorced from actress Julianne Phillips; married to E Street Band backup singer Patti Scialfa; they have three children

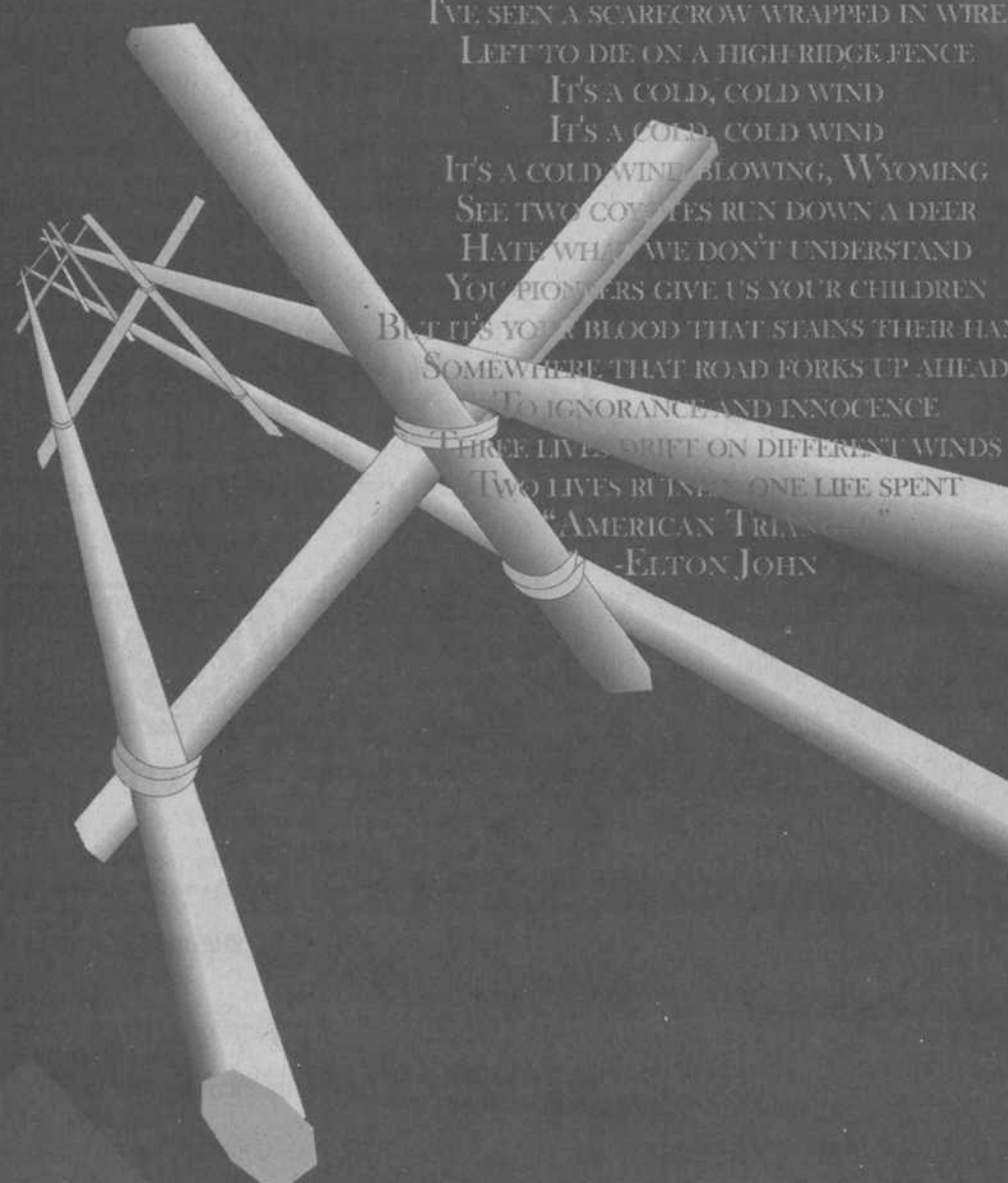
Did you

- Breakthrough: 1975 album "Born to Run" with E Street Band led to national acclaim; title song was a hit
- Red, white and blue: "Born in the U.S.A." (1984) spawned off seven hit singles, sold more than 10 million copies, led to a two-year tour
- Oscar: "Streets of Philadelphia," soundtrack for the film "Philadelphia" won a best song Academy Award, several Grammys
- All-American Jersey boy: Writes about dignity of everyday people and work; takes local citizen role seriously, giving benefit concerts for Freehold, N.J., neighborhood
- Ordinary heroes: Latest album, "The Rising" about Sept. 11 heroes

Source: New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Rolling Stone, KRT Photo Service
Graphic: Pat Carr, Tim Gohsen © 2002 KRT



SEEN HIM PLAYING IN HIS BACKYARD
YOUNG BOY JUST STARTING OUT
SO MUCH HISTORY IN THIS LANDSCAPE
SO MUCH CONFUSION, SO MUCH DOUBT
BEEN THERE DRINKING ON THAT FRONT PORCH
ANGRY KIDS, MEAN AND DUMB
LOOKS LIKE A PAINTING, THAT BLUE SKYLINE
GOD HATES EGGS WHERE WE COME FROM
'WESTERN SKIES' DON'T MAKE IT RIGHT
'HOME OF THE BRAVE' DON'T MAKE NO SENSE
I'VE SEEN A SCARECROW WRAPPED IN WIRE
LEFT TO DIE ON A HIGH RIDGE FENCE
IT'S A COLD, COLD WIND
IT'S A COLD, COLD WIND
IT'S A COLD WIND BLOWING, WYOMING
SEE TWO COYOTES RUN DOWN A DEER
HATE WHAT WE DON'T UNDERSTAND
YOU PIONEERS GIVE US YOUR CHILDREN
BUT IT'S YOUR BLOOD THAT STAINS THEIR HAND
SOMEWHERE THAT ROAD FORKS UP AHEAD
TO IGNORANCE AND INNOCENCE
THREE LIVES DRIFT ON DIFFERENT WINDS
TWO LIVES RUINED, ONE LIFE SPENT
"AMERICAN TRIANGLE"
— ELTON JOHN



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MOTHER OF
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ONE LIFE SPENT.

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Tartuffe

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

engagements, including that of Orgon's daughter, Mariane, to the villainous Tartuffe. Steven Fenley plays Tartuffe perfectly, mixing diabolical humor with lewd behavior in his attempts to seduce Orgon's wife, Elmire. Increasingly, though, the play comes to belong to Orgon and Elmire (Pamela Vogel). Jennings, as Orgon, wears realistic looking attire but stays with us through a laughably fake penciled-in moustache. Although his Duke is the prime dupe of the play, Jennings clearly has a fuller grasp of the language, and he imbues his ironic dialogue with a welcome and much needed subtlety.

Vogel is even more understated, and is just as effective. They both do their best work in a scene with Tartuffe, as Elmire attempts to seduce the cleric so Orgon can hear his treachery firsthand. Orgon is slow to come to his wife's rescue, preferring to switch hiding places and interact with the audience. Elmire's biting dismay at her husband's performance produces some of the funniest lines in the play. Other cast notables are Mary Helen Floyd as Dorine, an audience favorite for her frank sexual dialogue and gestures. Although Dorine's act became a bit tedious, Mariane's suitor Valere (Fabio Pires) was well loved. Dressed like a clown, and sporting an accent that seemed to come equally from Italy and Pires' native Brazil, the effeminate courtier wasn't onstage much but stole every scene he appeared in. "Tartuffe" may not be high art, but it is a whole lot of fun. The entire cast rises to the challenge of translating a 17th-century French farce into a current production, and there's not a dull moment in the action. If the rest of the USC main stage productions meet this high standard, we are in for a great season indeed.

"Tartuffe," a 17th-century French comedy, centers on a noble family dealing with a hypocritical clergyman.

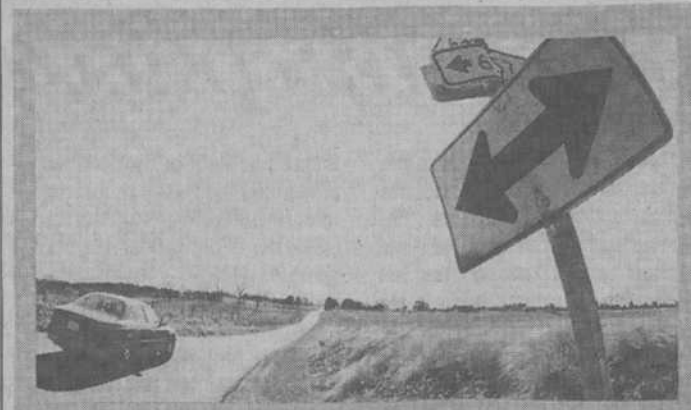
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Eating

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limited dining options. She said, however, "this year is better than the last" and enjoys the renovations. Ashley Walker, a first-year public relations student and Chicken Finger Wednesday devotee, eats turkey sandwiches with lettuce the other days of the week and also takes advantage of the new sushi being offered. She wishes, however, that Fire and Ice would use less oil. "I would like to make the suggestion of a potato bar being added," she said. Davin Emmel, a second-year psychology student, agrees that a potato bar would be a healthy addition.

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