

British series 'Wire in the Blood' delves into trauma during Austin shoot

Star Robson Green says the tropical heat helps set the mood

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SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Sunday, August 19, 2007



What's that Noël Coward song about mad dogs and Englishmen going out in the midday sun?

Robson Green, the genial actor behind forensic psychologist Dr. Tony Hill on BBC America's "Wire in the Blood," scoffs at the oft-quoted reference while shooting an episode on location in Austin, but explains the method behind the madness.

"It is incredibly hot, but it's perfect for this story," says Green. "What we have here is an alien in Texas, we have a very British character coming into a very, very Texan culture and it works brilliantly for the story."

"Wire in the Blood," which airs on ITV in the United Kingdom, is the latest "staff ace" from BBC America, which is making waves — and ratings — with shows such as "Murphy's Law," "MI-5," "Jekyll" and "Hotel Babylon." A dark, stylish, frenetically paced and, at times, genuinely disturbing psychological drama series, it brings protagonist Hill to Texas for the trial of an Iraq veteran.

"All I'm here for — meaning Tony Hill — is to come in as an expert witness for the prosecution basically to see if this suspect, this guy, Darius Grady, who's charged with murdering his wife and children, I'm just here to see if post-traumatic stress disorder has caused the trauma, therefore has caused him to kill his wife and his children," Green says when waiting for his scene at the Texas Capitol on Aug. 12. "Working through the story, Tony suddenly realizes that neither the prosecution nor the defense wants him here, nor does anyone in Texas."

It's all part of a three-week shoot for a one-off, yet-to-be-scheduled special episode called "Prayer of the Bone," set in the fictitious small Texas town of Luther.

In addition to the punishing heat, Hill experiences "Luther Hospitality" — rattlesnakes are placed in his car and his bed, a child confronts him with a shotgun and he is chased by a Rottweiler that needs more than half an hour on his couch.

"Then, when I realize they want to execute this man, Darius, I tell them, 'I know it's Texas, but what's the hurry?'" Green says.

Green says Hill is "nothing like a Hollywood hero. He doesn't drive the flashy car or anything like that. He heals minds, or tries to. He gets things wrong sometimes, he's clumsy and he carries what he needs in a blue polythene bag," an affectation Green incorporated after researching his part with revered British forensic psychologist Julian Boon, who told the actor his blue bag contained his "life."



Starring alongside Green for this special is Augusta, Ga.-born Naima Imani Lett. The accomplished theater, television and film actress plays attorney Anita Addison of a fictitious organization, the Southern Justice League, which defends Grady.

"Anita really wants to like this guy," says Lett about her character's on-screen problems with the British psychologist, "but he's on the side of the prosecution and stands for everything she's against. It's the kind of dynamic that is wonderful to watch, and great to participate in."

"What we delve into with this episode is really what would drive someone to murder his wife and children," she says.

The underlying theme of this special is also bound to court some controversy, since the character Darius Grady is a returning Iraqi war veteran. The episode's director, Oxford-born Declan O'Dwyer, admits that dealing with a subject like this is possibly treading on thin ice.

"You've got to be really careful when you're doing stuff like this," O'Dwyer says, "but if you can do it responsibly, it's a good thing, but you can't be pro-war or anti-war.

"It's bad what's going on at the moment, so to be making 'entertainment' from it is a very, very dodgy subject. But post-traumatic stress disorder is the real issue, and this episode isn't about 'Iraqi Trauma,' this is about trauma, full stop. The war is used more as a backdrop, a possible catalyst, for this guy's actions. But whenever you do these sorts of subjects, whether it's politics or whatever, you have to be careful, but not shy away."

As for coming back to work in Austin, Green and O'Dwyer betray no hesitation.

"Oh, I'd come back tomorrow," Green says.

O'Dwyer concurs: "We've been working with (Quentin) Tarantino's and Robert Rodriguez's crew, and they are just so cool. Apart from this heat, it just doesn't get any better than this."