Television

Ones to watch

BY MILLIE ACEBAL ROUSSEAU

TV is getting a lot hotter this fall thanks to these Latino superstars. So mark your calendars and set your TiVo for one spicy season.

The Artiste

KAT VON D

Katherine Von Drachenberg, better known as Kat, the striking tattoo artist of *Miami Ink* fame, immigrated to California from Mexico with her Argentinean parents when she was 4 years old. From childhood, she displayed an unusual love of art and grew to develop a tremendous skill for fine line black-and-gray life-like tattoos. It was that ability that landed her a job at the venerable Miami tattoo shop, but it was her charm and on-screen persona that finally resulted in the debut of her own show on TLC, *L.A. Ink.*

HM: How did you get your start in the tattoo business?

KVD: I loved it since I was a kid. I didn’t get any breaks. I worked super hard at it. I never went through a traditional apprenticeship. I began tattooing one day. My first tattoo was at age 14 [a skull on one of her friends.] At the same time I got an Old English J on my ankle after a guy named James.

Hispanic Magazine: Why should we watch your show?

KVD: The show premise is similar to *Miami Ink,* but more rock and roll. On our show, you’ll see a connection between the artists and clients. [The tattoos] will be intricate and you’ll see a lot more different styles. The shooting is different; it looks like a movie. And it’s on The Learning Channel; whether you collect them [tattoos] or not, there’s something to be learned. There’s a lot of history in tattooing. I want this show to be about tattooing, not just drama.

HM: If you could no longer tattoo?

KVD: Tattooing is all I know. If I got carpal tunnel or my hands were broken, I’d certainly go into some insane asylum. I’m not interested in teaching or stopping, whether I’m on TV or not. I’m going to tattoo until the wheels come off.

The Funnyman

OSCAR NUNEZ

Cuban-born Actor Oscar Nunez’s first gig out of college was as a dental technologist. It taught him few skills for the future, but he found a knack for making people laugh. He hung up his lab coat and started acting lessons, which led to roles in Comedy Central’s *Reno 911, Halfway Home,* and NBC’s *The Office,* which won a 2007 Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Comedy Ensemble, where he plays Oscar, a conservative, gay accountant.

HM: How did you get involved with *The Office,* and why is it a hit with audiences?

Oscar Nunez: I auditioned and got the part. At first, I thought, this isn’t going to work, we’re going to mess up another great British TV show, but when I saw Steve Carell was in it, I thought, ‘We have a shot at this.’ And they let us do it without a laugh track. From there, we took off. [It works because] the show is really funny and intelligent; it doesn’t insult people. It’s based on characters and situations rather than jokes. Viewers know people like this.

HM: What would you do if you weren’t an actor?

ON: I’d be doing something helping children or animals, maybe some type of hybrid child-animal captured in the wild. I’d be rehabilitating them.

HM: What’s the best advice you’ve received?

ON: It was on Tuesday. It was from a book: “The most important lesson you have to learn, no one can teach you but yourself.” The other one was when Jack Nicholson was on Johnny Carson and was asked to give advice to actors. Nicholson said, ‘If they need advice, they’re not gonna make it.’
The Action Figure
AMAURY NOLASCO
Puerto Rican actor Amaury Nolasco plays Sucre on FOX's Prison Break, and in Transformers, he helped ease the edge-of-your-seat tension by eliciting laughs with his Spanish rants, which he admits were mostly ad-libbed.

Amaury wasn't always destined for acting. He was following in his family's footsteps and was on track to become a doctor. "I would have been a heart surgeon." In a strange twist, he was hanging out on a beach when he was approached to audition for a Tylenol commercial, which he got. That led to other commercials and eventually university acting lessons from one of Puerto Rico's best-known theater directors, Dean Zayas. At Zayas' urging, he moved to New York to study acting, eventually ending up in L.A.

Hispanic Magazine: You were left for dead in the season cliffhanger of Prison Break. Are we going to see you again? (Readers: Spoiler alert)
Amaury Nolasco: I was left on the street bleeding to death. Fans won't see me and think... 'He's dead.' I'm back; I jump in on Episode 2. I'm still on the lookout for my girl who's pregnant and somewhere in a hole. All the gang is in prison except me and Dominic. Everyone's got an agenda—mine is to find my pregnant girl who was kidnapped.

HM: For those who don't watch the show, why should they tune in?
AN: Shows like 24 and Prison Break are changing the face of TV, giving you something different. It's like watching a movie every week. You're left hanging and you can't wait for the next Monday. I dare anybody to watch the pilot and not be hooked to keep watching all the other episodes. I get fans telling me, 'We put the kids to bed; we shut the phones off. No interruptions. Monday is sacred.' Other shows, you can pick up on any episode and you're fine; not this show. You have to pick it up from day one, follow the characters and fall in love with them as you go.

HM: Where will we see you next on the silver screen?
AN: I'm in a movie with Keanu Reeves, Forest Whitaker, Hugh Laurie from House and Chris Evans from Fantastic Four. It's called The Night Watchman and it's about corrupt LAPD cops. It's an amazing drama thriller, great script. It's from [James Ellroy] who wrote L.A. Confidential. It was revised by David Ayer who wrote Training Day. David is directing it. When I saw Harsh Times [also written and directed by Ayer], I said, 'I want to work with this guy.' Six months later I get a call. You put it out to the universe and it comes back.

The Sexiest Scrub
JUDY REYES
Much like her character Carla Espinosa on the NBC's Scrubs, Judy Reyes is warm, spunky and straightforward. After seven seasons she admits to similarities between her and the character. "I'm as direct and sassy as she is, and definitely as good looking." Those qualities may have helped her land the 2007 National Hispanic Media Coalition Impact Award for Outstanding Performance in a Comedy Television Series, and also an Alma Award last year for Outstanding Actress. And acting runs in the family—two of her sisters, one her fraternal twin, are actresses.

HM: What do people like about Carla and why should they watch?
Judy Reyes: She's a sexy, no-nonsense nurse who loves her job. She puts people in their place in a very funny way. She's very good at what she does and is a genuine human being. She's confident, takes her job seriously and can't be talked down to or played. Scrubs is very well written. It's one of the funniest shows you'll ever see. It combines the hilarious with heartfelt, gut-wrenching moments—all in half an hour.

HM: Describe your most embarrassing moment.
JR: There are tons. I like to block them out. Once I went to a press event. I wasn't feeling well and was taking medication. I was wearing a Max Azria dress and was answering questions on the red carpet, medicated. A reporter says to me, 'You look beautiful. Who are you wearing?' I replied, 'Hank Azaria.' I couldn't even speak. I broke into a cold sweat and walked off the red carpet. No more medication on the red carpet.

HM: What's next for Judy?
JR: I'm in an indie film called The Poker Club by Johnathon Schaeck of That Thing You Do! I play Detective Patterson. It's about four guys who get together to play poker. They inadvertently kill a robber. Everyone ends up dead, and I'm the detective who investigates the case. Hopefully, it will get into Sundance. I also look forward to adding producer to my career, particularly of Spanish-language films. I'm currently working on [and bought the script to] Conversaciones que Nunca Tuvimos (Conversations We Never Had). We start production next year in Argentina.
The Family Man
DANNY PINO
Danny Pino is devoted to his family, acting and helping others. The actor, who plays Valens on CBS' *Cold Case* is a new dad and the spokesperson for the CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program, in which court-appointed volunteers serve as watchdogs for foster kids in the courtroom. "Right next door there could be a child who needs support, may not be going to school and getting the education they have a right to because no one's monitoring their life ... One person can make a 180-degree change for that child." The NYU post-graduate also remains close to his Cuban roots.

HM: Why should people watch *Cold Case?*
Danny Pino: What I find so fascinating about our show is that solving crimes is about the human experience. I find the way homicides are solved, especially cold cases, is through what people know and what they didn’t want to reveal at the time of the crime. To me that makes the show much more human, much more about people and less about science.

HM: What would you be if you weren’t an actor?
DP: Probably a lawyer, that’s what my dad really wanted me to be. [One day] I was sitting at [a Cuban restaurant] with my dad. When you have a sit down with my dad he takes out a pen and does a diagram of your life: ‘This is how much money you need; this is how I got started.’ I told him, ‘A professor told me I should continue on and get my master’s degree.’ My dad thought: ‘You get your master’s in business, something that’s more secure, not something creative.’ He was afraid of me wasting my time. I told him that there are three top schools in the country where directors and producers look for people. I was able to convince him if I got in [to one of those], I’d pursue acting. Now, he thinks it was his idea.

HM: Who’s your role model?
DP: My grandparents on both sides. I don’t think I realized when I was a kid [that] being in your late 40s, early 50s, and being uprooted from everything you know—language, environment, family, friends, job and culture—[is tied to your identity]. I would love to bring the experience of my grandparents to the screen. That would make my career very fulfilling. They’re not ... running around saving lives. They’re loving their families and putting them in front of themselves. For me, that’s heroic.

The Hero
DANIA RAMIREZ
You might remember Dania Ramírez as Blanca, AJ's Hispanic single-mom girlfriend on HBO's *The Sopranos.* Or from *X-Men: The Last Stand* and *25th Hour.* Now, she's got more big-screen work on the way—*Illegal Tender* and *Brooklyn to Manhattan,* as well as on the small-screen, where she joins the cast of NBC's *Heroes.*

Hispanic Magazine: You’re joining *Heroes* as Maya Herrera. Tell us about the character, her ability, and why we should watch.
Dania Ramírez: I can’t talk about her ability, but I can tell you I’m dealing with the darker side of having an ability. My character is essentially a good person, but because she can’t control her ability she’s been harming people around her. When you first meet my character, she’s on the run from the cops somewhere in Central America, trying to make it into the U.S. through Mexico. You’ll see me speaking Spanish, dealing with illegal crossing of borders. You get a really good feel of corruption in Latin America and what the culture is like. It’s the first time you see a leading character on an English network being able to speak Spanish. It’s interesting to see what it’s like crossing borders in Central America as opposed to from Mexico to the U.S., and how it affects my character because of how she’s treated. You should watch because it’s hands down the coolest show out! There’s drama, it’s exciting and really raw. Every episode is a mini-movie.

HM: Describe working with Brett Ratner and Spike Lee.
DR: I learned a lot from both directors, and it’s really interesting because as an actor you get hired, it’s their vision, and you have to work with them in creating something. You have to be able to be free so they can direct you and take you in their own path. Ratner breathes, eats and lives movies; it’s all he does. Spike Lee is one of the smartest people I’ve ever encountered.

HM: What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?
DR: People tend to give me advice all the time. I think the best advice was, stay focused because in this business it’s so easy to lose sight of who you are and what your goal was when you started. Don’t get caught up, but at the same time enjoy your success.
The Go-Getter
CAMILLE GUATY
Camille Guaty works hard. This past season, she worked double duty on two shows: Prison Break on FOX and ABC’s The Nine, which by itself sometimes required 16-hour days, she says. Plus, she had a recurring role on NBC’s Crossing Jordan. And that is just the way she likes it.

She still thinks about her family, especially her conservative Cuban dad, when considering roles. At first, her family wasn’t supportive of her career choice, but she went for it anyway. Today, she says her dad searches blogs to find out what they’re saying about her characters. This season, he’ll have more research to do as she joins the cast of NBC’s Las Vegas.

Hispanic Magazine: Describe Piper, your new character on Las Vegas.
Camille Guaty: She’s been brought in to stir things up a bit. The casino was run by strict rules; the new boss, played by Tom Selleck, hires me. I come from The Palms, a young, hip hotel. I don’t follow any rules, but I make the casino money. In the end, how can you argue with results? My character is sexy, feisty and funny; it’s something different from what I’m used to playing. On Prison Break, I’m an innocent girl in love with a criminal. On this show, [Las Vegas] she takes the reins and is in control. This year, they’re going to go away from crime-scene drama and lighten it up and make it more of a fun dramedy.

HM: Your Prison Break character Maricruz is pregnant and trapped in a hole, all for love. Explain.
CG: Maricruz is someone who would never be associated with a criminal. She comes from a really good background, but these two fell in love. Love conquers and overtakes all. Now she’s pregnant and Sucre (Anaury Nolasco) is on the run. She was on the run with him, and he’s put her in a bad situation; she was taken hostage somewhere. Sucre is looking for her, trying to save her and her baby.

HM: What’s the best advice you’ve gotten?
CG: Don’t be critical of others; don’t judge.

The Scene-Stealer
ANA ORTIZ
Ana Ortiz resembles her character Hilda on Ugly Betty in at least one regard—they both have an effervescent personality. The newlywed can’t even say she’s married without giggling. This year, she received an ALMA Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress for her role as Hilda. Besides Betty, she’s doing a short film called The Winged Man, based on a one-act play by playwright Jose Rivera.

Hispanic Magazine: Why do you think Ugly Betty has been such a hit with audiences?
Ana Ortiz: There are so many reasons. One of them is there’s a familiarity to Betty that people can really relate to, and to the whole Suarez family. It’s nice for people to watch and say, ‘Hey, that’s like me, like my family!’ Then there’s Mode [magazine], with the campy [characters] and fabulous clothes. We have someone for everyone.

HM: What’s it like to play Hilda?
AO: Hilda is sort of like my alter ego; I get to go on set and be this person that everyone wants to be at one point in their life—dress provocatively, tell people what’s on your mind, no matter what it is. Her confidence is unique and truly her own. The fact that she’s a single mom leads her, and gives her no choice but to have the veracity to be free to say whatever is on her mind. She has no time to waste. She’s a composite of different people in my family and people I’ve grown up with. One time, my cousin called me and said, ‘I know you’ve been imitating me.’ I denied it, but yeah, maybe just a little bit.

HM: What would you be doing if you weren’t an actress?
AO: My dad seems to think I would have gone into politics, probably [as a lawyer because I’m really good at arguing. Everyone in my family has a strong sense of justice and a desire to change the world. With acting, I’m trying to do that in some way.

HM: What’s the best advice you’ve gotten?
AO: The best advice came from my mom. She had a three-day rule. When something horrible happens, give it three days. The first day is really awful. The second day, it subsides, and by the third day, everything is manageable. Then you can take action. Sit it out, and think it out. It’s worked really well for me. H
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