



series, “Men of A Certain Age” where his co-stars, Scott Bakula and Andre Braugher, are already immersed in conversation about the various indignities and revelations that come with being a 50-something guy -- the prostate exams, the inexplicable hairs, the calm that comes with having less to prove, the acceptance (or not) that half your life has probably come and gone.



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Guy Talk

“Men of A Certain Age” Discuss the Meaning of Life. And Donuts

By Joe Rhodes

Ray Romano comes roaring, literally, onto the diner set of his new TBS

“Here he comes,” Bakula says, “What’s that character from “Ice Age?” Snuffleupagus? He’s coming.

“Don’t go to the donuts,” Bakula shouts, as Romano, still bellowing, stops at the craft services table. Braugher chimes in, “We might have another sex scene.”

“All my topless scenes are over,” Romano shouts back. “At least for the next six months.”

“You never think you’re gonna hear a guy say that,” Bakula says. They are laughing, all of them, by the time Romano sits down.

This is how they are, on-camera and off, these “Men of A Certain Age,” locker-room friendly, comrades in middle-age arms. On the show, created by Romano and his “Everybody Loves Raymond” writing pal, Mike Royce, they play old college friends – one married, one divorced, one eternally single – all of them wondering if their best years are behind them, uncertain about what to do next.

In real life Braugher, 49, Romano, 51 and Bakula, 55, are all married with kids and have really only gotten to know each other in the few months the series has been filming, mostly here on the Paramount lot. Long enough, though, to understand each other’s rhythms and neuroses, Romano’s in particular.

“Any of you see TMZ last night,” he says.

“Why?,” Bakula answers. “What did you do?”

“They caught me coming out of a charity thing and they go, ‘Ray, what do you think of the cast of your new show?’ I go, ‘They’re all assholes.’ And after I say it, I’m like, oh what if they see that in print now. I thought I would get in trouble with you guys.”

“Did you really think that?” Bakula asks, half-therapist, half-friend. “Cause I never for a second would have thought that was serious. Cause I know you.

“Yeah, I know. But you know me, I have to obsess over it.”

“I know you do.”

They are all, in some ways, surprised at the lives they’ve lived and the men they have turned out to be.. Braugher, Chicago raised and Julliard-trained, had visions of fast-lane stardom when he began acting. “And thank God those fantasies didn’t come true,” he says. “They’re so superficial. I’ve got a lovely wife, terrific kids who are on the right track. I didn’t plan to be here, but it’s vastly more satisfying than where I did plan.”

“I’m a more evolved person than I ever thought I would be,” Bakula says, amazed that he could go from St. Louis to studying law at Kansas University to who he is now. “I have no right to be here, based on how I was raised and where I come from. I look at the rest of my family sometimes and think, ‘How did this happen?’”

And then there’s Romano, who at one point in the conversation pulls a card out of his wallet on which he has recorded the results of every cholesterol and prostate test he’s taken since 2004. “The prostate’s good,” he says. “The cholesterol’s a little high.”

That he keeps this in his wallet – which Braugher and Bakula find hilarious – explains a lot about why this is the show Romano chose to do as his follow-up to “Everybody Loves

Raymond. "It proves that I have a propensity to not be in total control and I am susceptible to midlife crisis," he says of the homemade report card.

And is "Men of a Certain Age" the manifestation of his midlife crisis, or a solution to it?

"Both," he says. "It's temporarily a solution. Until it gets cancelled. And then the next solution will be "Dancing With the Stars." But, yeah, it's definitely a solution. Because it gives me focus and purpose."

They end up talking about ailments, of course, that they can't run or play softball the way they used to, how they're more likely to wake up in the middle of the night. Sometimes, it's just to pee. Sometimes it's about way more than that.

"I think it's the only time is good to lie to yourself," Romano says, asked if he ever thinks about mortality. "I was thinking about that the other day. I'm 51, 9 years away from old how Peter Boyle was when he started working on "Raymond". "Raymond" seemed like it took forever but it also felt like it took a blip of the eye until it was gone. So, this show is gonna be over and I'm gonna be 56 and then I'm gonna be 60 and I'm like, how am I not gonna be scared of death? And I decided you just have to ignore death until it happens. You have to just keep thinking you're gonna do the next great thing and keep telling yourself, "I'm getting up, I'm going in" and boop boop boop and then when

you're dead, it catches you by surprise. You WANT to be blindsided by death.

"I don't ignore it," Braugher says. "I just try to prepare for it."

"No," Romano shouts, "IGNORE IT!"

Braugher says he just finished reading a book he bought for his wife, called "How We Die" . "So I know what happens," he says, " how you feel when you die."

"Well, don't tell Ray," Bakula says, "cause that's gonna blow his plan."

"Okay," Romano says, "I take back calling you an asshole on TMZ."

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