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**PLAYING
BALDWIN**
BILLY'S ULTIMATE ROLE

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His surname is synonymous with "handsome," family is his top priority and he's playing an NYC politico with skeletons in the closet on TV this fall. Welcome to William Baldwin's beautiful world.

by Brian Scott Lipton

photographs by
Scott Pasfield



William Tells All

BASKING IN SUMMER SUNLIGHT and the attention from passersby during a photo shoot on Fifth Avenue, William Baldwin ("Billy" to his friends) is approached by a pair of newlyweds. "I know who you are!" squeals the bride, still wearing her wedding gown and carrying a bouquet of white roses. "Can I take a picture with you?" The third of the four acting Baldwin brothers (including older Alec and Daniel and younger Stephen) happily poses with the couple, and also flashes his famous Baldwin smile for a small army of sidewalk photographers that begins to gather, wielding cell phones and digital cameras in his direction.

A half hour later, over a turkey club sandwich and Diet Coke at the Gotham Lounge inside The Peninsula New York, the rakishly handsome 44 year old is more reflective. "My family is the only thing that really matters to me," he says. "I wish show business got me as high as my kids and my wife, but it doesn't." Noticing that the bride and groom he just met are now perched at the bar, he instructs a waiter to send them a round of drinks. Without missing a beat, he continues to talk about his wife of 12 years, singer Chynna Phillips, a former member of pop trio Wilson Phillips, their three children—Jameson, 7, Vance, 6, and Brooke, 3—and cocker spaniel Thurman, named after Yankee legend Thurman Munson. As if on cue, Jameson calls her dad's cell phone to ask if he'd bring home water balloons, and he seems positively giddy. "I'm head over heels for my children," he gushes. "I love being able to take them to school and coach their Little League teams."

Baldwin's routine, however, is about to change; the family is moving from their suburban home in Westchester County to Los Angeles, where he's co-starring in ABC-TV's *Dirty Sexy Money*, a highly anticipated new dramatic series set in New York City—but filmed on the West Coast—which premieres this fall. He plays Patrick Darling, the oldest scion of a wealthy, powerful, extremely dysfunctional family (headed by Donald Sutherland and Jill Clayburgh) who hopes to rise from state attorney general to senator, provided the family's lawyer can keep his sordid secrets under wraps.

"I feel like I've made a pact with the devil, because I never

wanted to raise my kids anywhere but the New York area," says Baldwin, who grew up with five siblings—older sister Elizabeth and younger sister Jane are

not in show business—in nearby Massapequa, Long Island. New York City has always been his main stomping ground, and he relishes being part of it, delighting when people recognize him on the street and yell "Hey, Baldwin" as he walks past. "Still, I feel like the planets are in alignment with this show. It's fun and exciting, with a great cast. And I have to think about the money. I may have to save whatever I make on this show for all the college tuitions, weddings and car leases I have coming up over the next 20 years."

After spending the past few years working almost exclusively on independent films currently making the festival circuit, Baldwin would like to return to the days when his movie projects—such as *Flatliners* (1990), *Backdraft* (1991) and *Sliver* (1993)—were considerably higher profile. In fact, his most recent commercial hit was *The Squid and the Whale* (2005), in which he had a supporting role as a goofy tennis

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pro. "This TV series could be my first step back to mainstream movies," he says. "No one is asking me to be part of *Ocean's 14* yet, but maybe soon."

Playing a politician isn't a huge stretch for Baldwin. "My father taught government in the local high school and we used to talk about politics around the dinner table," he says. He majored in political science at the State University of New York at Binghamton and planned to go to law school, then work in the nonprofit sector. "But while I was in school, my brother Alec was starring on the soap opera *The Doctors*, and I used to come into the city to visit him on the set. After work, we'd go out to all those great 1980s clubs and hang out with people like Demi Moore. Everyone I met was more

interesting and dynamic than the next. Pretty soon, I knew the path my life would take, which was to be a New York actor. Still, I finished college and applied to law school, but I deferred my admission. Then I moved to New York to take acting classes." He modeled for Calvin Klein, acted in TV commercials and soon landed the starring role of convicted killer Robert Chambers in TV's *The Preppie Murder* (1989) and work as an extra in *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989).

Now playing a child of privilege in *Dirty Sexy Money*, Baldwin admits that he's unable to rely on personal experience. "We didn't have much money, so from the time I was 12, I was doing factory work, landscaping, bartending or whatever I could to help my parents.

my brother is in a no-win situation," he says, adding that he hopes Alec and ex-wife Kim Basinger will realize the futility of being in "this state of constant battle. It's just heartbreaking."

Thankfully, this Baldwin brother's home life couldn't be more harmonious—and he's determined to teach his children the value of public responsibility as they get older. A fine role model, he's currently active in numerous charities, including Project A.L.S., which raises funds to find a cure for Lou Gehrig's disease; the Massapequa Community Fund, which provides scholarships to high school seniors from his hometown; Mercy Corps, an international relief organization; and The Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer

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They didn't manage money well," he confides. His dad, Alexander, passed away in 1983, but he's still devoted to his mom, Carol, and speaks frequently with Alec. "Otherwise, I see most of the family only at weddings and funerals. We have lots of love and lots of wars, and I think everyone is losing patience," he says, referring to the recent tabloid frenzy when an angry voicemail message that Alec left for his 11-year-old daughter, Ireland, was leaked to the media. "I think

Research Fund, founded in honor of his mom, a cancer survivor. "One thing I like about philanthropy is that only rarely does it not live up to its potential," says Baldwin. "In the movie business, you can never be sure of the outcome." He wishes the newlyweds a happy life and steps out into the Fifth Avenue sunshine.

Brian Scott Lipton is editor of Theatermania.com and a frequent IN New York contributor.

GRAY T-SHIRT, GAP; CHARCOAL SUIT, JACKET, ZANELLA; JEANS, EARNEST SEWEN