

# labors of love



CAPTION HEADER:  
Caption TK

**J**onathan Prince keeps his options open. As an actor, writer, producer and director, he's worked on sitcoms, dramas, long form, short form — even quiz shows. He's gone from small acting gigs to executive producer-creator of *American Dreams*. The '60s-era drama that revisits the glory days of *American Bandstand* has earned solid ratings for NBC in its Sunday night slot and is now gearing up for season two.

But he did shut the door on one career option: lawyer.

Growing up in Beverly Hills, Prince never considered a show-biz career. After graduating from Harvard with a double major in English and psychology and a minor in international law, he was accepted by the law schools at both Harvard and UC Berkeley.

The only son among five daughters, he nearly broke his mother's heart when he gave up law school to appear in Equity-waiver productions and work in a pizza parlor. "I was a great disappointment to every Jewish family in the immediate vicinity," he says, laughing.

He scored some minor TV roles, but for the high-energy Prince, acting involved too much down time. "You're either waiting for auditions, waiting for parts or waiting to read your lines. It didn't appeal to me. I need to spin a lot of plates."

So while waiting for screen time, he began writing. With a mix of luck and chutzpah, he met George Burns and pitched an idea a movie based on Burns' theme song, "I Wish I Was Eighteen Again." It became the movie *18 Again!*, written by Burns and Josh Goldstein. Not exactly a classic, but a prelude to a busy TV career in which Prince has learned from some of the best in the business. His resume includes stints with Dick Clark (now his fellow exec producer on *American Dreams*), Witt-Thomas and MTM.

"I made a conscious decision to be a jack-of-all-trades in case one didn't work out," he quips. "This way, by the time someone figures out I'm a lousy actor, I'll be directing, and when they find out I suck at that, I'll be on to something else. It's hard to hit a moving target."

Still, he's settled on drama ("I was never the funniest guy in the sitcom room, but in a drama room, I'm hilarious."), and now he's doing the family show he always dreamed of.

*American Dreams* follows "two families from Kennedy to Nixon — from Camelot to Watergate — from the working-class point of view," Prince says. "We wanted to touch on the bittersweet losses. I want people to feel that smile and that heartbreak."

The series keeps him spinning plenty of plates. Television suits him, Prince says, because he's a team player who thrives among "the best and the brightest. I love it when my learning curve is high."

—Roberta G. Wax

Paul Drinkwater/NBC