

## TELEVISION

# Film Career Takes Ulrich Into The West

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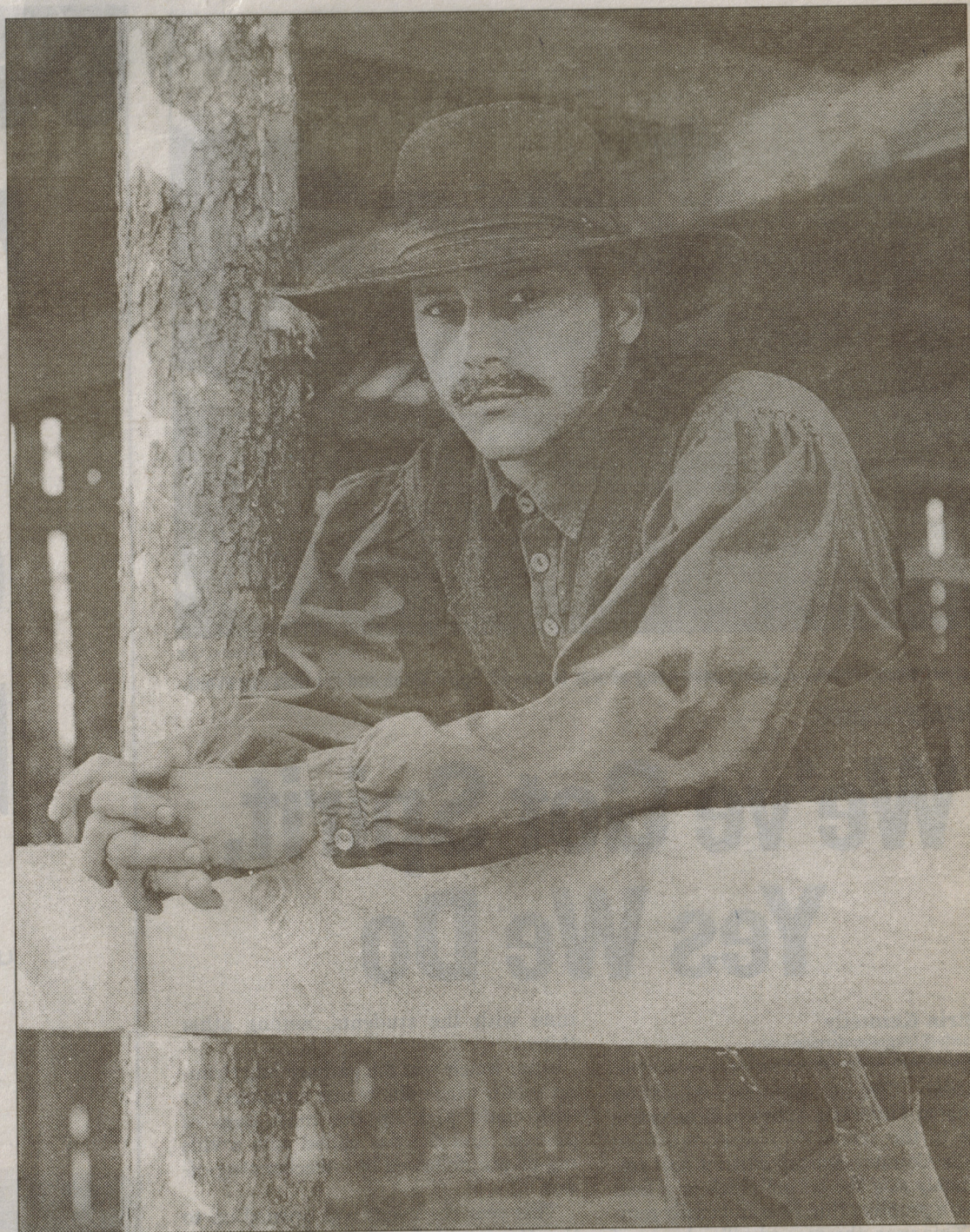
TNT has literally struck gold with the television event of the summer, *Into the West*, a six-episode series with a cast and production team so large and diverse that network heads have been turning for months. The epic spans the opening of the American West, a dramatic, personal tale of the adventurous exploration of the American wilderness, the life and death struggle between the Native American and pioneer cultures, the rush to riches in a new land, and the building of a new civilization.

Skeet Ulrich is one of many talented actors to play a role in the landmark production from none other than executive producer Steven Spielberg. Ulrich plays *Into the West*'s Jethro Wheeler, brother to protagonist/adventurer Jacob (Matthew Settle). "My character is a confused adolescent who doesn't have a great relationship with his brother," Ulrich says. "Being jealous of his brother and his adventures, he contemplates taking the journey with him. My character is faced with challenges, and it's how he overcomes them that creates a narrative that is purely inconceivable."

Ulrich studied acting at New York University before making his film debut in

would say, "Who wants to watch an educational television show about so many years ago, when there are so many modern comedies and dramas out there?"

I would tell them not to watch it, because you shouldn't be watching it if you have that outlook. First of all, each episode is really a slice of life of Native American culture, and the white migration, and sort of the involvement with the Native Americans. But it's also very family oriented, not family-media, but family in that you get pieces of these people's lives in a very intimate way. And it has a lot of aspects to it, lots of love and humor (though not too much humor), and romance. I think it does apply to 2005; you can't look away from your past and make the future what you want it to be. I think there are a lot



Photos Courtesy Chris Large

clude *The Newton Boys*, *As Good as It Gets*, *Touch*, *Albino Alligator*, *Last Dance*, *Boys*, and *Scream*, from which most might remember him as the murderer behind the now infamous white mask. He recently spoke with **The-Long Islander** about his own journey *West*.

**Into the West is very different from what most people would expect from a television series when they sit down to relax at night. What inspired you to take on such a project?**

In my opinion, this is the first telling of the American holocaust, the displacing of the Native American culture. I was really into telling that story. I'm not Native American, nor do I have anything to do with that side, but that's really what drove me in. I found the history of the migration West interesting, and I don't know, the time period really fascinated me.

**Are you a big history buff? I bet you were always finishing school with As in history and social studies.**

*(Laughs)* I get into it for the sake of film. I guess I'm inclined in that way. I don't remember doing that well in those subjects, so I would say that you are wrong there! My upper education has come post-college. I am drawn to period pieces. It's always fun to sort of find out how they express themselves, to find out what was going on inside, a lot different from what is going inside us now.

**What would you say to someone who**

**What challenges did you face in making a series of such a large proportion?**

It was a lot of research. Physically it was very demanding, we were in the elements all day, especially in Calgary where it gets very cold. At one point I end up in an iced-over river! God bless our crew because they really went through hell trying to film this stuff. It was 25 below, and they were chopping ice off this river for me to get in. It was grueling!

It sort of haunted my mind for a while, because I knew it was coming, and finally it was there. But you really have to go through all this stuff just to tell this story. And it's a beautiful story at such a heart-wrenching time. It really sort of set the standard for the American work ethic, as we show what these people went through for a better life. It introduced a lot of heart for the world.

**Are there any similarities between you and Jethro Wheeler? Do you swim in icy rivers in your spare time?**

*(Laughs)* Not usually! But I came West seeking fortune. I somewhat succeeded. Jethro is a family man, a bit to himself, but when he gets past that he really goes for it, and it's really thrilling. He also strives to better his family, and his passions for his work are definitely elements I understand.

**The costumes and make-up in *Into the West* are incredibly elaborate and pre-**

**cise. Was this aspect of the filmmaking tedious for you as an actor?**

The makeup artists and hair-stylists are unbelievable. Really every department just nailed everything. You deal with a lot of different effects sometimes with makeup. When you're cutting back and forth with time they sort of have to match and deal with it, and that's the hard part. But you never feel complete until you step into the wardrobe. The wardrobe was like your history book, and you knew so much about the time. They had everything so deep and they had everything nailed. You can do anything you want, but if you're sitting there in Adidas it's not going to work.

**What do you want people to take away from *Into the West*?**

I think it's important for people to remember to give Native American culture its due, and to not just put it behind them. I hope people can recognize the mistakes we've made, and then maybe we can learn from them.



**What's next for you? Any chance you're killer role in *Scream* will somehow be resurrected for a *Scream 4*?**

*(Laughs)* I'm going to direct the non-existent *Scream 4*! You just inspired me to do exactly that! But really, I don't know, I'm trying to find out the answer to that question myself. I have an idea of what I want to do but it's not quite set in stone yet.

*You can find Into the West on TNT on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 8 p.m. through July 24.*

*Catch Part 2 of The Long-Islander's Into the West coverage next week as we interview another familiar face from the massive cast of stars, Rachael Leigh Cook.*