

Parade

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In **LOVE** *with* **LOVE!**

Mushy movies and feel-good endings
are just what we need this winter

**Because it's
your vision.**



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LOVE

is on
the

AIR!



Go ahead: Watch that mushy movie. It's the perfect feel-good entertainment on Valentine's Day—and every day.

by nicole pajer

Winter days are dark, cold and dreary. The antidote? Something heartwarming with a happy ending.

"Who doesn't enjoy a good love story?" asks Cameron Mathison, 48, who stars in the Hallmark Channel's *Very, Very, Valentine* (which aired Feb. 10 and will be rebroadcast Feb. 14 at 6 p.m. ET). "It's a bit of escapism in today's world, and a lot of people need that, now more than ever," says Mathison, who played Ryan Lavery on *All My Children* from 1998 to 2011 and appeared in season five of *Dancing With the Stars*.

He's not kidding about the "a lot of people." With an audience of 90 million, the Hallmark Channel is TV's fastest-growing non-sports-oriented cable network. It's a magnet for fans who want to cozy up to feel-good stories and characters who always end up happily ever after. Enthusiastic viewers have created fan clubs, Pinterest boards of leading men and flooded the channel's Facebook page with love.

Stars like a little romance too. In addition to a whole stable of regulars, the network's movies have featured James Brolin (he also directed), Adrian Grenier, Kimberly Williams-Paisley, Danny Glover and Andie MacDowell.

"There is a lot of programming out there that's darker and edgier," says

Michelle Vicary, the executive vice president of programming and network publicity for Crown Media Family Networks, Hallmark's parent company. "We strive to represent the more positive, celebratory side of life." And that means something for everyone—girlfriends watching with champagne, a couple cozying for date night or someone home alone flipping through the channels.

hopeless romantics

The network's many viewers are not the only ones who love happy endings.

"I love playing characters that get to fall in love, and I love being a part of stories that highlight the romance people have in their lives," says Hallmark regular Lacey Chabert, 35, who is proud to call herself a "hopeless romantic." She began her acting career as a child actor in the TV drama *Party of Five* and voiced the character of Eliza in *The Wild Thornberrys*. Chabert has starred in 12 Hallmark movies, most recently *My Secret Valentine* (Feb. 3), which will return Feb. 14 at 8 p.m. ET.

Andrew Walker, 38, another frequent Hallmark star, also admits to gravitating toward uplifting storylines. "There is so much turmoil in our world right now and I just really love how these stories end," says the Canadian actor, who has been in 11 Hallmark movies after a run of appearances in TV shows including *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Maybe It's Me* and *Hot Properties*.

Former *Full House* and now *Fuller House* star Candace Cameron Bure, 41, who has starred in 15 Hallmark originals, agrees. "I love my heart feeling warm after watching a movie that ends well," she says. "It lifts your spirit and gives you hope, even if it's just for a few hours."

"It doesn't matter how many of these films you watch, you're gonna have a little lump in your throat, a tear in your eye and a big smile on your face at the end," says Hallmark star Alicia Witt, 42.

musical chairs

One thing that's fun for viewers is watching Hallmark movie mainstays—including Chabert, Bure, Witt and Danica McKellar, 43—paired with new love interests.

"I'm a big sports fan, and it's almost like a game," says Walker of seeing which Hallmark actors get matched up. "It's like watching my favorite quarterback take the field with a good receiver for the first time." Walker recently starred opposite Chabert in *My Secret Valentine*. He admits he'd been gunning to share the screen with her for some time. "She's like the very essence of Hallmark, and I've wanted to work with her forever."

McKellar, who played Winnie Cooper in TV's *The Wonder Years*, jokes that the women share Walker's sentiments and that there might be a little innocent gossip about the men behind their backs. "Lacey and I will call each other and say, 'You gotta work with this guy. He's a sweetheart. He's really talented,'" she says. "And I'll call up another Hallmark star and say, 'What was it like working with this person?' and get some insider tips."

When it comes to creating chemistry with their onscreen partner, the actors each have their own tricks. Witt, who began her career as a child actor in the 1984 movie *Dune* and most recently had a recurring role on the TV series *The Exorcist*, likes to wing it. "I'm not big on lots of rehearsals. I'm very happy with meeting people and just going with it," she says. McKellar writes bios for each of her characters to help her delve a little deeper into the mind-set of a romantically conflicted female lead.

And if Chabert has time—Hallmark movie shoots average just 15 days—she will pull her male co-star aside to bond. She admits, however, that she's definitely had her share of flubs when it comes to transitioning between co-stars. "I've accidentally called an actor the name of a

advice for sweethearts

We asked stars of the Hallmark Channel for relationship advice.

"Love is easy when it's new. It takes more creativity and thoughtfulness to make it special the longer you've been together. Put each other on a pedestal. Look into each other's eyes when you talk. Grab his butt."

Laugh. Make time for each other; don't let the kids or work consume your every waking hour. And most of all: Don't stuff yourself at dinner so that you're too full to get physical after (story of my life!)."

CANDACE CAMERON BURE



"Keep expectations in check. Don't sweat the small stuff. Love unconditionally. Stay ever so slightly mysterious."

JOSIE BISSETT



"It's important to always connect at the end of a long day. There's nothing more satisfying than talking through your daily wins and failures and having a listening ear to get advice from."

ANDREW WALKER



"Be sure that the person you are falling in love with is the person who is genuinely there and not an idealized version of a person who you 'wish' was there. And always go with your heart."

DANICA MCKELLAR



Go to Parade.com/sweethearts for more.

previous character," she says with a laugh. "Heck, I've even referred to *my* character as the wrong name!"

But for some, swapping love interests is not always as glamorous as it looks. "I love watching the movies and I love the feelings that I get from watching them. But as an actor, sometimes it's not always fun to fall in love over and over," admits Bure. "When you make so many of these, you have to find the chemistry with a brand-new person on the first day you're thrown together."

She says that it's not uncommon to be paired with an unfamiliar male co-star, then asked to act out the script's



countdown to heart day

Cooking With Love (Feb. 11, 9 p.m. ET) stars Ali Liebert and Brett Dalton. "It's a comedy, and romance blossoms," says Liebert, who portrayed detective Nickole Bilson on the ABC television series *Ten Days in the Valley*.

Very, Very, Valentine (re-airs Feb. 14 at 6 p.m. ET) features Danica McKellar, Cameron Mathison and Damon Runyan. McKellar calls the tale "a modern-day Cinderella story."

My Secret Valentine (re-airs Feb. 14 at 8 p.m. ET) stars Lacey Chabert and Andrew Walker. "I love the secret-romance aspect of this film," says Chabert.

Wedding March 3: Here Comes the Bride (Feb. 17, 9 p.m. ET), starring Jack Wagner and Josie Bissett, keeps the love fest brewing. "Someone will be getting married," teases Bissett, who also starred on *Melrose Place* and appeared for five years on TV's *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*.

Season five of **When Calls the Heart** with Lori Loughlin debuts Feb. 18 at 9 p.m. ET, followed at 10 p.m. by the premiere of the network's new reality series, **Meet the Peetes**, about the love story and family life of actress Holly Robinson Peete and her retired NFL football-player husband, Rodney Peete.



FROM TOP: SHANE MACODD/HALLMARK CHANNEL/CROWN MEDIA; DAVID DOUSEN/HALLMARK CHANNEL/CROWN MEDIA; LAUREN & TALBERT/HALLMARK CHANNEL/CROWN MEDIA

most intimate scenes first. And Bure jokes that as an actress, she much prefers being in her five-film relationship with Canadian actor Yannick Bisson, 48, on her Hallmark Movies & Mysteries *Aurora Teagarden Mystery* series.

strong relationships

That's also been the case for Bure's *Fuller House* co-star Lori Loughlin, 53, who enjoys portraying a 20-plus-year relationship on Hallmark's *Garage Sale Mystery* franchise. "I love showing a marriage that is intact and people that are still in love and still having a good time," Loughlin says, noting that the arc is representative of what she has with her real-life husband, Massimo Giannulli. On the popular series, her character, antique shop owner Jennifer Shannon, is married to engineer Jason (Steve Bacic).

She also appreciates that her character Abigail Stanton in *When Calls the Heart*—the Hallmark Channel series that follows the journey of a young educator (Erin Krakow) who leaves her high-society life behind to teach school in a small coal-mining town—is paired with different romantic prospects. "I really like the idea that Abigail has encounters with different people. And while they don't turn into full-blown romances, I love that dance right up until the kiss," she says.

faithful fans

While the actors enjoy bringing these rom-coms to life, it's the fans who really make them appreciate their partnership with the network.

"People come up to me con-

stantly and say, 'We love your Hallmark movies,'” says McKellar. “I love the idea that I get to make people’s days a little brighter.” As a thank-you, she live-tweeted during the premiere of *Very, Very, Valentine* and gave away signed cards from the film’s flower shop to 10 participants.

“It’s fun to see people root for the different couples,” says Jack Wagner, 58, who stars with Josie Bissett, 47, in *Wedding March 3: Here Comes the Bride* (Feb. 17, 9 p.m. ET). The No. 1 question he gets asked lately is, “When are Olivia and Mick getting married?”

♥

LOVE STORIES

Go to Parade.com/fans to meet the “Hearties” and other Hallmark movie fans.

The Hallmark Channel skews heavily female (75 percent of its viewers), but the stars are proud to be expanding to a more generalized audience. “I have so many men approach me and say, ‘My wife loves your movies. But I love them just as much; I just don’t tell everyone,’” Bure says.

Walker and Bissett have had similar experiences.

“I was in a café in New Mexico a while back and there was a big burly guy in line next to me,” Walker recalls. “He kept looking over like he was going to pummel me. But then he leaned in and said, ‘You’re the Hallmark guy!’ He told me he spends most of his time on the road as a trucker but turns on Hallmark for the feel-good

happy endings any chance that he gets.”

Bissett lives in Seattle but frequently crosses the border into Canada to film. She says that even the most stone-faced border guards have admitted to being moved by her romantic comedies. “They are so intimidating, but when I mention Hallmark, they completely lighten up. It’s cute!” she says.

Loughlin has been blown away by the support for *When Calls the Heart*. “Our fans are unlike anything I’ve ever seen before,” she says. And Chabert explains that the sequel to *All of My Heart* came about because fans were vocal about wanting to see the storyline continue.

“They are so loyal and kind and I love hearing from them,” she says.

And if some people turn on a Hallmark movie to laugh at the sometimes-implausible showers of sunshine that tend to end all the storylines, the stars are perfectly OK with that.

“I know people also watch these because they’re cheesy,” admits Bure, who says she laughed at the recent Hallmark Christmas movie parody on *Saturday Night Live*. “A Hallmark drinking game came out this year,” she says. “If those are the reasons you tune in, then great—just watch and have fun. Either way, it’s making you feel good!”

Visit Parade.com/romance to take the ultimate Hallmark movie quiz.

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