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**WRITER/PRODUCER OF CLASSIC TV SITCOMS DELIVERS
A FUNNY MYSTERY THRILLER THAT WILDLY SPOOFS
THE SURREAL WORLD OF REALITY TV**

Hollywood writer Bill Bryan enjoyed a long and highly successful career during the golden era of TV comedy, writing and producing such hits as *Night Court* and *Coach*. But just when he thought the sitcom party would go on forever, a rude uninvited guest called Reality TV came along and crashed it. So Bryan decided that rather than getting mad, he would get even – and he does so in high style, with his hilarious and biting first novel, **KEEP IT REAL** (Bleak House Books; May 28, 2007). Set in the surreal worlds of reality television and gangsta rap, **KEEP IT REAL** is a contemporary and sometimes startlingly politically incorrect satire that is also a first-rate murder mystery. Already other writers and critics are lining up to offer this rookie novelist a warm welcome, including humorist Dave Barry, who said, “If you like to laugh, and you hate reality TV, you will love this wonderfully, viciously hilarious book.”

During the course of his research for **KEEP IT REAL**, Bill Bryan met and interviewed many people who work in Reality TV. He therefore had a ringside seat as a slugfest recently broke out between the Writer’s Guild of America and the big reality production houses, which routinely exploit writer/producers by demanding that they work long hours for little pay. Some of these disgruntled workers have told Bryan outrageous, closely guarded secrets about just how unreal Reality TV is. And Bryan says “the biggest reality scandal of all is hiding in plain sight, in the form of the shameless invasion of what used to be called content by what used to be called commercials.”

In **KEEP IT REAL**, Bill Bryan introduces Ted Collins, a former Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist whose issues with anger management have exiled him from the newspaper business. He can barely make his child support payments, and is outmaneuvered by his ex-wife and her sleazy entertainment-lawyer husband. Drummed

out of journalism, Ted is slumming as a producer of a hit Reality TV show called “The Mogul.” In a recent reorganization of the show’s staff, Ted has been unexpectedly promoted to co-executive producer, which doesn’t help his self-esteem at all. During a visit to his daughter, Ted accidentally witnesses a nasty squabble between a beautiful young woman and her lover, celebrity rapper Boney, a client of his ex-wife’s husband. When the young woman disappears, and is later found murdered, Ted sees an opportunity to get back his professional self-respect while he investigates Boney as a guest of “The Mogul.” Could the solving of the woman’s murder be the key to his redemption?

Robert Ward, writer/producer of *Hill St. Blues* and *Miami Vice*, sums of the appeal of **KEEP IT REAL** as “Hilarious, profane, and dead-on funny. *Keep It Real* is a brilliant comic mystery, which skewers the world of reality TV, rap music and Hollywood lawyers. Run out and buy it now and be prepared to stay up all night choking with laughter.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Bill Bryan lives with his family in Pacific Palisades, California where he is currently at work on his next novel.

Q & A with BILL BRYAN

1) **KEEP IT REAL** spoofs the Reality TV genre. Why did you decide it was worth spoofing?

Two reasons: It’s wildly popular, and it’s utterly ridiculous.

2) How "real" is Reality TV?

Based on my extensive research, I believe it’s slightly less real than professional wrestling, but slightly more so than a presidential news conference.

3) The Writers Guild is currently preparing to do battle with the producers of Reality TV. Why?

Because all of the shows that used to be written by highly-paid union members have been replaced with shows written by part-time baristas. The WGA has taken the quite reasonable position that if someone dreams up what’s going to happen on a show,

coaches and manipulates the on-camera performers to make it happen, then shapes the raw footage into a coherent, polished storyline, that person deserves to be called – at the very least – a writer. The production companies prefer a different job title: “monkey.”

4) You've heard some of the stories from writer friends about the abuses producers of Reality TV are imposing on writers and producers. Why haven't these disputes received more publicity?

For the same reason witnesses don't testify against street gangs – ‘cause they ain't no fools. The production companies demand that all of their employees sign heavy-duty Non-Disclosure agreements (“NDAs”), which prohibit them from revealing anything at all about the inside workings of Reality shows. And they spread the word that anyone who dares violate his or her NDA will be sued, screwed, and blackballed from the business. The excuse is that this is necessary to prevent the names of the winners from leaking before airtime; the more important reason is to hide from the audience all the dirty little secrets about how Reality is made, and how the people who make it are treated.

5) Would it make sense for the Writer's Guild to go on strike against the producers of Reality TV?

I'm not qualified to answer that. But I do know that the one time that a group of Reality writers tried a walkout – against “America's Next Top Model,” it was a complete disaster. The production company simply ordered other employees to do the writers' jobs, which they did. That doesn't mean that “Top Model” or any other show doesn't need writers – it just means that lots of hungry people are capable of writing Reality TV.

6) One of your criticisms of Reality TV is the presence of products. Isn't this just another form of advertising? It's paid for, isn't it?

My complaint with product placement, as it's called, is that it distracts from the story, and it erodes the audience's trust in the storytellers. Because we're all inundated by advertising at virtually every waking moment, we develop automatic, subconscious defenses to it – if we didn't, we'd be all be hopeless shopaholics. So when we're watching our favorite show and something makes that little red warning light go off in our heads - say, when one of the starving “Survivor” contestants uncovers a treasure chest full of Pringles – we lose some of our faith in the story, our “willing suspension of disbelief.” You can argue that it really doesn't matter if (as in the above example) the show is crap in the first place, but product placement has already migrated from Reality into scripted shows, even the good ones. I don't know how many times I've been enjoying something on HBO and suddenly found myself staring at the Apple logo on the back of someone's laptop screen. I hate that.

7) What do you think is the great appeal of Reality TV?

There are lots of varieties of Reality shows, and they all have different appeals. The common thread is the illusion of unpredictability – because the performers are supposedly “real” people, we’re supposed to have no idea what they’ll do. Of course this isn’t true, and no one would like it if it was. People don’t want to watch a series of disjointed events, leading to a random outcome. They want a progression of cause and effect, with various twists and surprises along the way but leading to a satisfying and inevitable conclusion. That’s called a story, and you can’t get one without a storyteller, aka writer. “Reality” is just another storytelling genre, and as soon as audiences figure that out, they’ll lose interest and move on to the next dubious innovation.

8) You've earned a good living as a writer/producer of situation comedies. This is a genre that has taken a beating by other types of programs in the past few years. Why?

Because it – okay, we – got boring. We kept serving the audience the same old slop, and thinking that if we changed the name on the menu they wouldn’t notice. Tragically, they did.

9) Is the sitcom dead?

I’m pretty sure that human beings haven’t lost the desire to laugh, so no, it isn’t dead. It will be back, and it will be fundamentally the same as it always has been. TV comedies always have been and always will be about the interactions of small groups – families, roommates, or co-workers – most or all of whom are entertainingly stupid.

10) Is there any Reality TV program you like?

“Cheaters.” Winning a million dollars isn’t half as exhilarating as getting caught butt naked, hiding behind your sister-in-law’s futon.

11) In your book, KEEP IT REAL, you've created a fictionalized Reality TV series called 'The Mogul' which might remind some of Donald Trump's "The Apprentice." Why this particular Reality TV program?

My attorney has advised me to tell you that I have no idea what you’re talking about.

12) Some people think the level of rancor between Donald Trump and Rosie O'Donnell was a ploy to shore up his sagging ratings? Agree?

Again, I’m no expert. But my guess is that Donald Trump spends most of his time trying to shore up something that’s sagging.

