



THE  
PILOT  
INTERVIEW

# A NEW LOWE

**ROB LOWE IS PLAYING A LINCOLNSHIRE POLICE CHIEF IN AN ITV DRAMA. THIS IS NOT A DRILL**

WORDS PAUL SIMPER PHOTOGRAPHY MILLER MOBLEY

BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE (POPULATION 69,000) has the highest murder rate per capita of any town or city in Britain. So why not bring in an American detective to help deal with the crimewave? That's the premise of this new series in which the incoming cop, algorithm-spouting Bill Hixon, is played by... Rob Lowe. After appearing in a string of brilliantly written television series, from *The West Wing* and *Brothers And Sisters* to *Parks And Recreation*, Lowe has gone down this extraordinary new path, relocating to Boston, the heart of Brexit Britain, for a fish-out-of-water ITV crime drama. If its quirky tone bears the influence of American series such as *Better Call Saul* and *Fargo*, the crimes of the week are specific to the universe of the flatlands of Lincolnshire. Feuding farmers, post-office robberies, the exploitation of migrant working communities — they're all viewed from Bill's outsider's perspective.

So what did the Hollywood and TV star make of his first UK show — and filming in the decidedly unglamorous fens of East Anglia?

**You've said "real actors take chances", does your role in *Wild Bill* feel like that?** I think it feels more taking a chance conceptually. More so than the actual character. I've been doing multiple American traditional television since 1999. So then to

just go: 'I'm packing up and coming to England. I'm doing a show where I'm the only American. It's hyper-English.' That definitely feels like, I don't know [if it's taking] a chance but it's a complete 180.

**What was the first day filming in Boston like?**

A lot of people thought I really was the new chief constable. They were coming up and complaining to me about the crime. Other people knew it was me. One of the wonderful little quirks that are the differences between American productions and British productions is that in Britain you don't lock the area off when you're filming on location. So people would walk up to me in the middle of takes and go: 'Rob Lowe, what are you doing here in a policeman's uniform?'

**Tonally how would you describe *Wild Bill*? It looks to have a lot more larking about than other British police procedurals such as *Happy Valley*, *Scott & Bailey* or *Line Of Duty*. For instance, you're chucking cabbages at fleeing suspects...**

It's funny. My knowledge of British television is pretty limited to what makes it to, and is embraced in, America. Starting all the way back to *Prime Suspect*, *Wild Bill* has more similarities to the *Better Call Souls* of the world and the TV version of *Fargo* where there's a very specific universe ie: Boston, Lincolnshire with very specific crimes that only happen there. The tone is very odd and weird and unsettling and surrealist but still really gritty. Those two US shows are really where its DNA comes from.

**What difference does it make when a part has been specifically written for you as Bill was?**

It's always interesting. When I hear that I look at the part and go: 'What does that say about me?' Is it a good or a bad thing? I think Jim [Keeble], Dudi [Appleton] and Kyle [Killen] — the three people responsible for writing *Wild Bill* — basically told me that they wanted to write a character that takes full utilisation of my ability to do speeches and handle dialogue. I love dialogue. I feel confident around it. Bill is very articulate. But he also has that internal explosive turmoil that doesn't usually come with a highly articulate character.

**We've seen a sizzle reel where Bill has out-there moments. He sticks on a cowboy hat and gives a little whoop when he briefs his force. Obviously Bill is the lead, but is there the chance for you to also feed in some character-actor** →

August

stuff? Maybe not as much as you did for *Californication's* Eddie Nero...

[Laughs.] Nothing will ever be as extreme as Eddie Nero unfortunately. Really what it feels like to me — and the sizzle reel is a very good barometer of that — is it feels very fresh. It feels unlike anything you've seen. I think me in a constable outfit is a very fresh visual. I've been doing this for almost five decades and it's hard to find visuals that look different and that definitely does.

**What did you respond to in creators Dudi Appleton and Jim Keeble's scripts?**

You always have to ask yourself why. Why go to England to do a show? Why is it set in Lincolnshire? The thing about 'fish out of water' is a lot of times the fish out of water is just made-up bullshit to put a fish out of water. This fish makes perfect sense because of Brexit. This is the time to do something in that area. That area is driving the national conversation of this country. The people of Boston, Lincolnshire voted, I think, 86 per cent for Brexit. There's clearly something going on there that needs to be looked at. So it's a perfect excuse to set a story there and a perfect time to do it. It also makes the show special and different and having that undercurrent is just another way of keeping it from being like anything you have ever seen before.

**How did Bill develop as a character from what you first saw on the page?**

The first version was written by Kyle, who is currently writing *Halo* [Showtime TV's series based on the computer game and produced by Spielberg's company, Amblin Television]. You don't get a bigger project to write than *Halo*, that's for sure. It was very muscular. What initially drew me was that the character was a very male, no-holds-barred starring part. Dudi and Jim brought that beautiful British sensibility to it and created a world which was believable and real and could take place in Boston, Lincolnshire. So my notes to them through the process have been keeping my American character American. What is it, we're two nations divided by a common language? There were many times I had to go: 'An American would never say that' or 'an American wouldn't know what that is.' That was really it on a daily basis. Keeping Bill with that brusque American directness that we sort of have.

**Had you been looking to make a British TV show for a while?**

What I was really looking to do now was find my own streaming show [Rob is an executive producer on *Wild Bill*]. While this is ITV in the UK, around the world it will be on



a streaming platform. It is not a network television show by American standards. It's weird, there's language, there's storytelling you could never do in a traditional setting. What I like about it is it feels unlike anything you've seen before. I don't think there have been many TV shows that have chosen Boston, Lincolnshire as their storytelling arena.

**As an executive producer what is your involvement pre- and post-shooting? What's the most interesting part of that job for you?**

Honestly, for me the acting is the least interesting because I've been doing it for so long. It's very hard to get surprised. It's very hard to experience something new. I still take a huge satisfaction in executing it to the best of my ability — otherwise I wouldn't be doing it any more — but in terms of excitement I get that from the new stuff. Helping with the stories, giving notes on the scripts, giving notes on the cuts, being in the editing room, thinking about ad campaigns,



Clockwise from top left: Blimey, that copper really looks like Rob Lowe; Starting in his directorial debut *The Bad Seed*; With Martin Sheen in *The West Wing*; As Eddie Nero in *Californication*; Blending in with the locals in Boston. *Kind of*.



helping to put together the sizzle reel. The producing of it is what's really fun for me.

**Did you hang out in Boston when you weren't filming?**

This has been a really long shoot. We shoot every day except the weekends, and I was staying in London so I would commute back. So for my social life it wasn't great. On a show like this you prioritise. For me it's sleep and training and food. Once I'm done with those there's no more time. I'm back on set. But I had a great dinner with Michael Caine while I was over here, and a wonderful evening of going to see Paul McCartney.

**If this is a hit could you see yourself spending the next five years in Boston?**

It's getting harder and harder for a show to cut through the clutter, so if anything approaches a legitimate worldwide hit you'd be stupid to walk away from it.

**Are there other British TV writers you'd be interested in working with?**

I kept stalking Julian Fellowes to put me in *Downton Abbey* and that didn't happen. There's so much good work being done over here. In the States all anybody can wait for is the next big thing to come out of Britain on television.

**You previously said that you thought *The West Wing* was the best TV series ever but suggested that a few recent shows on cable might give it a run for its money. Which shows?**

Forgetting I was in it — and maybe if I hadn't been in it it would have been even better — I do still think *The West Wing* is the best show ever. I think *The Sopranos* is probably right there at number two for me. In terms of just impressive achievement there's *Game Of Thrones*. You have to understand that when we're talking about the best TV shows it is so unfair to compare *Game Of Thrones*, *The Sopranos* or *Mad Men* to *The West Wing*. We used to do 22 episodes a year, on a schedule, with commercial breaks. David Chase said he got bored of writing *The Sopranos* one year so he just went to Italy and drank espressos for a year. Then he came back and said he only felt like making 15 this season. With *The West Wing* it was: 'You're doing 22, you're doing them every year, we're gonna have commercial breaks and you're gonna fucking go do it.' To create that show under those auspices. People forget. I hear on this last season of *Game Of Thrones* they shot one battle sequence for 50 days — five zero. One sequence. So it was a different world for us.

**What's the latest on *The West Wing* reboot? When was the last time you spoke to Aaron Sorkin?**

Everybody kind of speaks off the record about it. Every once in a while there will be something in the press that it's imminent. The truth of it is I take Aaron at his word. If he had a really good idea in terms of how to do it he would do it in a second, as we all would. But what exactly would that look like? It doesn't sound like he's been able to figure that out but he's about to write and direct another movie and a lot of us are on other things. It would be a fluky miracle if it ever happens but you never know.

**What have you learned from directing for the first time with *The Bad Seed* [Lowe's 2018 horror film for Showtime]?**

I loved directing. If I could figure out a way for it to make financial sense for me, frankly that would be all I would do. But the time commitment is just too much at this point in my life. That was a perfect opportunity to get in, get out and do something I believed in that I had a blast doing. For me writing and directing is the ultimate because it's just much easier to be in control of all the other decisions than to give them over to other people when you're the one who has the vision. If you don't have the vision, then there's no reason to direct. Being an actor [on screen] is unbelievably limiting. You are creative for 45 seconds. Then you go to your trailer for an hour. You come out and are creative for another 45 seconds. You go to your trailer for another two hours. As a director, you're creative from the moment you arrive on set till the moment you leave.

**Have you ever had a dream project in mind that you'd love to do with Martin, Charlie Sheen and Emilio Estevez?**

I never really have. For Martin and I, if I could go back in a time machine and join him in *Apocalypse Now* that would be great. For Charlie and Emilio, instead of *Young Guns* we could do *Much Older Guns*.

**This whole surreal experience in Lincolnshire feels like it could one day make a great biopic...**

Oh, for sure. I hope someone was doing a behind-the-scenes. I think they were. There was another camera running all the time. Oh boy, it'd be good.

**Who would play you?**

Hmmm. Zac Efron? I don't know. Zac is a lot younger than me. Here's the good news, and I say this with all modesty: there is no other me.

**WILD BILL IS ON ITV NOW**