

# BATMAN MEMORIES

While there was no room for Robin or Burt Ward, West's one possible chance to return (and die) in *Batman* didn't interest him. For another view of West, see the fold-out.



*Adam West is still serious about his long-ago exploits as the Caped Crusader.*

By ROBERT PEGG

would like to see it done right."

For many Batman fans, that means the deadly serious Dark Knight, not the "camp" approach of West's TV series which producer William Dozier once described "as the only situation comedy on the air without a laugh track." Still, many other fans loved West's portrayal.

With his droll, deadpan delivery and a physique seemingly devoid of muscle tone (*Newsweek* called him a "flabby travesty of muscle beach"), West overplayed the part to the hilt.

Central to West's camp approach was making Batman into the squarest hero on TV. In the series' pilot, hot on the trail of the Riddler, Batman casually wanders into a nightclub, turns down a ringside table and takes a place at the bar, explaining to the doorman, "I shouldn't wish to attract attention," and then stolidly orders an orange juice.

"I always thought of Batman as an undercover cop," says West today. "He's sort of an undercover guy who happens to be in a funny costume while trying to be inconspicuous."

In the new film, West is conspicuous by his absence. He says he turned down the chance to cameo as Dr. Thomas Wayne, murdered father of Bruce Wayne and the psychological impetus behind the hero.

But West wanted to play Batman and



After scaling the side of a building, TV's Batman and Robin jump through an open window into the Joker's hideout. Finding only his blonde moll, they demand to see the Clown Prince of Crime. "Oh, the Joker's in his office right now. Who may I ask is calling?" The Dynamic Duo exchange puzzled glances and then an incredulous Batman answers the all-too-obvious, "Batman and Robin, of course."

Who else would be all dressed up to trail the Joker into Gotham City's underworld? And who else but Adam West would be under that famous cowl?

That was true in the '60s, of course, but

now Michael Keaton is Batman in the current movie hit. West's reaction? "I feel devastated," he says.

Identified with the part since the mid-60s, West hasn't worked extensively due to typecasting. He has done countless personal appearances with Burt (Robin) Ward at car shows, colleges and science-fiction conventions, but the movie, to his chagrin, passed him by. "It really is devastating in a sense," West says, "because you work 20 years to keep the show alive and fresh and then they hire the hottest director in the business [Tim Burton] and evidently they've plowed a lot of money into this movie and you

nothing else. He says the film's producers ignored him, except for the cameo offer. "And I wouldn't do that. It's ridiculous. They only asked me for one reason—to help identify the film, to give it my stamp of approval so my fans will come out."

"I wish them well. I really do. I have no bitterness about it although I'm disappointed, of course, that I couldn't do it again in a new version. If they want to remove me as Batman, fine. I've done it and loved it. I'm doing other things now."

Those other things include his 1986 TV series, *The Last Precinct*, and *Doin' Time on Planet Earth*, an SF comedy film now on video. He continues his frequent personal appearances, sometimes in costume as Batman.

Curiously, West's familiarity with the 50-year-old superhero extends back to childhood. "I was never a lunatic-fringe comic-book freak," he admits. "But I remember reading all those things, I remember Batman very well."

In recent years, the Batman of the comics has taken a turn back to his roots. The character is once again a grim avenger; his most popular stories, dark and Gothic. "Those things are written to open new markets, to sell more comic books naturally," West comments. "That's the bottom line. In an attempt to stay appealing and exciting to the people who are really into comics, they do this. And that's fine, but it just proves to me that the theater of the imagination will allow it, that Batman can be presented in many ways, on many different levels and it's acceptable if you do it artfully. I don't think you should tamper with it as far as the violence, the sexuality, the S & M—that's all right in a comic book with a limited readership."

Today's Batman is not the Caped Crusader of West's era, but this grim Dark Knight of the comics. Still, Adam West believes he could have played this more contemporary version of Batman, especially with *Beetlejuice*'s Tim Burton as his director.

"That's what I thought," laments West. "I was really excited that they had signed him and thought we could have had a wonderful rapport. He could have been able to bring out a freshness with me if I were to do the picture."

"But anyways, let's get off that because it's their candy store, their ball game. They have the licensing, they can do what they want."

How would West do the Batman film if he had the chance?

"Well, half-a-billion people watch our show every day and they don't want it tampered with or changed," he explains. "But you can still update it. I would do it as a little more serious adventure but I would retain the old show's flavor. It would be a hi-tech wondrous kind of mystery adventure and Batman would be fighting crime only at night."

"Things would be suggested and imagined, you know? You don't have to



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show flesh and bones splintering and splattering on walls and you don't really have to show Batman being clawed in bed while making love or Bruce Wayne with bruises on his back in the shower after hopping out of the sack with some chick. You can make it much more adult and romantic without that."

Meanwhile, West's *Batman* continues to battle evildoers in syndication. In the wake of the Burton film, 20th Century Fox TV plans a marketing push which should find the series reruns airing again on many local TV stations.

"There has been so much new product fighting for the marketplace. Like televi-

Jill St. John's "Hi Diddle Riddle" dance partner has been immortalized in song once more by Los Angeles disc jockey Wally Wingert with the cult classic "Adam West."

Photos: Copyright 1986, 1987, 1988 Greenway Productions/20th Century Fox TV

sion, there's such a deluge of it. America's going to murder itself with amusement if we're not careful," he notes wryly. "And so, what happens is, everybody's trying for something new and different but really just cloning [other shows] so that you forget the really delightful aspects of the '60s series that were very original—*Batman*, *I Spy*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Green Acres*—shows where they really threw the rules out the window. Those shows might work today. I think people are a little tired of the standard network fare—witness the attrition, the falling away of network viewers mostly due to videos and cable."

"*Batman* was done on two levels, one for adults and the other for the kids. That's what we tried to do, so that as you get older and watch it over and over, you see different things. That's what makes a classic."

"My 10-year-old son, Perrin, and his friends enjoy seeing *Batman* as much as they do anything else. They're all so familiar with me, they don't care, it's just like watching Dad go to work or do another show," says Adam West. "But *Batman*, I think, is just going to go on and on, long after I'm gone." CS

