

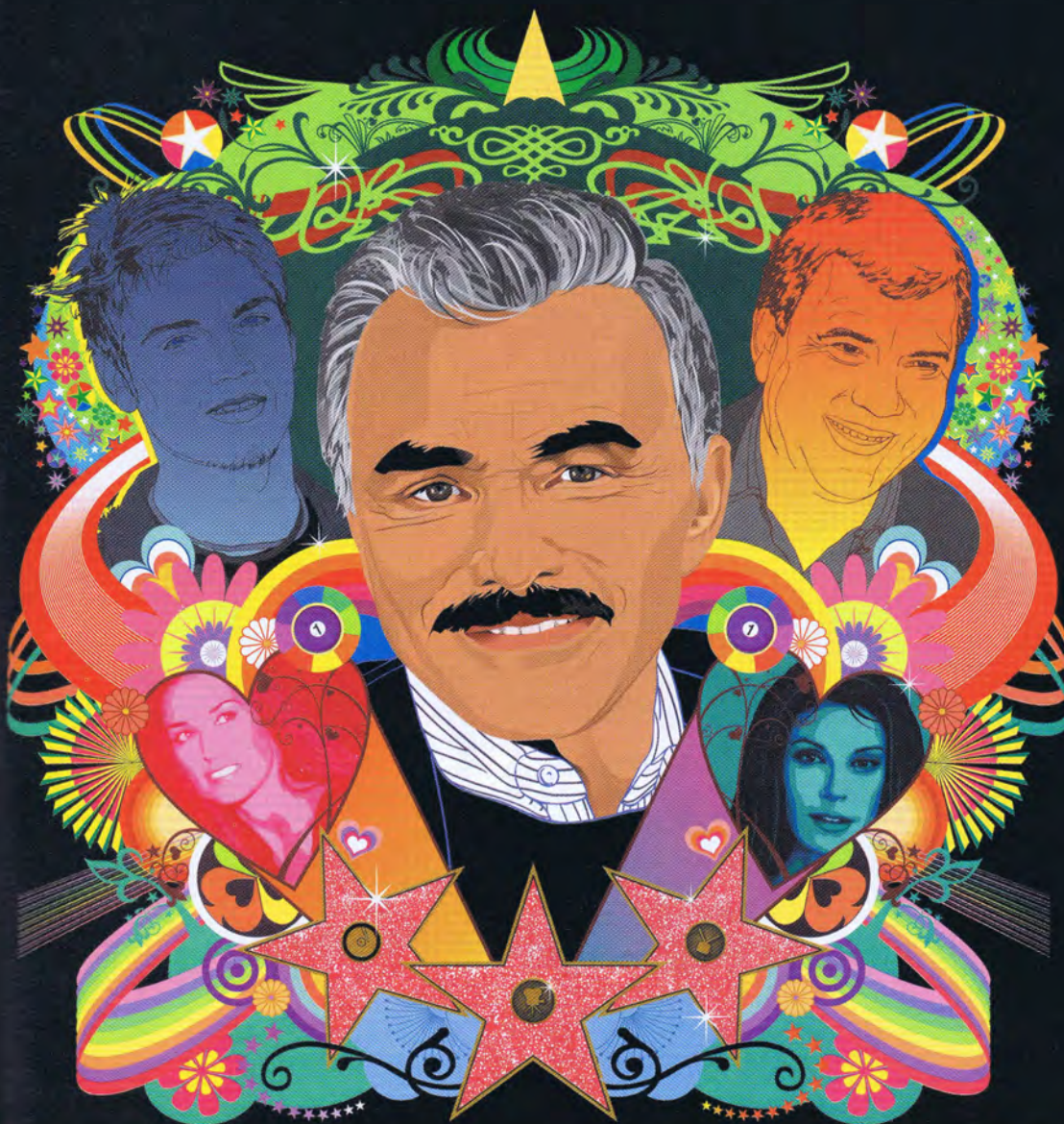
# IN PLAY

MOVIES CAN SNOOP ACT? MUSIC 20 BEST SUMMER SINGLES BOOKS HOT BEACH READS

## Don't Call It a Comeback

How Burt Reynolds, Demi Moore, the Backstreet Boys, and — yes — Rick Springfield win our hearts again. And again. And again.

CULTURE SHOCK



**T**here's no doubt about it: You are a big, big star. Still, there comes a moment when you start to suspect that your career doesn't have that old sizzle. Was it when you realized your house was somehow omitted from the new star maps? Don't despair, Ms. Bertinelli. Stop that sniffing, Mr. Macchio. Movie producer, motivational speaker, and manager Larry A. Thompson — who has guided the careers of Shannen Doherty, Donna Mills, and Robert Blake — has some encouraging words for you. "A champion will run again," he says. "If you've proven yourself successful at that level once, we already know the public likes you. If you can match that likability and success with another creative formula, then it will work again." Yes, what Thompson is describing sounds like a comeback, but what a harsh word that is for an icon like you, who starred in two films Larry King called "quite simply the best movie ever made." Instead, let's think of it as a fresh "creative formula" to properly restore you to your clamoring fans. Giddyap, champ. Here are four strategies to get you out in front again. >

by Andrew Goldman illustrations by Paul Reilly

## CULTURE SHOCK (CONTINUED)

### THE SHAT

After decades suspecting the world was laughing at him, **William Shatner** learned that the way to beam himself off planet Un-employas was to join in the fun and begin laughing about the silly, silly way he'd spent his entire life. According to Thompson, who's been Shatner's manager for 25 years, "Bill would say to me, 'Why aren't they hiring me?' I'd say, 'The only way we're going to move away from this is by moving away from Captain Kirk.'" So Shatner went on *Saturday Night Live* and cruelly parodied the *Star Trek* fans who made him famous, appeared in Priceline ads "ironically" sending up an impossibly hammy spoken-word album he recorded in the '60s, and gave the world permission to mock everything about him, except his fake hair, which isn't really something that should be joked about. Now he's got an Emmy. Burt Reynolds — who may not be eligible to attempt the Shat until 2007, when the 10-year statute of limitations on his *Boogie Nights*-Serious Actor comeback runs out — was well served by his Super Bowl FedEx commercial, in which he did a pas de deux with a bear. By showing that he's keen to laugh at the depths to which he has long been willing to stoop for money, the ad laid the groundwork for Reynolds's light comedy return in *The Longest Yard* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. (And it also brought in some welcome scratch.)

### THE BLOB

Fat people make the world smile, and there are few things that reopen doors in Hollywood more quickly than the jiggly flesh of a former fit person. Who can forget the joy of seeing brain matter being hosed off the hairy C-cups of **John Travolta** in his big comeback role in *Pulp Fiction*? Marlon Brando never saw bigger paychecks than in the '90s, a decade he spent showing up to work in elegant Lane Bryant house-dresses. (One small caveat: Fat actresses, and Fat Actress, should learn to just put the doughnut down and lose the fucking weight.) After devoting themselves to their comebacks by spending endless hours in drive-thru gridlock, two actors this summer will attempt the Blob: Val Kilmer, as a fat FBI agent, in *Mindhunters*, and Edward Furlong, as the vengeful, fat undead, in *The Crow: Wicked Prayer*, July's most anticipated straight-to-DVD release.

**THE FAKE-OUT** Some more wily stars attempt to forgo the need for a comeback altogether by insisting that they have never even gone away. While doing press for 2003's *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, **Demi Moore**, who had appeared in exactly zero hit films in the six years since giffing the world with *G.I. Jane*, told a reporter, "First, let's rule out the idea of comebacks, because I didn't really go anywhere. I was just doing something else." Moore may have been spending her late 30s at her Idaho ranch, searching for undiscovered body parts she could pay her plastic surgeon to work on, since she reportedly spent \$330,000 before even considering standing anywhere near Cameron Diaz in a bikini. An even nimbler practitioner of the Fake-Out may be the singer Shannon, who has been absent from the Top 40 for a full 21 years, since her dance hit "Let the Music Play." "This is not a comeback," she says, "I'm just surfacing now for you to see." In a risky but brilliantly subversive move, she has attempted the Fake-Out while calling her new summer album *A Beauty Returns*. Backstreet Boys, who in June will release their first album in five years, are trying a variation on the Fake-Out called the Damn! — Who Dat? They're hoping their new songs might be mistaken for those of any band other than them. "With the direction we're going in now," Backstreet member Howie Dorough told a reporter, "I think some of these songs you could put on the radio and listen to three or four times, and you wouldn't know it was us."

**"I didn't really go anywhere," says Demi Moore, who hadn't had a single hit since *G.I. Jane*. "I was just doing something else."**

### THE SPRINGFIELD

Practitioners of the Springfield must be hardy souls, willing to employ any remotely plausible tactic to achieve the comeback and, despite long odds and past failures, never waver. Last year **Rick Springfield** tried the Damn! — Who Dat? with the grungy *Shock/Denial/Anger/Acceptance*, an album that the former teen idol, now 55, describes as "the darkest record I've ever done." This summer, no more famous than he was last, Springfield will try again with a dual-pronged nostalgia assault. First he'll release a career retrospective. Then comes *The Day After Yesterday*, covers of songs chosen from the period when he was last popular, such as "Broken Wings" and "Waiting for a Girl Like You." He has full faith in the brilliance of this plan, full faith in his twist on the comeback Rod Stewart achieved by simply clearing his throat into a microphone while an orchestra played standards behind him. "Covers seem to be the only way artists like me are getting heard," Springfield sighs. "His faith springs from an exchange in a Los Angeles bar in 1973, a year after he'd had a minor hit with "Speak to the Sky." "Aren't you Rick Springfield?" a guy asked him. Springfield nodded. "You should have gone further." Now Springfield's waiting for his second coming. "This one's the one, baby," he says. "And if it's not, it's the next one." ❧

