

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



Richard Thomas narrates "The Waltons' Homecoming" Sunday on The CW.

Richard Thomas has a 'Waltons' homecoming in new CW movie

Richard Thomas not only played eldest son John-Boy on "The Waltons," he also wanted to do the show's opening and closing narration.

Now, a half-century later, he's getting that chance.

The actor returns to the franchise that made him an Emmy-winning star as The CW debuts the new movie "The Waltons' Homecoming" Sunday, Nov. 28. A remake of the film that became the pilot for the beloved 1972-81 series about a close-knit Depression-era mountain family, it lets Thomas reprise the part of John-Boy, but as the adult narrator ... the spot initially filled by "The Waltons" creator and executive producer Earl Hamner Jr.

"When I first read the script," the amiable Thomas recalls of the original production, "and there were these beautiful narrations at the beginning and the end, I was so excited. I thought, 'I can't wait to read these.' And then I was told, 'Actually, because he's the older John-Boy, Earl Hamner is going to read those.' But finally, it's come full-circle, and I'm really happy to have been invited to the party."

In "The Waltons' Homecoming," John-Boy is portrayed by Logan Shroyer, alias the teenage incarnation of Kevin Pearson on NBC's "This Is Us." He happens to be a friend of Thomas' grandson, fortifying the bond between the two actors as they share an iconic role. "I knew what The Waltons' was because I knew he was still recognized as

John-Boy," Shroyer explains. "I hadn't really seen any of the series, which I actually don't think is a bad thing. I think that kind of helped me."

While Shroyer arguably is the best-known of the actors playing the younger family members, the snowstorm-involving "The Waltons' Homecoming" also features Ben Lawson and Bellamy Young ("Scandal") as parents John and Olivia, Rebecca Koon and Alpha Trivette as the Walton grandparents, and music veterans Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis Jr. as church personnel.

"If you've done a show or a movie that they're remaking, there's always that first moment of, 'Oh, no, we're history now,'" Thomas reflects. "And then immediately after that, there's the feeling of, 'Well, of course. It makes perfect sense.' And how wonderful, because this is a classic, and classics are destined to be reinvented and done again for a new time. It's kind of the ultimate compliment."

"The Homecoming: A Christmas Story" was made as a one-shot 1971 film, but CBS chief William S. Paley was impressed enough by it to order the "Waltons" series (still shown regularly on the Hallmark Drama channel) from it. Thomas is gratified to revisit it now in a different way, noting the job "was easy for me to do, because I have such profound feelings about that show."

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