

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



Sam Elliott stars in "1883," premiering Sunday on Paramount+ and Paramount Network.

Sam Elliott takes viewers back to '1883' in new 'Yellowstone' prequel

Especially with so few Westerns being made now, it's little surprise that a new one would hold great appeal for Sam Elliott.

However, there was an extra lure for the "A Star Is Born" Oscar nominee: the writing of Taylor Sheridan, the co-creator of the successful series "Yellowstone," which now is yielding a Paramount+ prequel with the Elliott-starring "1883." Premiering Sunday, Dec. 19, the drama casts him as a late-19th-century cowboy who guides settlers from Texas to Montana. Among them, played by music-superstar spouses Faith Hill and Tim McGraw, are ancestors of John Dutton ... Kevin Costner's "Yellowstone" character. (The premiere will be simulcast on Paramount Network.)

"We started at the end of August in 100-plus-degree weather in Texas," the friendly, famously deep-voiced Elliott says of the filming. It took him away from his actress wife Katharine Ross (both appeared in "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid"), and he reports, "It was grueling for everyone. It meant wearing wool, so it was tough. And we've headed since to Montana, where we're likely to get snowed on."

Elliott notes his "1883" character, Shea Brennan, is "carrying a heavy load" from his family history and serving in the Civil War. The actor appreciates that "Taylor writes these arias that are gifts. It's not just the words

(Brennan) says but where they come from, and it's great playing someone who has more going on than meets the eye."

Before "1883" started production, Elliott hadn't met Hill and McGraw. "They went to a 'cowboy camp,' because a lot of people hadn't ridden horses when we started this thing — and when I got to Texas and joined them, everyone was in the mood. I hadn't ridden a horse in 20 years, and I was very leery about it, but it's like riding a bicycle. You never forget how, but with that said, you've got to get back in condition and be confident."

Once a star of such shows as "Mission: Impossible" and "The Yellow Rose," Elliott has been involved in streaming series such as "The Ranch" and "Grace and Frankie" more recently, but those didn't entail the work demands "1883" does. Still, he maintains, "I'm up to it. It's been a while since I've done something like this, but based on the fact that it was Taylor Sheridan, there was no passing on it."

Elliott admits he hasn't been a viewer of "Yellowstone," but he notes that where "1883" is concerned, "I've had great fortune in that genre from the beginning. I've always felt a good Western has three classic elements: man against man, man against nature, and man against himself. And here it is again, particularly man against himself, in this character."

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