

Time to change—The Bradys' Chris Knight, 60, turns 'swinging senior' in new role

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Here's the story: Top row, Maureen McCormick, Florence Henderson, Barry Williams and Christopher Knight. Bottom row, Eve Plumb, Mike Lookinland, Robert Reed and Cindy Olson.

Maybe it was just a matter of decades before *The Brady Bunch* would create something just as risqué as that sitcom was clean-scrubbed.

“If you think about the show itself, it was already in '69 a fish out of water,” said Christopher Knight, the 60-year-old actor who once played pubescent Peter on the iconic family comedy. “It was already a show whose time had come and gone. Hell, I missed being drafted by two years. We were in the middle of fricking Vietnam.”



Lloyd Schwartz, who helped create the series with his father Sherwood, was always an older-brother figure to Knight who would help coach the young actor through some of the show's more demanding dialogue—like the time middle-brother Peter tried to create a more engaging personality by impersonating screen legend Humphrey Bogart.

In that episode, Peter famously announces the family's dinner menu with a Bogart-esque “pork chops and applesauce,” a line that has lived in infamy in *Brady Bunch* lore.

“I don't know what we've learned about humanity, but something about that moment clicked with all kinds of people,” Knight said with a laugh. “But as a result, I'm asked to say ‘pork chops and applesauce’ for the rest of my life. Of course, I didn't know who Humphrey Bogart was at that time, so I was doing an impersonation of Lloyd impersonating Humphrey Bogart.”

Thousands of reruns later, Knight and Schwartz are working together on a project the clean-cut Bradys could not have imagined. This week, Knight is co-starring in the Schwartz-written *Dinner at Five*, through Sunday, Nov. 19, at PACE center in Parker. The play, which imagines a bored quartet of seniors mulling the benefits of wife-swapping also stars *Family Affair's* Kathy Garver as Knight's wife.

My interview with Garver appeared in last week's *Villager*, though Knight's phone call came too late to join her. As anyone can tell you, I never get enough classic television. [Back around 1989, I interviewed then-Denver resident Ann B. Davis (*The Brady Bunch's* Alice) on my then-radio show, not to mention George “Goober” Lindsey and others.]



Christopher Knight, 60, best known as Peter on *The Brady Bunch*, co-stars in *Dinner at Five* at PACE center in Parker through Nov. 19. For tickets, visit parkerarts.org or call 303-805-6800. Courtesy of Fivers Inc.

From my standpoint, who better to cast in a senior-citizen twist on *Bob, Carl, Ted and Alice* than an aging foursome of clean-cut TV stars? The other couple is Fred Grandy [*Gofer on Love Boaf*] and Caryn Richman [*The New Gidget*].

When Schwartz sent the script to Knight, the actor was initially taken aback by the decidedly non-Brady nature of the play and its semi-autobiographical origins.

“As I’m reading this, I’m realizing this *is* Lloyd,” Knight laughed. “This is leaping out of his mind. This is him. These are his thoughts—and I’ve known Lloyd my whole life!”

The Bradys, of course, were much subtler in their implicit sexuality, though when parents Mike and Carol kissed goodnight at episode’s end, I always had the sense that the two had a ... well, healthy relationship. The revelation that actor Robert Reed was gay could never have been predicted by the screen couple’s bedtime playfulness.

“He was a great actor,” Knight explained, “and [Florence Henderson] was just this magnetic personality. She oozed charm. She had a fun sensual side. Florence always had sort of a wink and a nod. She was nasty in a wholesome way.”

Knight says he was more frustrated by his own role on the show.

“As much as I had consternation about playing somebody so squeaky clean, who was unlike anybody I knew, as I became a teenager and wanted to be cool, nothing about the show was cool. As much as I rebelled through my hair, it looked ridiculous. Nobody could talk any sense into me,” Knight said.

Although the idea of a blended family was a distinctly modern construct in the early 1970s, *The Brady Bunch* was unequivocally lacking any realistic or contemporary edge.

“We truly didn’t act toward one another, as I’m certain blended families do from time to time. There’s always that recognition that ‘You’re not my sister, you’re not my mom.’ We never dealt with that whatsoever,” Knight said. “The show didn’t really deal with the world outside the home. Looking back on it, that’s the reason the show continues to work.”

Among Knight’s most traumatic “episodes,” so to speak, was when the Brady kids became a musical group and the young actor was forced to confront his lack of musical talent. When adolescent Peter’s voice-squeaking became the crux of drama surrounding a big record date, Knight took the script personally.

“It was an absolute psychological disaster for me. I was 12 or 13,” he said. “I can’t sing. I don’t want to sing. I thought that episode was them all making fun. Let’s give Chris something to do.”

Although *Dinner at Five* wades into more mature waters, in some ways the play is like old times for Knight, especially when Schwartz is around to coach him.

“It’s like working with an older brother, all the joys and pitfalls,” he said. “It’s a fun fluff piece about an outrageous idea that is apparently gifted on us all by Dr. Phil. Empty-nesters do what empty-nesters do. It’s fun. It’s a sitcom on stage.”