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PLANET OF THE APES
buck kartalian

BUCK NAKED LINE DANCING
julie strain



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Buck Kartalian

Interview By Justin Humphreys

WWII gunner, bodybuilder, wrestler, comic, actor, singer Buck Kartalian was born to Armenian parents on August 13, 1922. Note: landlocked Christian Armenia, bordered by Iran, Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan, has been brutally ruled by (among other powers) The Ottoman Empire, The Soviet Union and Russia. Actor Sid Haig (PV #3) is also Armenian. "We came to New York when I was about four or five years old. We moved to Manhattan. I grew up on Third Avenue, I was a city boy. When I was a kid, there was an elevated train that ran by my house, the Third Avenue El. It went right by my window. If it stopped, I would wake up. My mother was from Turkey — Istanbul. There was a population of Armenians there. They were very good business people. A lot of them were teachers. They got ahold of all the young eligible men in the village. My mother picked my father out of all of them [because] he had a nice smile. My father died when he was about thirty-nine years old, when I was about eleven. They never went to the doctor really. We were out with him and he just dropped dead in the street. My mother was stuck with six kids (four girls, two boys- Buck's brother is now deceased). I finished high school, but, after that, I got drafted into the Navy. I was in the Navy for about two-and-a-half years. I was on this destroyer in the Pacific. I saw a lot of action, a lot of stuff: planes shot down in flame, (we) sunk a cruiser, bombarded the shore. I was a gunner, a 40mm gun. It would shoot these big 40mm shells, this double barreled gun. I was really lucky: we had one destroyer right above us sunk, torpedoed."

"I was out of the Navy and me and a friend were walking on 42nd Street, near 8th Avenue. At that time, there was a huge Automat. You'd buy some food and give the guy some money and- f-r-rrrt- he'd give you change, and he'd be right every time. Right above the Automat, there was this huge gymnasium, enormous place. And this old-time wrestler that ran it- when I was up there, he was about eighty-five years old. His name was George. He wrestled when wrestling was real. He used to come up there, two, three times a week. They had another fella running the place for him. I went up there with my friend and I just stood in awe of the surroundings. It was the most incredible place! They had this enormous space where people rehearsed their acts, before the end of vaudeville. They'd have people on unicycles, somebody would have a monkey on their head, somebody would be doing ballet or juggling. On one side of the stage, they had a bunch of mats. And the wrestlers would come up and rehearse their wrestling, their acts. It was just like a three-ring circus. I said, 'This place is amazing!' I joined the gym right away. I wasn't working. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had no idea. I'd hang around there and I met a lot of friends and everyone was very helpful. I learned how to juggle. Another guy showed me how to do a flip-flop. They had a harness where you could learn to do a flip. There's a guy on the other side that pulls the harness, so, if you didn't make it, they had you (laughs). They said, 'Try it.' I tried it and was good at it. They said, 'You're a good acrobat!' I said, 'I don't know.'



They used to have a little vaudeville theater, before the show, they'd have vaudeville and stuff. They'd have acrobatics, a juggler, little acts, you know? This was towards the end of vaudeville, the last two or three years. Somebody got hurt in one of the acts. A guy busted his hand, so this guy says, 'Hey, buddy, one of the guys in this act sprained his wrist. You want to take his place? C'mon- you can do it. I've seen you around the place.' So I rehearsed with them and, next thing you know, I'm doing a hand-balancing and tumbling act with a guy and a girl, I was the middle guy. I did a tumbling act up there."

"They had an area with weights. I started lifting weights. And, before you know it, one of the guys comes over to me and says, 'Hey, Buck, you're getting some build!' I said, 'Yeah, I've just been fooling around with the weights and I'm developing fast!' He says, 'You really are. They're having a contest. Why don't you go down and enter? They're looking for the best-built man in New York City.' I said, 'Well, I'm not that good.' He said, 'You are! You really are!' I had no idea. I went down there and they showed me how to

pose and I did it AND I WON THE DAMN CONTEST! I'd enter weight-lifting contests and I'd come in second or third. And they had the Mr. America Contest. At the gym they said, 'You ought to enter.' I said, 'I don't know.' They said, 'Go ahead- enter. What have you got to lose?' So I said, 'Yeah, it's kinda fun.' And, the thing is, I wasn't working out like these guys that I was watching work out, like six hours a day: I'd work out like an hour. I was getting strong as hell. Different people's bodies develop differently, you know. I had the kind of body that looked good when it's developed. Even though I was short (Note: Buck is 5'2"), I was very symmetrical. If you saw a picture of me in a pose, a muscular pose, you would never know how tall I was. So, I get to the contest and I come out third in it! Mr. America, best-built man in every state and Canada. I won for best arms, best chest, and I got a couple of trophies. It was the end of 1949."

"Then I just went back to the gym, and I'd be working out with the weights, and, then, one day, this guy that wrestled, George Tregis, he was waiting for his partner to come up there to wrestle. And he said, 'Come on, Buck, let's wrestle.' I said, 'Are you crazy? You want to kill me?' He says, 'C'mon!' He's about 5-foot-ten, weighs 250 pounds. Back in those days, when I was really in great shape, the most I ever weighed was 150. I said, 'Okay.' I start wrestling with him, fooling around. And I saw that it was just starting then, this TV wrestling, wrestling for showmanship, the kind of wrestling where you flip around, you jump, you dive around. And I was kidding around with this guy, going under his legs, jumping over him, because I was like a feather. I said, 'This is fun!' And the guy's laughing, and he'd get me in a hold, he'd get mad, because I was making a fool out of him. Everybody'd watch, they'd laugh, and I'd say (jokingly), 'YOU'RE HURTING ME! You're hurting me on purpose! That ain't allowed! You know that!' So one day, I was up there with another wrestler and I was kidding around with him. And after I finished, a guy comes over to me and he says, 'Hey, kid, got a second? I was watchin' you. I've got an idea. I've got a strong troupe of wrestlers. I send them on little trips.

They go from here to New Jersey, they go to Baltimore, Pennsylvania, and back. I haven't got anyone like you. You'd be making good money and make it fast.' I said, 'Gee, I've never done any of this stuff before. Will I make any money?' And he said, 'Well, it's up to you. As soon as you start, you'll open for twenty-five dollars a match.' I said, 'It sounds good.' So I started wrestling. There wasn't much TV and I'd go in these little towns like Lansdale, Pennsylvania, and little towns in New Jersey. There was a little circuit we did. We'd wrestle Monday night here, Tuesday night (there), Wednesday night (there), and then we'd come back. I'd wrestle sometimes six, seven nights a week. We'd all get in a car together separately so nobody would see us together, like we didn't even know each other, you know? And the wrestling was BIG. I became like a favorite in some of these little towns. I would make 'em laugh and they're always for the little guy. That was a ball. For awhile, they called me 'The Mighty Mouse,' then 'Buck, The Professional Motion Man,' then I'd go back to 'The Mighty Mouse.'"

"I'd just dive over the ropes instead of stepping in the ring. What I would do, and everybody had their own favorite (move): I would do a drop-kick. I'd be facing the other wrestler and I'd leap up and I'd just tap him with my feet on his chest, and, of course, he'd go down, and I'd land back on my feet, just like nothing. That was one of my favorite things. They'd howl when I'd do that. Then, another thing, I'd go under the (other wrestler's) legs. They'd howl. It was all kinda funny. The promoter didn't know whether I'd be the 'good guy' or the 'bad guy.' After one match, he said, 'You're the good guy. They love you. You're the little guy and they love you.' So I wrestled for about seven or eight months. I've got to tell you about one incident. We went to some little town, and I'd wrestled there about seven times and they really loved me there, I was one of the favorites. We were going in and there were some new wrestlers coming in. This time, I was in the car with one guy who called himself 'The Lion Man.' He looked like a lion, huge, his hair flowing over his head and over his shoulders, fierce-looking. Everyone outweighed me by about a hundred pounds, at least. So I was gonna wrestle him. There's a real skill to it. People say, 'Ah, it's fake.' You gotta be in great shape and you've got to know how to work the audience. As long as the audience is howling and yelling and screaming, the match is going well. If they're quiet, you're dying. So, the Lion Man says, 'What's your favorite hold?' And I said, 'I don't have one, but I've got some funny things that I do, like I leap onto a guy's shoulders, I put my legs around his neck, and I flip him over. Then there's my drop-kick with my legs out.' He says, 'I've got a terrific one. Here's what I do, I lift you up, and then I lift my knee, and I kick you right in the balls with my knee.' I said, 'Let's try it.' And we did it, and I said, 'Wow, that looks terrific!' I didn't feel anything. It's unbelievable how well he had it perfected. I said, 'Wow, they're going to get angry that you did that to me.' He said, 'Yeah, that's great!' I was thinking about it just before we went on. I said, 'You know, Mr. Lion Man, I'm a little concerned about your kicking me in the groin like that. I know you do it well. I'm not worried about getting hurt, I'm worried about the audience getting so wound-up,' they really liked me and

they'd never seen this guy before- 'I think they're going to be too angry.' He said, 'Come on! That's the idea! Build up the heat, get them angry!' I said, 'I know, I know. Okay.' We go in and we're wrestling and we're doing a good job. They're yelling and screaming for me. He's the dirty guy, playing dirty and I'm the little guy trying to get the best of him. We're about a quarter through the match and he says, 'I'm gonna do it,' and I said, 'Go ahead.' So he comes over and lifts me up, kicks me right in the groin, and he did it beautifully- the knee comes up and it's right in there. I went down and went, 'OOOOOH! OOOOOH!' I was really selling it to the audience. And they're screaming to the ref: 'FOUL! FOUL!' And when we did it, the ref turned his head so he wouldn't see it, so he wouldn't see the 'dirty stuff.' I got up. We'd talk to each other in the ring and make it look like we were cursing each other. He said, 'That was great!' I said, 'But they're angry.' He said, 'Let's do it again!' So he does it again. And the crowd is SCREAMING, and I'm selling it. And we did it a third time, for the last time. And I just stayed there and moaned and groaned, and tried to get up and fell down again. And I went down and stayed there and I looked up. And when I looked up, the ring was full of people. There was nothing I could do, what could I do? What I did was visit him in the hospital, poor guy. He said, 'Yeah, well, Buck: that's part of the game.' They broke his ribs, knocked out his teeth."



THE ACID EATERS (Buck as the Devil)



DEVILS ANGELS
(with Cassavettes)

"You'd go into towns where there were, say, 50,000 people and 8000 would show up for the wrestling match. It was very big then, after it first got started. After the first couple of years, it was big. It's coming back, but you don't see it as much nowadays, you just see the top ones. There used to be wrestling tours going all over the place, all these little towns. What happened was, I went back to the gym. And one day, a bunch of actors were going out for a reading and someone said, 'Hey, Buck, you want to come along?' I said, 'Sure, why not?' I finished my workout and I went along. So I was standing in the back there and there was a woman behind a desk. She was backstage, but not onstage, behind the curtain. So my friends went in and I'm just sitting there. So the lady comes over to me and she says,

'You're next.' I said, 'Oh, no, no, you don't understand, I came with my friends. I'm not here to...' And she said, 'Oh, you'd be perfect for this one part, you're next.' She hands me a book and I'm standing there and these two guys I went with, they're laughing. I said, 'Okay, I'll go.' So I get onstage, I walk out and, of course, it's pitch black out in the audience. I don't see a thing. There's just the light on me, and I was standing there. And the director was English, Peter Glenville. And he said, 'Are you ready?' I said, 'I don't know. I came with some friends of mine. I ended up here onstage. I don't know what I'm doing here.' He calls to me from the back, I couldn't even see him, 'Why don't you turn to page four,' or whatever page it was, 'and read the part of Samson.' I said, 'Okay.' Some guy comes on and I read with him. I finish reading and the director says, 'All right. Thank you very much.' I stood there and I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'We'll let you know. Thank you very much.' So I'm leaving and the lady says, 'Come here, come here. I want to check you off. I don't have your name.' She says, 'Give me your phone.' I said, 'I don't have a phone. I'll give you the gym number.' So I gave it to her; every-

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| 55 | CELL 2455, DEATH ROW
MISTER ROBERTS (WB) | | BLOOD LEGACY (LEGACY OF BLOOD) |
| 59 | on THE UNTOUCHABLES | | NICHOLS (NBC, to 72) |
| 62 | SAIL A CROOKED SHIP
on GALLANT MEN | 72 | GOODBYE, RAGGEDY ANNE (TV) |
| 64 | on THE MUNSTERS | | CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES
(20th Century) |
| 65 | (SABOTEUR, CODE NAME) MORITURI
on GET SMART, WILD, WILD WEST | | PLEASE DON'T EAT MY MOTHER (SW) |
| 66 | on BATMAN | 76 | THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES (Warner) |
| 67 | COOL HAND LUKE (Warner) | | MONSTER SQUAD (NBC, to 77) |
| | DEVIL'S ANGELS | 80 | THE MAN WITH BOGART'S FACE (20th Century) |
| | THE ACID EATERS (SW) | 85 | GYMKATA (MGM) |
| | THE YOUNG WARRIORS | 87 | REAL MEN |
| 68 | PLANET OF THE APES (20th Century) | | CHECKPOINT |
| | STAY AWAY, JOE (MGM) | 91 | BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY |
| | THE WILD FEMALES | 94 | on ER |
| | HERE COME THE BRIDES (ABC, to 69) | 95 | JOSH KIRBY: TIME WARRIOR 3 (Full Moon) |
| | on THE WILD WILD WEST | 96 | THE ROCK |
| 69 | MYRA BRECKINRIDGE (20th Century) | | on LIFE WITH ROGER |
| 70 | BREAKOUT (TV) | 97 | EIGHT DAYS A WEEK |
| 71 | OCTAMAN (Prism) | 99 | MY FAVORITE MARTIAN |
| | | 00 | FLINTSTONES IN VIVA LAS VEGAS |
| | | | PEDESTRIAN |

body knew me at the gym. About two weeks pass by and I get a call at the gym. The lady says, 'Are you Buck Kartalian?' I said, 'Yeah.' 'Well, you've got the part and we'd like to have you come in and meet someone. You can start fencing lessons and...' And I said, 'Ma'am, what are you talking about? What part?' Because I'd forgotten about it completely and it was completely out of my mind. She said, 'You came to the theater and read.' I said, 'OH! That thing!' I didn't know what the hell I'd read. She said, 'They want you and you've got the part and you can come down.' So I went down and met these people. And, sure enough, I had fencing lessons for two weeks."

"And you know what the play was, the first play I ever did in my life? Romeo And Juliet (in 1951). Olivia De Havilland was Juliet, Jack Hawkins played Mercutio, and a wonderful actor, he's passed away now, did Romeo: Douglas Watson. At the beginning of Romeo And Juliet, there's two servants of either the Capulets or the Montagues, I forget now. And we're there talking about our two houses, we're from the other family. And I'm the big booster, I say, 'Ehhh, I can do this!' and I grab their women, and then they show up. And I look at them and one of them comes over to me and starts being smart and I'm smart right back at him and I bite my thumb at him. He says, 'Do you bite your thumb at me, sir?' And I say, 'I bite my thumb.' And he says, 'Yes, but do you bite your thumb at ME, sir?' And I say, 'Yes, I bite my thumb at you, sir!' And then they pull out their swords and they fight. I wasn't making a quarter of the money I was making wrestling. Later on, I was doing very well in wrestling. I was making 100, 125 dollars a match. Here I was gonna get 50 dollars a week to start with. But I said, 'Hey, I think I like this.' We went out of town for about two months. Then we came back and we ran for about two or three months. It was almost over and one of the fellas, Robert Burr, a lovely, lovely actor, he said, 'What're you gonna do now, Buck?' I said, 'I don't know. I really like this.' He said, 'You've got a good feeling for acting. You're real.' I didn't know what to do after the show. I said, 'What am I going to do?' He said, 'You know what you do? I've got an idea. They're going on the road with Mr. Roberts.' And he gave me the



PLANET OF THE APES
(with Heston)

name of the person to see. He said, 'They'll give you Harvey Lembeck's part. It's a wonderful part. You look like him.' And that's how they cast on Broadway: if you looked like the character, you got the part. So I said, 'Okay.' I went to see one other person first and they sent me down

to the theater. So I went down to the theater and I met this guy and I said, 'So-and-so sent me down.' And I saw the stage manager and he said, 'See the show for about a week. Then you're gonna read. Watch Harvey Lembeck and when you come to read, I want you to imitate him.' I said, 'Okay.' That's the way they do it: if it's a big hit show, they don't want to lead it in any other directions. I imitated him and I got the part. I can't believe I just fell into one thing after another. And I was with the show for two years. I traveled all over the country with it. Tod Andrews was the lead. He looked a little like Fonda. The show was such a big hit, they didn't need a big star." Note: Lembeck later found fame as Eric Von Zipper in AIP beach movies. Andrews starred in FROM HELL IT CAME (57).

Joshua Logan directed. "Yeah. I did the movie, too, you know. What happened was I had been in Hollywood for about a year. I'd done a little work and I went back to New York again. And when I was in California, they were doing MR. ROBERTS (55), the movie. So I tried my agent. I said, 'Get me in! Get me in! Get me in to see somebody!' And he said, 'I tried, Buck, but John Ford is directing it and he's using a lot of people he knows. There's really no chance.' I said, 'Aw, okay.' They went to Hawaii, they made the picture, and when they got back, Josh Logan saw the movie and wanted some additional scenes, he wasn't too pleased, I guess, to give it a little more jazz. Ford got sick and Mervyn Leroy took over. Logan wanted to do a couple more days of shooting. My agent said, 'There'll be a cattle call. You want to go?' I went and there were about a hundred guys there. Who do I see coming by but Josh Logan with Mervyn Leroy. I didn't know Leroy. Of course Logan knew me. He sees me and I thought, 'I hope he recognizes me! (laughs) It's been awhile.' He sees me and he comes over and gives me a big hug, and I knew it: I was hired. They wrote a scene just for me, with the soap suds, remember when the

soap suds were all over the place and I'm in the passageway? The laundry blew up and all the soap's all over the place. Henry Fonda sees the soap suds and says, 'What happened?' and I say, 'I don't know, but I'm gonna find out!' While I'm talking to him, the soap goes higher and higher and finally goes over my head. They had to do that in one take: that was all the soap they had. It was fun. I didn't have any scenes at all with Cagney. In fact, I never met him. He was through with his part."

"Joshua Logan, Ooooooh, he was a sweetheart. He had the loveliest wife. They used to come see the show about every two, three months to see that it was up to par. He had a certain level that he always wanted it to be at. He came over to me one time and said (mock-threatening voice), 'You're not performing like Harvey Lembeck anymore!' I said, 'I know! I'm performing like Buck Kartalian!' (Laughs) I'm getting all his laughs and more!' He said, 'That's all we want and we want the feeling of the show.' He knew I knew it by heart. When I came back after the two years, everybody wanted me in summer stock to do the show, because I knew it and because I could give them ideas about how to do it because I knew the show so well. Then I'd do the show and they'd ask me to stay for another show. That's where I got all my great experience: doing summer stock. I would be rehearsing a show in the daytime and doing another one at night. We'd do seven, sometimes eight shows during a summer. It was great. I never sang and I did about five or six musicals. There was a director, his name was George Lipton. One day, he said, 'Okay, Buck, you're going to sing in this one.' I said, 'Oh, no, I'm not! I don't even sing in the shower.' He said, 'No, Buck, it's really easy.' It was *Kiss Me Kate*. And there's two gangsters in it and they sing this marvelous song (sings): 'The girls today in society/go for classical poetry/So, to win their hearts, you must quote with ease/Aeschylus and Euripides.' It just goes on and then we do a little dance, a little shuffle with a tap-dance. It's a funny, crazy song, but I was scared to death because I never sang, ever. He said, 'Don't worry, Buck.' Lipton used to slap a show together in amazing time, in no time. The first day, he'd block everything and the second, he was having run-throughs (laughs). He was a magician. He knew he had good people to work with and that they knew what the hell they were doing. I said, 'I really can't do this.' He said, 'I'll talk to the piano player. Don't worry.' He talked to the piano player and I go in to rehearse with him. The piano player says, 'Start in.' The girls and I go 'The GIRLS.' He says, 'No, no, no: 'The girls.' and I go 'The GIRLS.' He says, 'No, no, no...' So I said, 'Aw, shit. Excuse me. I have to go to the bathroom.' So I leave and I'm looking for the director. And he said, 'What happened?' I said, 'I never got past 'The girls!' I said, 'I can't hit right on the heads the notes! I'm not trained.' He said, 'Let me talk to him.' I guess he told him, 'Let Buck do anything he wants, just follow him.' (laughs) The funny part of it was I was working with a great opera star. She did the lead, a woman by the name of Patrice Munsel. She was one of the top opera stars in the world. Here she's doing the lead and I'm comin' on with 'The GIRLS today in SOCIETY.' I decided I was just going to do me. I'm gonna sell the song and do some funny stuff. After we did our number, me and this guy, we'd get together and work, we brought the house down. Really, they screamed and yelled. And Patrice Munsel came to me after our number and she started laughing and said, 'Buck, I never met anyone who could sing so badly and be so good!'

Then I did *Guys And Dolls* and I sang in that and a couple of others. It was just getting over the fear (of singing). Then I did *The Threepenny Opera* for about a year in New York off-Broadway. I played a gangster in that. There's a bunch of bandits. It ran for about eight or nine years. I was only with it for a year. There were full houses all the time, we used to make about 75, 80 dollars a week. This was off-Broadway. We never had any dressing rooms, we had this long hallway area behind the stage. Men, women, everybody would undress there, everybody would be on top of each other (laughs), it was a riot. At that time, I'd just gotten married. I had a little loft on 56th Street and lived there. You know, New York is so incredible. I used to walk all the way down to the Village and back. And it's pleasant to walk in New York: there's always people around, crowds, excitement."

Besides acting in the hit Warner movie version of *MR. ROBERTS*, Kartalian was also in the Columbia release *CELL 2455*, *DEATH ROW*, starring William Campbell as famous death row inmate Caryl Chessman and also started doing some TV work. "Then I went back and I did a play with Geraldine Page called *The Empress*. It didn't last very long. I had a lovely scene with her. She's a sweetheart. Then, in about 61 or 62, I came out to California. I did a couple of Broadway plays. I took *Wonderful Town* on the road and I did a play called *One More River*. It



Elvis and Buck in *STAY AWAY JOE*

didn't last very long. I did another play with Tom Poston on Broadway called *Golden Fleecing*. I did some stock. Then I came out here and the first picture I did was with Ernie Kovacs." *SAIL A CROOKED SHIP* (62), from Columbia, featured Kovacs in his last role. He died in a car crash before it was released. The support cast included Frankie Avalon, Frank Gorshin, Jesse White, Harvey Lembeck, Sid Tomack and Buck as Finster. "I'd only been here two weeks and I got a movie right away. I did a lot of television. I don't even remember some of the shows I did." Some comic roles were on *BATMAN* and *GET SMART*.

"I did a movie called *MORITURI* (65) with Brando. We shot it off Catalina Island on a German cargo ship. We stayed on Catalina Island for about five or six weeks. We played American prisoners who were picked up when a submarine sank a ship. We had a

scene with Brando and I remember we worked much longer than we had to. Brando was having some problems with his personal life and he'd walk off and we wouldn't see him for awhile. I think they changed the title to something else. I know that at that time it wasn't a big hit or anything. I know I had a nice time on Catalina Island off-season. We had the whole island to ourselves." The 20th Century WWII movie also featured Yul Brynner, Trevor Howard, Wally Cox, and Martin Kosleck. By 67, starting with *COOL HAND LUKE* (Warner), Kartalian was busy in Hollywood.

"I worked with (director) Stuart Rosenberg on a couple of the early *UNTOUCHABLES*. Stuart Rosenberg knew a lot of actors, he knew hundreds of actors, because he directed a lot of television shows. It was quite a big cast. There were some fantastic actors in that movie and so many of them went on to be big stars. We shot that out in Stockton, California, actually, it took place in Florida. He went to the bookstore one day and he saw there was one copy of a book called *Cool Hand Luke*. He picked it up and he liked it. It was the first thing the guy (Donald Pearce) that wrote it ever wrote. He was an extra in the movie. I remember he wasn't very nice. We almost got in a fight one day (laughs). He was kind of a jerk. He wrote this thing because he was a

prisoner. He wrote about his story. I guess Rosenberg saw something in it: here's a hero who's a loser, you know? I was 'Dynamite.' I had a lot of little scenes. The movie wound up being very, very long, so they cut it. I had a couple of nice little scenes that were cut out, but I was in enough of the picture, anyway. One day, we're out in Stockton and Rosenberg says, 'Do you know how I cast you guys? I'll tell you. I know so many actors, on Friday I put a character's name up on the wall and I put five pictures underneath each one. And I said, Gee, they're all so good! I can't tell who I'm going to pick! How am I going to pick this? So I walked down the row, picked up one picture, threw it in the wastebasket, picked up another one, just at random. And whoever was left Friday got the part!' Conrad Hall was the cameraman on that one, brilliant cameraman. We rehearsed with the camera for a whole week on the set. We had an outdoor set. We shot all the stuff indoors at Warner Brothers. We went down to Stockton for all the exteriors, they built the whole prison. One of my kids, Jason, was born during COOL HAND LUKE. He's made his own film recently." Everybody remembers Strother Martin as the prison captain. "Oh, yeah! He was a funny, funny, funny man, just a wonderful, lovely man. He always had a funny joke. And he was a great diver. There was a pool there and one day he got up and started diving. He said, 'I was a pretty good diver when I was younger.' (He was doing) incredible dives. He was a sweet, sweet man."

DEVIL'S ANGELS (67), starring John Cassavetes, was AIP's followup to their WILD ANGELS. Kartalian played gang member Funky. "I had this wonderful agent then, he's passed away now. His name was Hal Schaefer. In fact, he saw me in a play I did called The Wall. I did quite a few plays, even out here. I didn't make much money at them, but I loved the theater so much. I loved it, I enjoyed it, like candy to a baby. I did a play called The Wall and I got just fantastic reviews from it. It was set in the Warsaw Ghetto. A lot of people thought I'd actually been in a concentration camp, a lot of the Jewish people that came to see it. I played a marvelous character called Fishel Shpunt. I did Paddy Chayefsky's play, The Tenth Man, that takes place in a synagogue, out here for about two months. Then somebody wanted us to do it in Florida at the Cocoanut Grove Playhouse. It stayed there three weeks. My kids were growing up. I have two boys and a girl. I don't even remember a lot of the plays I did! Hal Schaefer sent me out. He said, 'Buck, can you ride a motorcycle?' I said, 'I've never been on one in my life. Forget it.' He said, 'Come on, Buck, go see the guy anyway.' So I go see the guy and he hires me. He says, 'Can you ride a motorcycle?' I said, 'Well, uh (clears throat)... Years ago I was on one...' He kind of looked at me like he knew I'd lied. I got hired. Here I am: 'Oh, shoot, what am I gonna do?' I met one of the guys who was bringing the motorcycles down to Arizona, to Nogales, that's where we did it. He said, 'You've never been on a motorcycle in your life? Come on over to my place. I've got motorcycles and you can use one of them.' So I got on one for the first time and I'm going around the block and what happened was, all of a sudden, a car comes in the driveway and I didn't know which was the brake and I squeezed the gas. And of course I went right underneath and I hung with my hand, I tore a muscle in my right hand. I said, 'It's all right. I've got a torn muscle. I can live with it.' (laughs) We went out to Nogales and, it was so stupid of me, out there in the wide, open spaces. In a couple of days, I was riding a motorcycle like I was an old pro at it."



Rene Bond and Buck in
PLEASE DON'T EAT MY
MOTHER!

"I got along very well with Cassavetes. We used to sit and talk. He was just a very, very deep kind of person. Sometimes he was high when he talked to me, he'd lose me every once in awhile, then he'd come back. He was a marvelous funny man. We had a couple of scenes together. About this one scene, he said, 'This is a stupid scene.' I said, 'Yeah, it is.' He said, 'Hey, Buck, why don't we rewrite it?' I said, 'Can we do that?' At that time, Cassavetes was having ups and downs and this was one of his low periods, so he took this movie. American International was doing the movie and the producer (Burt Topper) wasn't very nice to us. We tolerated him, he tolerated us, I guess. So we stayed up all night one night figuring out what we were gonna do, and we came up with several very interesting moments in the scene, we changed it. The next morning we told the director (Daniel Haller), 'Hey, look at what we did. Can we do it?' And the director stands there and looks at us and says, 'Wow. That's marvelous. It's funny and very poignant. It's terrific.

It's two guys who really like each other.' And we said, 'Well, that's what we are, we're buddies.' He says, 'I can't do anything without the producer seeing it.' The producer comes over and watches us do the scene. And everybody was hanging around and they all applauded after we were through. The producer comes over and says, 'Listen, John, Buck: that's OUT. We don't do that kind of stuff here. I want VIOLENCE. I want BURNING. That's what this picture's about!' (laughs) I just laughed. We just took it. We were working for them, they're the boss. But it was a nice experience. I spent several weeks in Nogales. A funny thing: I was there and I went across the border one day. We came back and the border guards held Cassavetes and me back. They wouldn't let us go back to the states. John said, 'We're in a movie! Here, call this number.' And they searched us. Someone must have told them we had drugs on us. I never did drugs. Some of the guys used to smoke pot. I never even smoked one puff. The worst thing I ever did was I smoked a cigar (laughs). They held us for a couple of hours, John made some calls, and they let us go."

Other roles in 67 were in the Universal WWII movie THE YOUNG WARRIORS and THE ACID EATERS (PV #15). The unique adults only fantasy comedy was from David Friedman's Film Ventures. B. Ron Elliot directed from a script by Carl

Monson. Kartalian was top billed (using the pseudonym Bucky Buck), to play office worker Arty and, in drug induced scenes in a magic pyramid, the Devil, who shows the others how to smoke pot and eat cubes of LSD! "WOAH! That's one of those things..., you know more about me than I do! Somebody gave my name to this guy. They needed somebody to do a play, and he said, 'Buck's around here. He loves to do plays.' This guy called me in. His name was Carl Monson (aka Carlos Monsoya). He ran a little theater, it's not there anymore, down on Magnolia and Lancashire. Now the big television center is there. He directed some plays, it was his theater, and he did some very good work. He directed a lot of stuff and he had a great imagination. My God, way out, WAY OUT, crazy guy. I did about five or six plays with him. He said to me, 'You know, Buck, I'm gonna do movies one day. You're gonna be in all of my movies.' He calls me up (later) and says, 'I'm gonna do some movies.' I said, 'You're kidding!' 'Yeah, it's not exactly what I wanted, but it's movies. It's for the Pink Pussycat Theaters...' I said, 'It's all right, as long as I don't fool around with the naked ladies. I'm married. I can't do that.' He says, 'No, no. you'll be a

gangster, a funny man, whatever. There'll always be a part for you, you know that.' That's when we did *THE ACID EATERS*. I played the Devil in that (laughs). I did about four or five movies with him. I don't remember the others' names. I'll tell you what Carl used to do. He had his cameraman and a couple of the other people and the actors. He'd have about three, four cars and we'd be driving. I'd figure Carl knows where he's going. I'd be sitting with him in the first car and I said, 'Hey, Carl, where are we going?' 'Location, Buck, location.' And I said, 'Where?' And he said, 'I don't know yet.' (laughs) *THE WILD FEMALES* (68), from Sack Amusements, was an adults only drama directed by Carlos Samoya (Monson) with nudie legend Marsha Jordan as the mother of a girl who runs away to Hollywood. "Bucky Buck" played Tom.

Few people recognized Kartalian in the most famous movie he was in, *PLANET OF THE APES* (20th Century, 68) "I read for the director, (Franklin) Schaffner. I read for 'Julius' and he looked at me and says, 'I'll give you a choice: you can have that part or some other part. You'll work about six weeks with the other part, but with Julius, you'll only work two weeks.' Julius was a much better part, that's what I wanted. I said, 'I'll play Julius.' I didn't mind it (the makeup) too much. (John) Chambers made like a mask of my face out of plaster. The principals (lead apes) all had masks that were tailor-made. The extras just had hoods (masks), they just put them on. At a distance, you couldn't tell. For close-ups, Schaffner was always afraid it would look like a masquerade, you know? He wanted to make it real, real as hell. That was the whole thrust of the movie: make it real. I remember I was saying a line one time and he said, 'Buck, stop trying to be funny.' And I said, 'I'm not trying to be funny, it's a funny line!' We'd go in at like four in the morning to makeup. And after awhile, they had sixty- I don't know how many makeup men. I had one guy who always took care of me. To put the appliance on, he'd first do around the eyes, the nose, and the jaw with the teeth in it. Then he'd put the little hairs in all around it, glue them slowly all around. I took a good four hours to put it on. By eight o'clock, we'd be ready to go on the set."

Julius had scenes with Taylor (Charlton Heston). "He was okay. He was a very quiet, very somber actor. He wasn't a jokester or anything. A very serious worker. The funny part was there was a part where I'm hitting him over the head with a club. When we were done with rehearsals, he said, 'Julius, -he always called me Julius- 'Hit me harder.' I said, 'Okay' (laughs) 'You asked for it.'" Kartalian was responsible for the famous shot of him in ape makeup smoking a cigar, a popular scene in the movie. "We had one scene where I'm just sitting there and there's a gate and the other fellow (Lou Wagner) comes in with orders to release the human. (Schaffner) said, 'Okay, for this scene, the camera will open up on Julius here.' My ears went up: 'The cameras will open on me. I can't just be sitting there doing nothing. I've got to be doing something.' Then I said, 'Ooh! Ah! Schaffner, why don't I be smoking a cigar?' And he gave me a look like, 'What the hell are you talking about?' He didn't say anything. So he said, 'Let's rehearse it once.' So we rehearsed it. Then he said, 'Okay, let's shoot it. Somebody get Julius a cigar.' It's strange now, when I think of it, I never remember when I was younger, learning lines. I just looked at them and I knew them. Today I really have to work like hell to learn 'em. Son of a bitch, I don't understand why I can't absorb 'em faster! For five minutes, I'd look at a page and I just knew it. I never thought of a line: it came."

He also worked with Kim Hunter (Dr. Zira). "She was a very sweet, nice lady. The funniest, strangest part of the whole thing is that I never saw Kim Hunter without her makeup on (laughs). She was a

chimp as far as I knew! There was a lady who was a stand-in for Kim Hunter. She was just there for lighting. She just had her street clothes on, she didn't have a mask or anything. When we'd come in, all the extra apes or whatever, we'd all march in together onto the set. And I'd sit down. One day, I was just talking to her, I don't know how it happened, just gabbing away. And the next day I came in and she comes right over to me. I said, 'How the heck did you know it was me?' and she said, 'Your eyes.' The only part of me you could see was my eyes. And we'd talk, kid around together, laugh. Then one day, she looked at me and she put her hand on my hairy paw and kind of looked at me lovingly. Holy shit, this girl likes me! (laughs) She never got to know what I looked like, ever. I said, 'I can't. I'm married.' But she really liked me! 'My God,' I said, 'Beauty is really only skin deep!' (laughs) Falling for a gorilla. I had this strange, strange feeling like I didn't exist (in the ape makeup), like I could see everybody and nobody could see me. You notice every little thing when you have a mask on like that because you're hiding, you know?"

STAY AWAY, JOE (68), from MGM, starred Elvis as a half Navajo rodeo rider. Kartalian played Bull Shortgun. "You know, I really liked him. I was three months with him. Poor guy, he always had to have his five, six, seven guys with him, hanging around, lighting his little cigarillos, running around getting things for him. Basically he was a very shy guy. He really didn't do much acting, he was playing himself. I remember we did one scene where we're supposed to be having a party and everybody's happy. He looked at me like he didn't know what to do. I said, 'Have a good time. Just joke around.' And I gave him a little tap and we started kidding around and he loosened up. The scene turned out nice. When we did the movie, he was young and in his prime, he was in great shape. He did a lot of karate and



Clint and Buck in
OUTLAW JOSIE WALES

stuff. He was very introverted. Some actors are like that. Like Douglas Watson in *Romeo And Juliet*. He was the shyest guy you'd ever want to meet! But he'd get out onstage and just glow, be radiant, dynamic. It was a really silly picture. I don't think it came out the way they expected it to. I think Elvis got his million dollars anyway. He was a sweet young man."

Kartalian had a small role in the notorious *MYRA BRECKINRIDGE* (20th Century, 69) starring Raquel Welch, Rex Reed, and Mae West. The money losing sex change comedy received an X rating. "The only thing I remember was, I went in to see about it with Bob Fryer. I remembered him from New York years ago. He was always a casting director. Nice man. He had something to do with the casting. They had this really young director (Michael Sarne), really young guy. I saw him and he said, 'Okay I want you to read for the Acting Teacher.' And Bob Fryer says, 'Isn't he too young for the Acting Teacher?' And he said, 'How old is an acting teacher? Go read with this young lady.' So I went aside and I read with her. And we read and he says, 'You've got the part.' That was it. I've never seen it. I don't know what the heck I do in it. I never did see Mae West. There were signs on the set that said, 'No Smoking,' because Mae West didn't like smoking. The thing that I remember about it is that everyday they'd do about a page of it and everyday they'd give me new pages. They kept changing it and changing it."

He had recurring roles on two TV series, *HERE COME THE BRIDES* (ABC, 68/9) with teen idol Bobby Sherman, and *NICHOLS* (NBC, 71/2) a western with James Garner, and showed up in the barely released *OCTAMAN* (71), starring Kerwin Matthews and Pier Angeli. "I don't even remember doing it." *LEGACY OF BLOOD* (71) was Monson's

comic reading-of-the-will horror movie with John Carradine as the dying millionaire, Faith Domergue, Jeff Morrow, Merry Anders, John Russell, and Richard Davalos. Kartalian played Igor.

PLEASE DON'T EAT MY MOTHER (PV #6) from Harry Novak's Boxoffice International starred Kartalian as Henry Fudd, a voyeur with a hypochondriac mother and a man eating plant in his bedroom. Monson directed as Jack Beckett. "I knew Monson, I would say, five, six years. He's passed away now. He was much younger than me. One day, he calls me over and he's doing a take-off on LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS. He said, 'Pick up a script. We'll start shooting tomorrow.' 'Pick up a script? Why don't you give me a little time (to learn lines)?' He said, 'Well, pick up a script anyway. Maybe we'll pull it off in a couple of days.' I go up there and he hands me two pages. I said, 'What's this? Is this my part?' He said, 'Oh, no! You have the lead in it!' I said, 'There's just two pages here!' 'Buck,' he says, 'As we go along, we'll make it up.' With two pages. I said, 'Is it short?' He said, 'No, it's a full-length feature.' And with that crew, we made PLEASE DON'T EAT MY MOTHER." Since it had a more interesting story ("borrowed" from Charles B. Griffith's original) than most adults only quickies, and lots of nudity and (soft core) sex (featuring Rene Bond), PLEASE... played, under various names (including GLUMP!, HUNGRY PETS and SEXPOT SWINGERS), well into the 80s.

He returned as a new gorilla character in CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES (20th). "My agent sent me down there to meet the director (J. Lee Thompson) and he said, 'Ah, you're Julius! You're in the picture!' I said, 'Oh, good. Great.' The agent said, 'Great- you've got a five-week guarantee.' I said, 'But what kind of a part have I got?' And he said, 'I don't know, but you've got a five-week guarantee.' That means I get paid for five weeks no matter what I do. They shot the thing around the big buildings at Century City, all around there. They called me in the first day to work and they gave me the script. I'm looking for the part. I can't find it. I go in, they put the stuff (makeup) on me, the thing is, I had a nice appliance because they still had my old appliance. I got all ready to go and I went up to the AD and I said, 'Where do I go? What do I do?' And he said, 'You're Frank. It's not in the script, but you're Frank.' When it comes to your scene, I'll let you know.' Then we came to it and he said, 'You go over to the lady sitting there and she whispers something to you, and somebody else gives you a note to give to her,' and I don't know what the hell else. And that was it. I came over and said, 'That's it?' He said, 'Yeah, that's it. That was good.' And I waited until the end of the day and I said, 'When's my call tomorrow? I'm not on the call sheet.' They said, 'You're on hold.' And they're paying me, I had a five weeks guarantee anyway. I was available the whole five weeks. The next thing you know, the whole five weeks went by and they never called me in again. That was it. I got paid every week. (laughs) I knew one actor, John Anderson, and he was doing very well. But when a job was over, he would panic. He didn't know if he was ever going to work again in his life. I'd tell him, 'Would you give me a break! You also have to realize that (getting parts) isn't the only thing in your life. They say, 'Go see this guy! Go knock on this door! Go knock on that door!' But sometimes you make a nuisance of yourself and they throw you out. Sometimes they say, 'I like this guy, I admire his guts.' YOU NEVER KNOW. I've got three auditions Monday. Casting directors don't know what to do with

me because my hair's not white. They want a real old old man. If I get the part anyway, they'll change the part from an old old man to a younger man.'

THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES (Warner, 76) was directed by and starred Clint Eastwood. "This is another thing that's interesting. Originally, when I first came out here, when you did plays, now and then you'd get a movie from it. Somebody would come and see it (and give you a part). I was doing this play called The Wall. I had a wonderful role. I play a jokester, a buffoon, who dealt with both the Jews and the Nazis. He used to actually help the Jews, get them information and stuff. At the end, the audience thinks I'm dead. The Nazis arrest me and take me away and they think that's the end of me, but at the end of the play, I show up again. I got out of it. And the audience (heaves a sigh of relief), you can hear them breathing. It was such a wonderful experience, one of the highlights of my doing plays. The character was so true. So the agent sent me down to see about OUTLAW JOSEY WALES. The casting director and I are old friends. Of course, I didn't know him from Adam then. I just walked in to see him. He said, 'Did you do a play called The Wall?' I said, 'Yeah, a few years ago.' He said, 'You don't have to read for me.' And I got the part.

MONSTER SQUAD (76/7) was an NBC Saturday morning comedy kids show about a night watchman in a wax museum, the Wolfman (Kartalian), Dracula, and the Frankenstein monster. It only lasted 13 episodes but had guest stars every week including Sid Haig, Billy Curtis, Jonathan Harris and Julie Newmar. "Most of the time I really had to work my butt off to get a part. I never got it easy, except now and then. I remember when I got MONSTER SQUAD. It was produced by a man named Phil D'Angelo. Hal Schaefer was my agent and he'd sent me out on a couple of things. I'd done a war show, THE GALLANT MEN, I think he was producer of that. I worked with him one or two other times on a couple of other shows. One day he calls me in. So I go in and there's three other guys there. He says, 'Okay, on the new series called MONSTER SQUAD, you're the Wolfman, you're Frankenstein, and you're...' (laughs) And I'm looking at him and I said, 'What, are you playing games here? What do you mean, 'I am?' He says, 'You are.' I said, 'You don't want me to read?' And he said, 'What read? You got the part!' Of course I was in total shock the next couple of days: no one comes over and says, 'Hey, you got the part!' If you want to read for one line, you've got to read."

Some later roles were in THE MAN WITH BOG-ART'S FACE (80, see this issue's reviews), Robert Clouse's GYMKATA (85), as the Khan, and CHECK-POINT (87) about an Iran hostage related incident.

More recently he appeared in THE ROCK (96). "I'm just in the very end of it. I worked with Nicholas Cage for one whole day on that one scene. I play a priest and he comes to the church and saws a leg off of one of the pews because there's some microfilm in it. And I come out of the church chasing him, saying 'Vandals! Come back here! Thief!' And the picture ends right there. Cage was very nice, very lovely. We shot that scene many times, over and over again: this way, that way. They'd shoot just my feet, then my hands, then my head, then from overhead. They did a lot of coverage." Calling his wife: "Margaret! Justin remembers things I've forgotten about! He's unbelievable!" Buck Kartalian is still active doing TV and theater and reading for film roles. He's very good at comedy and drama and looks and acts younger than his age. Casting directors take note.



THE MONSTER SQUAD



Buck and Justin