



## Faces behind the voice

By MANDY STADTMILLER

**I**N a world where movie trailers all sound alike, one man has nowhere to hide.

That man is the legendary Don LaFontaine, voice of more than 4,500 trailers and a featured speaker today at the Museum of the Moving Image's panel on voice-over artistry (6:30 p.m., 35th Avenue at 36th Street, Astoria, Queens; [718] 784-4520, \$24). The event will feature a book-signing with artist and organizer Joan Baker, who wrote "Secrets of Voice-Over Success," with proceeds to benefit the Alzheimer's Association.

"I found that I had this propensity to write copy that fit the genre," says the 65-year-old LaFontaine, who is based in Los Angeles and got his start writing the original radio spots for "Dr. Strangelove" in 1962. "I get a lot of credit and blame for everything you hear: One man. One woman. Killing machine. Cat and mouse. All that stuff."

In an age when voice-over is everywhere — from the choices on your cable TV to the instructions on your cellphone — LaFontaine says he is glad to offer advice to those trying to break in. Never take rejection personally, for one, and don't give up, for two. He joins

a panel of 13 leading voice-over artists including Les Marshak (the Academy Awards and the Tonys) and Steve Zirkilton ("In the criminal justice system..." from "Law & Order").

In a time when doing favors is just as important as who you know, LaFontaine says he tries to use his projecting powers for good instead of evil. When he was approached by an editor friend to construct an elaborately fake movie trailer to woo a lady, LaFontaine readily agreed. "The whole

thing looked like this setup for this big romantic story with soft titles, people walking along the beach and then at the very end, the lights came up and my friend proposed," he recalls. "Apparently, it worked like gangbusters."

As the voice of "America's Most Wanted," "The Apprentice" and "American Idol," LaFontaine notes the subtle and important differences between doing the range of voices

("make it a little warmer," "give me a nudge-nudge") for the shows involved.

"With '24' there's an intensity, but don't confuse intensity with volume," he says. "'The Apprentice' is much louder and '24' is more down here: 'Will Jack make it?' 'Apprentice' is a bigger thing entirely. It's pompous and loud, and you can't be quiet about Donald Trump. You have to be noisy."

While LaFontaine is definitely a voice behind the scenes, a much more recognizable face is Alan "Big Red" Kalter from "The Late Show With David Letterman." His first day on the set in 1995, Kalter says he knew he was no longer going to be able to stay on the down low.

"I stayed away from the camera purposefully for 25 years because I didn't want to be recognized," he says. "My very first day on the set, I was dressed to kill, and Dave had an Olympic diver on the show and he said, 'Alan, do you swim?' Without any time to think about it, he said, 'Come on down,' and I came from the side of the stage and he took me by the wrist outside to 53rd, and I marched up a ladder and dove off into a Nike pool."

His suit drenched, his electronics ruined, Kalter — who is involved in frequent skits that end up with him running around the Ed Sullivan Theater going completely berserk — looks back on the initiation fondly.

"I'm doing the backfloat looking up at the camera on the roof," he recalls. "And I said to myself, 'So this is what it's like to announce for David Letterman.'"

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Don LaFontaine  
"The Apprentice"  
"24"  
"American Idol"



Alan Kalter  
"Late Night With David Letterman"  
"To Tell the Truth"  
"The \$10,000 Pyramid"

Steve Zirkilton  
"Law & Order"  
"Dateline"  
"Today"

Joan Baker  
Showtime on Demand  
The ABC Super Sign in Times Square  
"Sesame Street"

Les Marshak  
The Tonys  
The Oscars  
The Emmys