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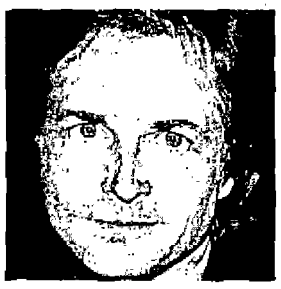
AMERICA STRIKES BACK

LAMEST OF THE FAMOUS: CELEBS SKIP OUT IN CITY'S TIME OF NEED



'LATE' SCRATCH: Heather Graham abruptly canceled her appearance on David Letterman's "Late Show" this week. Reuters



MICHAEL J. FOX
Flies only by charter.



ANDREA PEYSER

THEY come off tough when defending the rights of farm animals not to be ground into veal. So where are the stars, now that humans need them?

That blur on the horizon is blond hair zooming out of New York.

Heather Graham is the latest anthrax-spooked starlet to schiz out on us. Graham abruptly canceled her date on David Letterman's germ-free show this week, say sources close to the newly serious star of "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me." She traded Dave for Leno in L.A.

Drew Barrymore dumped the New York premiere of her latest flick and high-tailed it to California after reluctantly finishing her hosting duties at "Saturday Night Live."

East Coaster Liza Minnelli wimped out on singing at a Los Angeles charity event, telling The Post's Cindy Adams that her Washington "contacts" (she has Washington contacts?) advised her not to fly.

"I should risk my life for one f—ing song?" Liza snipped.

Of course, Gov. Pataki stoked the hysteria Wednesday when he flouted the advice of health officials and said he was taking the antibiotic Cipro after traces of anthrax were found in his Manhattan offices. As he spoke, quivering members of Congress fled Washington as if the British were attacking.

In normal days, any event with a vegetarian menu can attract a surgically enhanced face to lend support for, say, the right of liver not to become foie gras.

But now that we need famous faces and full wallets to save our restaurants and airlines, the stars are skedaddling like pedestrians from Lizzie Grubman.

Actually, the vehicularly challenged publicity princess has no problem flying. Commercial, pals say.

But Rosie O'Donnell, who aired Kelsey Grammer's vomit-inducing boasts about touring that celeb hot spot — ground zero — canceled her New York-taped show this week.

Model Naomi Campbell travels by tour bus. Elizabeth Hurley took a four-hour car ride from New York to Boston for a charity hockey game. Michael J. Fox and tenor Placido Domingo fly only by charter plane.

The sight of, say, Julia Roberts boarding an American Airlines jet en route to dinner at Nobu could boost a city in economic despair and an airline industry in the dumps. But Julia hasn't been on a plane since Sept. 11 — although her rep promises she'll fly here next month to promote a movie. Please do.

NYC & Company tourism chief Cristyne Nicholas says stars like Whoopi Goldberg and Glenn Close are itching to promote the city, "but it's been difficult to get the message heard when we're competing with anthrax."

"We'd like to see the stars come out for our restaurants and hotels" as they did for Broadway, Nicholas said.

The next time celebs ask to be taken seriously, ask if they bought meals in Manhattan lately.

If not, send them packing to Tibet.



RUNAWAY HIT: Drew Barrymore skipped the New York premiere of her latest movie and fled to California in fear of anthrax. AP



LIZA MINNELLI
Won't risk air travel just to sing.

THESE charitable stars are Big Apple heroes

By BILL HOFFMANN

While some stars are fleeing the city, three of Hollywood's sexiest are lining up as late additions for tomorrow's all-star "Concert for New York."

Richard Gere, Mark Wahlberg and Halle Berry will take the stage alongside Paul McCartney, Eric Clapton, David Bowie and other rock legends to raise money for the families of the World Trade Center heroes.

And chart-topping rapper Jay-Z, funnyman Billy Crystal and "Boys Don't Cry" star Hilary Swank also signed up yesterday for the Madison Square Garden extravaganza.

Bowie hit the Garden to rehearse "Heroes," which will open the concert, and the tune brought tears to the eyes of listeners.

"It was so emotional to hear this song. I think the crowd is going to go wild when he plays it," one onlooker said.

The concert, to be aired live on VH1 from 7 p.m. to midnight, will benefit the Robin Hood Foundation. Tickets are available from Ticketmaster and the Garden box office for $2,000, $5,000 and $10,000. Funds are also being raised through a toll-free number, (888) NYMUSIC.

The money will be distributed to families of firefighters, cops and rescue workers lost in the WTC collapse.

Performing artists will include Mick Jagger, The Who, Billy Joel, James Taylor, John Mellencamp, Janet Jackson, Bono, Bon Jovi, the Backstreet Boys and Destiny's Child.

Win tickets / P. 32

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