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Bernardi's road to stardom is cluttered with wisdom

Herchel Bernardi, formerly television's "Arnie" and the star of Broadway's "Piddler on the Roof," sat in a wooden folding chair backstage at the Ford Auditorium. A station wagon with New York license plates was parked behind him. Stage hands, hangers-on and public relations persons milled around as the musicians rehearsed for Farmington's Hilde School benefit.

"I think everybody's a rubber band, emotionally," Bernardi said, trying to explain why many persons have attached a new importance to their ethnic background.

"In moments of emotional crisis, the other hand snaps and they return to what they were in the beginning," he said, gesturing with his thumb and index finger as if he were about to send a rubber band flying across the stage.

"After five years of age, your character is pretty well determined," he continued. "In moments of crisis, you return."

"Especially with strong childhood conditioning, which most ethnic groups have," he said.

DRESSED IN A frayed denim jacket and a flat leather cap with a visor, he slouched in his straight-backed chair. "I was forced into acting as a kid. My parents were in 'vaudeville,'" he said. "I gave it up. I was 28 or 29 when I took it up again. I loved it, but I didn't know it at the time."

Bernardi decided to become a welder after he quit acting. "I had to return to it once, to earn a living and I was surprised that I could still be a welder."

"I found a way of living that satisfies me," he said. He travels for part of the year, then returns to his farm outside of San Francisco.

"I'm doing concerts to keep my hand in it," he explained. "Like wedding, I've discovered that I can still do it."

He's called to the front of the stage to check out the show. The back stage crowd has broken up into little groups resting sandwiches and drinking coffee from Styrofoam cups. A young stage hand dressed in jeans and a Beach Boys concert T-shirt sits on a stool in a corner, removed from the crowd.

The musicians resume their portion of the rehearsal and Bernardi returns to his chair and coffee.

"MY LAST movie is called, 'The Front.' I got to work with a lot of people who I wanted to work with for a long time. Woody Allen and Zero Mostel are in the picture. I play the producer who blacklists the character played by Zero Mostel."

The film is set in McCarthy-era California when an actor, who was suspected of being a Communist front, could find himself suddenly unemployed and unrecognized by old business associates.

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Club shows coins in Masonic Temple

The Farmington Coin Club will have its show, Sunday, April 4, at the Masonic Hall, corner of Grand River and Farmington Road from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Free pap tests at Orchard Ridge

On Thursday, April 1, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., free Pap tests will be given at the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College.

Maggie's of Livonia
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