

# Stage parents are getting actresses together

By ALICIA GILLETTE

Birmingham's far cry from Broadway, but Elaine Stritch and Maureen Cook have anything to say about "The Village Players" version of Stephen Sondheim's "Company." "I'll ooze with professional pizzazz."

And it's all because two sets of "stage parents" thought it would be a good idea to get their actress daughters together to discuss the role of "Joanne."

Mrs. Stritch made the role famous on the professional stage for 2 1/2 years and Mrs. Cook will play the part on the Village Players stage the first two weekends in December.

Bloomfield Hills Country Club was the scene of the theatrical encounter recently. Maureen Cook's parents, the Frank McGinnises of Bloomfield Hills, asked longtime friends, the George Striches of Birmingham to bring their 16-year-old daughter to lunch. The Strichs' daughters are actress Elaine Stritch of London, Eng. and Sally Bolton of Birmingham.

"I ACCUSED MOTHER OF BEING a stage mother and told her a 40-year-old broad is too old to be pushed," laughed Mrs. Cook as she set up her tape recorder in preparation for Elaine's arrival.

She said she had studied the famous actress's Broadway records of "Company" in order to land the role, which calls for a deep, whacky voice and the ability to act hard and cynical.

One of the numbers in "Company" is "The Ladies Who Lunch" and here we are equipped. Maureen was interested in how Elaine handled the part, how long their rehearsal had been, what the Broadway set had been like, where to come in on the Bobby Baby number and how Elaine had ever survived the "Side By Side" number.

It didn't take long to find out. Mrs. Stritch made her grand entrance with perfect timing—just a few moments after her family—entwined in a strawberry cranberry suede creation by John Bates of England, with matching hat, stockings and shoes.

"I'VE BEEN HERE LONGER than I ever have before. We have the run of the house at my sister and brother-in-law's, George and Franca Moran," she said. "It seems I'm home three days and I'm treated like I never left—like a 12-year-old. It's like you never left home after five minutes. My mother even said, 'Elaine's gotten lazier.'"

With that, the two "Joannes" stood back to back in front of the mirror and compared hairdos. The Birmingham Joanne topped the Bloomfield Joanne by a half an inch and the dialogue continued uninterrupted.

"MY HUSBAND IS WITH ME at all times—John Bay, as in my right. I was married at 46. . . I came home to see Mom and Dad and to discuss a couple of verses for Warner Brothers. But I wouldn't want to live in California."

She described her TV series in London as "stiffer and more casual than those in the United States."

Elaine Stritch was born in Detroit and was educated at the Academy of the Sacred Heart on Lawrence Avenue. She credits the late Sister Lucia Rasmussen of Sacred Heart for convincing her parents to let her live at the Duchesne Residence School in New York while she studied acting.

She drives her lines with just the right amount of punch, she's always on cue, and there's no need for a prompter—whether lunching at Bloomfield or emceeing on the Broadway or London stage.

AND SHE HAD LOTS to say about "Company."

"It was a fairly musical, ahead of its time," explained Mrs. Stritch who played Joanne a year on Broadway, a year on the road and six months in London before it closed in 1973. "I don't miss it now, it was too long a run."

She told Maureen she required longer rehearsals than any other production. "It was extremely difficult and everybody lost weight."

What about "Side By Side," asked Maureen, who had earlier expressed her apprehensions about that particular musical number. "It's a killer, very strenuous. We had oxygen back stage, but I had brand-

and lasted longer than anyone," answered her mentor.

AND THE SET? "Most beautiful." "Treat Bobby Baby" like acting, she advised.

"The timing is hard at first, but you'll get it," the assured Maureen.

"The Ladies Who Lunch?" "It's almost like a total play in itself—most difficult. It's so packed with ideas and philosophy

that it's hard for the audience to take it all in." And what about "Joanne" herself? "The part of Joanne is sad, entertaining, vital, scary," explained Elaine.

The most important thing is to be honest and sincere. Don't take advantage of your audience. Tell the truth and believe in what you're doing." Elaine told Maureen.

ON AND ON WENT the dialogue, peppered with advice, anecdotes and bits of humor.



Birmingham's Maureen Cook (left) gets tips from Broadway star Elaine Stritch, formerly of Birmingham, on how to play the role of "Joanne" in the Village Players' upcoming version of "Company." In the background is Sally Bolton, Elaine's sister, who lives in Birmingham. (Photos by Alicia Gillette)

## Poison lecture set next week

Providence Hospital's community health education program will host the lecture "What to do if Your Child is Accidentally Poisoned," 7:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 6 in the hospital's Fisher Center Auditorium, 1900 W. Nine Mile, Southfield.

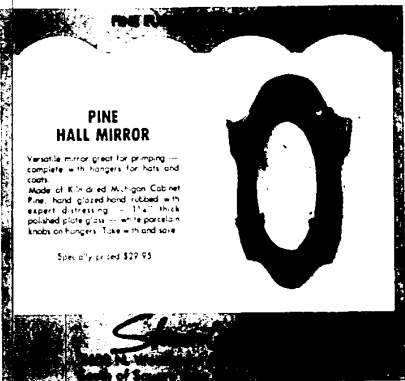
The session will feature a panel of Providence Hospital physicians and pharmacists including Gary, Group M.D. John Mitchell, Pharm. D., and Robert K. Wise, M.D.

The panel members will discuss the incidence of poisoning in children and will stress prevention, protection and emergency treatment.

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The lecture series will continue the first Monday of each month.



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