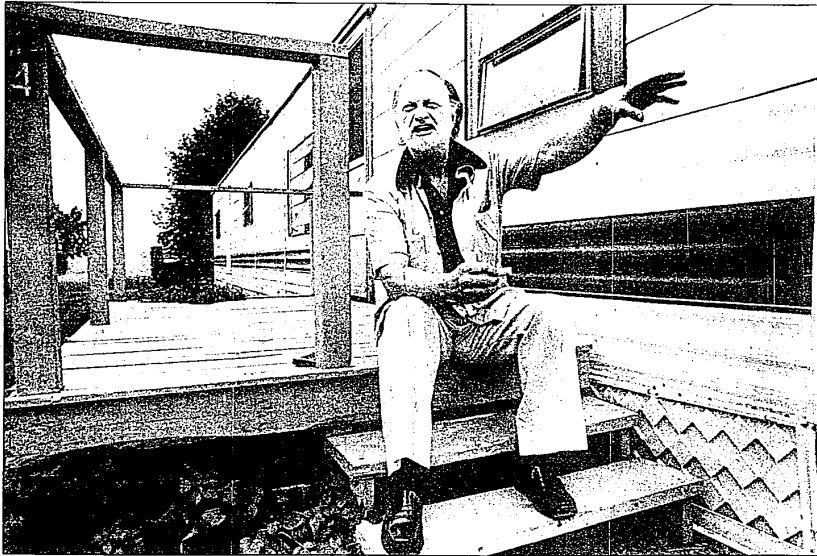


Thursday, October 4, 1979

(F10)



Actor Robert Donley is not the kind of person to be put in a slot. Based in a mobile home at Oakland University, he offers his long years of experience and fun to students — even dumpy Broadway dressing rooms.

Robert Donley combines acting career with zest

By ETHEL SIMMONS

You get a warm welcome and a cup of coffee when you arrive at veteran actor Robert Donley's mobile home on the Oakland University campus.

Donley, an ageless, charismatic personality, rolls his own cigarette before he settles down to be interviewed. But you don't really interview Donley. Mostly you listen to his energy-charged speech. His words flow in an untheatrical voice that weaves a spell nonetheless.

You may start to put down your notebook to listen to a story, then realize that's the supreme compliment, forgetting you're there to write it all down.

DONLEY is that most delightful of companions, a storyteller, or raconteur, who seems to have nearly total recall of almost everything that's happened to him.

Having spanned many years as a performer, playing with big-name talents on Broadway, radio, television and lately even in a feature film, he has had fascinating experiences.

But Donley also seems to have an interest in just about every subject, expounding on everything from reluctant tops of ice cream cartons (he just loves ice cream) to dumpy Broadway dressing rooms for actors.

"Have you ever been backstage in a

Broadway theater?" he asked. Describing the dismal, cramped dressing rooms there, he said, "Most of them you wouldn't put a sick goat in."

Asked if he cared to reveal his age, Donley replied that he generally gives stock answers, such as, "I'm still 39," and so on. Then, he added a line about age from a 95-year-old character he played in "The Red Bluegrass Western Flyer Show."

"That's just a number. It doesn't mean nothing to me. No one's gonna add up my life."

AS DONLEY, he continued, "There's a tendency to put people in slots."

You get the distinct impression no one every put Donley in a slot.

"I've been lucky, as far as parts are concerned," he said. "I never got stuck in a type."

Born on a Pennsylvania farm, Donley ran away from home to Detroit at the age of 17. He worked his way up from bus boy to elevator operator in six months at the Detroit-Leland Hotel.

Returning home, he enrolled in Wayneburg College in Greene County, Pa. "In the backwoods, you don't think about going into the theater," he recalled. At college, however, Donley organized a drama club, which put on a couple of one-act plays.

"One day walking across the campus, it hit me like a thunderbolt. People get paid for this. That's my philosophy.

'That's my philosophy. I raised my kids to find out what's more fun than anything else in the world, and find out how to get paid for it.'
—Actor Robert Donley

I raised my kids to find out what's more fun than anything else in the world, and find out how to get paid for it."

THE BEARDED ACTOR is back on campus at OU near Rochester to play the role of Sir Oliver in Meadow Brook Theatre's opening production of the 14th season, "The School for Scandal." The show runs Thursday, Oct. 11, through Nov. 4.

Donley was a member of the resident company at Meadow Brook for the theater's inaugural season, appearing in the first show "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" and "You Never Can Tell." He brought his twin sons with him then, and one of them played a role in "Chalk Circle" with the other son as understudy.

Donley has appeared on television in many of the detective and police dramas, including "The Rockford Files."

"I did the pilot on that, playing Jim's

(James Garner's) father, Jim and I hit it off right away. He's from Oklahoma and I spent a couple of years there."

NBC network brass wanted a bigger name, Donley said, and Noah Beery got the role as the father. But it's easy to picture Donley, with his relaxed personal style, playing Dad to Garner's down-home manner.

"I WORKED with a lot of the good ones," he said, about his theatrical career. He appeared on Broadway in "The Visit" with the Lunts ("they're perfectionists"), toured with Melvyn Douglas in "Inherit the Wind," playing Detroit for a month; and was on Broadway and on the road with Tammy Grimes, as her father in "The Unsinkable Molly Brown" (he once played a scene locking her shoulder under his arm to keep impetuous Tammy from upstaging him).

More recently, he was on Broadway as Pa in "Twigs" and costarred with Liv Ullmann in Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie."

Intermission

Readers tell Their favorites

The Birmingham Theater is expected to open its first fall season in November as part of the Nederlander Theatrical Enterprises. Productions will be announced soon, but in the meantime readers have responded to the *Intermission* column question: WHAT SHOWS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE AT THE BIRMINGHAM THEATER? WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE KINDS OF SHOWS — MUSICALS OR STRAIGHT DRAMA?

New plays. No reruns of old hits. me in "fantasyland" — whatever happened to "I Love My Wife?" Please don't resurrect old stars for old roles. How about considering "The Price" and "Gin Game?"

CARRIE PROCTOR, Birmingham

JANE PASHIER WARD, Birmingham
Some of the old great musicals like: "Oklahoma," "My Fair Lady," "Brigadoon," "South Pacific." These built our theaters. Less "Iguana," "Red Ryder," "Turtlenecks" and new "art."

B. FLETCHER, Farmington Hills
The worldwide success of a show like "Annie" indicates what the general public will pay to see. I endorse shows such as this, that my entire family can enjoy.

MRS. R. M. BRYANT, "Bus Stop," "Dark at the Top of the Bloomfield Hills Stair," "Rhinoeros," "Madwoman of Chailott," "Hair," something of Albee's and recently written plays by relative unknowns.

JAN JACOBS, Birmingham

I would like to see musicals. Many plays today seem to be too depressing. Musical I'd like to see: "Camelot," "West Side Story," "Kiss Me Kate," "Annie" and "Oliver."

R. W. THOMAS, No. 1, musicals (including revivals such as "Oklahoma," "South Pacific," et al; No. 2, Broadway dramas with Broadway stars.

DWIGHT E. WEBER, Birmingham

We would like to see musicals, most of the time with some name stars. That goes for all eight of us.

EILEEN KIRMAN, Oak Park

Musicals.
MR. AND MRS. ROBERT LEE GUNDERSON, Dearborn
I think the shows that I would like to see there are some comedy shows, and some musicals also. My favorite kinds of shows are really good musicals like "Hello, Dolly!" "My Fair Lady," "Sound of Music," etc.

Combination of musicals and drama (straight, not sick)
DIANE VALENTINE, Royal Oak

W. I. SQUIRES, Birmingham

My current favorites are: "They're Musical! The kind you can walk away playing our song." "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" and "The Elephant Man." I've always loved "Carnival." I love all theater, whether with or without music.

MARY ANN CAMPBELL, Bloomfield Hills
TOM GLASER, Rochester
Musicals, or a continuation of Pine Knob-type shows.

RICHARD C. SCOTT, Troy
Musicals — fun — light plays — put

Adelines offer 'Toast to Dolly'

The South Oakland County Chapter of Sweet Adelines, Inc., will highlight 25 years of performances with the production of its special show "A Toast to Dolly."

The show is the chapter's third presentation of this type. In 1975, the show was "A Salute to Music Man" and in 1977 four performances were staged of "Hat's Off to Oklahoma."

"People buy tickets because they remember our previous performances," said Mary Ann Frank, public relations chairman for the group and an active singer. The shows increase in popularity each time because of the reputation she adds.

Birmingham resident Nora Van Deven will appear in one of the featured roles of this year's show. Ms. Van Deven, an elementary teacher in the Berkley school district, will portray the young Minnie Fay, a salesgirl in Mrs. Malloy's hat shop.

Also included in the cast are Wayne Brumm of Birmingham, who plays the part of Rudolph, the head waiter; Bruce Young of Rochester as Barnaby Tucker, junior clerk in the local hay and feed store; Peter Burns of Troy as Ambrose, the struggling young artist in love with the niece of Horace Vandergelder; Evelyn Harper of Rochester as the niece Ermengard; and Sally Burns of Troy who shares the role of Minnie Fay.

Barbara St. Amant is show chairman. "She has been the instigator for this type of performance," says Mrs. Frank. "Mrs. St. Amant was chairman of the two previous shows, too."

This event will be held at 8:15 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 26 and 27, and Nov. 2 and 3, at Our Lady of Mercy High School, Eleven Mile and Middlebelt roads in Farmington Hills.

Reservations may be made by calling 689-0026.

The concept of women's voices being adaptable to four-part harmony was still new in the world of barbershop when the chapter chorus began giving performances in the Detroit metropolitan area.

THEIR MUSIC is still being enjoyed by senior citizens, members of civic organizations and guests at various social functions.

The South Oakland County Chapter received its charter in 1954 and was among the first to become affiliated with Sweet Adelines, Inc., founded in 1947.

Members of the South Oakland County Chapter come from various parts of Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties. They are dedicated to the preservation of barbershop harmony and, during the last 25 years, have given many free performances for nursing homes, hospitals and local churches.

Throughout the years, the chapter has given support to many charities. Following the 1977 show, part of the profits were donated to the Eastern Seal campaign.

The chapter's current interest is focused on the Michigan Cancer Foundation, so a portion of the proceeds from the 1979 production will go to that organization.

Chapter members meet every Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall on Twelve Mile Road in Berkley. The meeting is open to women who enjoy singing.

Additional information regarding performances and membership may be obtained by calling 528-0969.

Weekend

IN THE SUBURBS

● Birmingham Village Players — presents "Same Time Next Year" comedy by Bernard Slade, opening 57th season. Performances Friday-Sunday, Oct. 5-7, and Friday and Saturday, Oct. 12 and 13, at playhouse in Birmingham. Curtain time 8:30 p.m. except the Sunday show at 7:30 p.m. For ticket information call 644-2075.

● Winsten's the Bar — Cougar, vocalist and guitarist, returns to Win Schuler's Grate Steak and Seafood Lounge in Rochester. Cougar entertains Tuesdays-Thursdays from 8 p.m. to midnight and Fridays and Saturdays from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m., through Nov. 3.

● Royal Oak Music Theatre — presents Ramsey Lewis at 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 5. Ticket information at box office, 547-1555.

● The Raven Gallery — coffee house presents footloose guitarist Jack Hamilton through Sunday, Oct. 7, in Southfield. Also on bill, professional comedian James Wesley Jackson. Show times Thursday and Sunday at 9:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday at 9:30 and 11 p.m.

● Will-O-Way Repertory Company presents "The Taming of the Shrew" comedy by William Shakespeare, opening 1979-80 season. Performances Friday and Saturday at 8:30 p.m. through Oct. 20 at Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre in Bloomfield Township. Tickets at 544-4418.

IN DETROIT

● Rackham Auditorium — "The Furies of Mother Jones" folk musical celebrating the Appalachian miners and mill workers' culture and struggles against oppression, written and performed by Little Flagg Theatre currently on their fourth national tour. Performances at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 5 and 6, in auditorium in Cultural Center. Tickets at the door.

● The Railroad Crossing — Ron Coden, one of Detroit's most offbeat comics, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights at 8:30, beginning Oct. 4, at 6640 E. Eight Mile. Coden accompanied by musicians Ron Blight and Steve Fava. Cover charge; reservations at 366-2023.

● Dire Straits — in concert at 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 4, at Masonic Auditorium. Phone 832-3608.

● Detroit Institute of Arts — presents "Film Panorama" with "Manhatta" (U.S., 1924), directed by Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler (10 minutes); "Berlin: Symphony of a Great City" (Germany, 1927) directed by Karl Freund and Walter Rutman (1 hour, 10 minutes), through Sunday, Oct. 7, at 2 p.m. in museum's 400-seat Lecture/Recital Hall. Ticket office, phone 832-2730.

● Fisher Theatre — presents "Deathtrap" Ira Levin's comedy/thriller starring Brian Bedford, through Saturday, Oct. 6, at Fisher Theatre. Box office, 872-1000.