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(F1D)

Dancing in 'Grease' is her sweet revenge

Story: ETHEL SIMMONS

Photo: STEPHEN CANTRELL

When Sherry Berman was attending Bloomfield Hills Andover High School she didn't get picked to be one of the Jili Bell-Ringers, even though she was voted "most talented" in her class.

Ms. Berman is a singer first, although she is an actress too, and not getting to sing and ring bells with the Jilis is something she just won't forget.

"It was very hurtful," she recalled, during an interview Tuesday in the Birmingham office of The Observer & Eccentric. "I had the best voice — and I knew how to perform, because I had a show business background."

But now the 1970 Andover graduate has her revenge. She's back in town, appearing in the National Touring Company of "Grease," the musical which opened Tuesday night at Detroit's Fisher Theater.

MS. BERMAN'S PARENTS are divorced; her father, Bennett Berman, lives in Birmingham, and her mother lives in Grand Rapids. When Sherry was a child, her parents had a musical comedy night club called Sugar and Spice. Her dad also committed to Toledo to play Sal in a TV show called "Meet Mr. Satan."

In "Grease," playing at the Fisher through Sunday, June 3, Ms. Berman is Cha-Cha, a girlfriend of one of the gang leaders. She doesn't appear until Act II, and her big moment in "Grease" comes when she dances with the show's star, Columbia recording artist Rex Smith as Danny Zuko.

"She's his (Danny's) best friend's

'I wear a dress that has layers, layers, layers and layers — get all the layers — of yellow ruffles, and I have banana curls.'
— Sherry Berman, Cha-Cha in 'Grease'

blind date," she explained. "They dance at the prom and win the big contest."

Ms. Berman's own shoulder-length, medium brown frizzy hair-do is covered with a darker wig in the show. "I wear a dress that has layers, layers, layers and layers — get all the layers — of yellow ruffles, and I have banana curls," she said.

She and Danny, and the rest of the 1950s greasers and goodies, do the "Hand Jive," a big production number with a hand-clapping dance popular in that era.

"We have brush-up rehearsals all the time. At first, in rehearsal dancing eight hours a day, all my muscles pulled out," she said.

DEFINING THE DANCE, Ms. Berman said, "It's stamina. Ten minutes of hopping, splits and cartwheels."

In the movie version of "Grease," Cha-Cha is Puerto Rican and sexy. Ms. Berman related — although she hasn't seen the movie. On stage, Cha-Cha is supposed to be a fat, Italian girl, who is "out of it."

Ms. Berman is chubby, but padding helps put her character across. All those layers of ruffles are held together by a big zipper, which she unzips for a fast change into a slip she wears for the

next chorus routine.

Besides "Hand Jive," she has another number, "Raining on Prom Night" done as a duet with the show's female star Mary Murray, who plays Sandy.

You don't see Cha-Cha, but it's Ms. Berman's voice that comes out when Sandy turns on the radio and sings with a record.

Ms. Berman has many good memories of Andover High School. She appeared in numerous productions there including "Thurber Carnival" and "The Lottery." In her senior year she directed the variety show.

Because of a cutback in mileage, she went to do some things previously handled by the drama teacher. "I directed shows. I took it all on. I did the choreography and musical arrangements," she said.

AFTER HIGH SCHOOL graduation, she attended Wayne State University, then the University of Michigan as a performing arts major in musical theater. She performed with the U-M Professional Repertory Company. She received a scholarship to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and went to New York before began she started working with a comedy writer and a comic actor in a nightclub.

There were nights they played to just a few drunks, but the act proved popular and they even got standing ova-



Sherry Berman is back in town, and this time she's on stage instead of in the audience at the Fisher Theater.

tions. She decided not to go to school, continuing the night club act for three years, the last year on her own.

Following a tour of Europe and Israel, she returned to New York and auditioned for a bus and trunk company production of "Grease." After four months with that touring company, she quit, but later auditioned for the National Company.

So far, this company has traveled to Baltimore, Boston and Washington D.C. Because of the gas shortage, Detroit will be the last stop on the tour, she said.

"People are interested in taking the show to Paris," Ms. Berman said.

After the run, she plans to stay in Michigan for a while. At the interview, she was accompanied by a friend, Ed Learned, who was raised in Birmingham and now lives and works in Ann Arbor.

THEY MET on the bus and truck tour with "Grease," where he was sound director. The two discovered they both had gone to U-M and that they had lived two miles apart in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area.

Ms. Berman now lives in New York City at the Manhattan Plaza, "the first artists' housing in the United States, subsidized by the government," she said.

Anxious to get in touch with some of her former high school classmates, Ms. Berman asked that they call her at the Fisher Theater. "Leave a message at the box office, and I'll get it backstage," she said.

The young actress said she saw her first show, "Bye, Bye, Birdie" — another musical about the 1950s — at the Fisher when she was 6 or 7 years old. She knew then she wanted to be up there on stage some day.

The multi-talented Ms. Berman also has written a novel, "My Suzanne Summer," which will be published by E. P. Dutton in August. It's set in Tennessee in 1939, and the main character is a 13-year-old girl who renames herself "Suzanne" for the summer.

REX SMITH, star of "Grease," has a record rising on the charts. It's the album of the sound track from his TV movie, "Sooner or Later," with the hit single, "You Take My Breath Away."

At the close of "Grease," Ms. Berman said, Smith and Mary Murray sing some songs that were added to the movie "Grease" and Smith also sings his top recording. "We get zillions of screaming groups outside the stage door," Ms. Berman said.

"Rex has limited acting experience. He's learning to be an actor, not just a rock and roll singer."

Jazz film buffs gather for 4 hours of rare viewing

By JIM WINDELL

Detroit is a great jazz town is how the rumor goes. Cass City Cinema found this to be more than a rumor last weekend.

Cass City Cinema and WDET-FM hosted the John Baker Jazz Film Collection, and the venture proved to be the most successful program in five years for the non-profit film organization that generally presents 20th century films in the Detroit Cultural Center.

On two nights last weekend, the Rackham Auditorium was nearly filled with serious jazz buffs who came to view four hours of rare jazz film clips and shorts from John Baker, the man who has been called the "granddaddy of jazz film collectors."

The event attracted jazz disc jockeys and jazz musicians, such as Pat Flowers and Mike Montgomery (who appeared in a clip with the Boll Weevil Jazz Band in the Saturday night show), as well as fans who wanted to catch the films that have never been seen in Detroit before. Baker's collection includes superior prints of unusual and one-of-a-kind films of jazz greats and early jazz pioneers.

JOHN BAKER is a 70-year-old practicing attorney from Columbus, Ohio. He has the white hair to prove his age, but his carriage is that of a man half his years. His energy and enthusiasm is boundless. His wife, who often accompanies him on his jaunts around the world to show his films, refers to him as an addict.

"My wife says that collecting is an addiction. Of course, I don't agree. I've recognized that the things I have collected in my life — films, records, piano rolls — are worth preserving. "The history of the record and film industry is to destroy. They treat their products as something you use today and then discard. I see records and films as historical and cultural documents. I'm a preserver of these valuable documents. If it weren't for people like me, these artifacts would be lost to history."

That some of the films he brought with him were records of our culture could not be denied. Prejudicial thinking and racial stereotyping were frequently blatant in several of the films of the 1920s and '30s. Baker apologized to the audience on each night saying that he deplored the racism but that if

'I didn't call it jazz back then. I called it hot dance music.'
— Jazz film collector John Baker

they could bear with these scenes, the music could still be enjoyed.

Baker grew up in the city where he continues to make his home. His original home as a child was located in what later became the black ghetto area of Columbus.

"WHEN I WAS 11 or 12, I was the only white boy in my class at school. There was one boy friend I had and he would invite me home with him. His mother would always have a certain blues record on the record player when I would go to his house. She would play that record over and over again. I later learned that the singer was Mamie Smith and the song was 'Crazy Blues.' I can still recall every nuance of that vocal. I could never get enough of it as a little boy — I guess I had an interest in blues and jazz in my blood."

On Friday night, Baker had two hours of films divided into rural and urban blues. One of the classic blues artists he presented from the 1920s was Mamie Smith.

"I have the only existing print of a short called 'Jail House Blues,' Columbia Broadcasting System broke it when they borrowed it for a TV program a few years ago. I have patched it together and the result is 45 seconds of Mamie Smith. She appears on no other film."

Before Baker was a film collector, he was a record and piano roll collector. "In 1925, I wanted to go to my high school senior prom, but I didn't know how to dance. My mother said I was going and she came home with two records and said to use them to learn how to dance."

"I was only 15 at the time and I did what I was told. In the process of learning how to dance, I happened to listen to the music on the two records. I liked what Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke were playing. I started picking up jazz records and I not only listening but also collecting."

THAT COLLECTION of records was sold about six years ago to a CBS

executive. "At the time they were sold, they were the most solid collection of its kind in the world. I collected the black jazz of the 1920s and '30s. I had over 9,000 78's and over 500 LP's. I got rid of them because no one came around any more to listen to them."

He had, however, also begun collecting piano rolls and films. The piano rolls came first. With three hobbies, he was having difficulty keeping up with the amount of mail, catalogs and lists that came to his house and required a couple of days a week to sort and file.

He decided that something had to go and in 1973 he sold his "World's Greatest Piano Roll Collection of Blues, Stomps and Rags" to Detroit's Mike Montgomery. Montgomery used Baker's collection, along with his own accumulated piano rolls and related research, to assist Biograph Records in the issuing of a piano roll series of recordings.

While Baker's interest in jazz music goes back to when he was a teenager, his interest in film extends back to a younger age. He explains that he became a film buff in 1914.

"When I saw Charlie Chaplin movies,



Fats Waller, pianist, is one of the greats whose performances are captured in the John Baker Jazz Film Collection.

I became a film fan forever. Later, I was hired by two different movie houses to distribute circulars. For this,

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Getting Around

By ETHEL SIMMONS



Mini-Dome lures Bee Gees on tour



The Bee Gees (from left), Maurice, Barry and Robin Gibb, shown here in a scene from their recent film "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," will give 50 concerts on their summer tour, including one at the Pontiac Silverdome.

The Bee Gees are coming.

One of the hottest attractions on the music scene, the Bee Gees will be making what Charlie Silverdome, executive director of the Pontiac Silverdome, calls "the country's most exciting tour this summer."

"They wanted to play our mini-dome," he said, at a press conference Tuesday morning. "Only three stadiums we know of are going to be on the concert tour."

According to McGowan, "Cleveland offered \$500,000 for the same date we will play them here and a major percentage of the gate."

In a long-distance conference call with Tom Huellett, who will be handling the whole concert tour, Huellett said that "out of a total of 50 concerts, the Silverdome will be one of three stadiums."

HE SAID the Bee Gees were eager to play the Silverdome, where Elvis Presley and Elton John, among other pop superstars had given concerts.

"The mini-dome features 'the world's largest theatrical curtain,' which cuts the big stadium in half and allows for extremely good sight lines."

The Bee Gees — brothers Barry, Robin and Maurice Gibb — will give their mini-dome concert at 8 p.m. Saturday, July 28. Tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. Saturday at the Silverdome's expanded new box office near the Main Event Restaurant.

The Bee Gees draw crowds ranging in age from 3 to 60, due to the phenomenal success of their records and films including "Saturday Night Fever" and "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band."

THE SWEET INSPIRATIONS, however, was sung with Elvis, will open the Bee Gees show. But the Bee Gees are expected to be

on stage for about an hour and a half.

On the 38-city tour, the Bee Gees will be backed by a set that took an entire year's work to put together.

"It's elaborate in make-up, the lights, etc., are the most comprehensive ever built in the business for a traveling show," Huellett said. "It runs \$21,000 a night for light and sound."

Eight semis carry the equipment.

The Bee Gees had planned a nationwide concert tour last summer that would have included the Silverdome. But they wanted to finish a new album, rather than go on the road with merely the sensational "Saturday Night Fever" behind them.

This summer at the Pontiac Silverdome, the mini-dome also will host the bizarrely costumed rockers, Kiss, with special guest Cheap Trick. Tickets for the 8 p.m. concert, Friday, July 13 are on sale at the box office.

MUSIC IS ALL around us, with the Michigan Inn and Dewey's in Southfield offering a Wednesday and Sunday series of outdoor parties.

"Dewey's Outside Inn Live" features Roy Meriwether, pianist and jazz musician appearing at Dewey's performing 5-9 p.m. Wednesday and 8-11 p.m. Sunday through May and June.

The concerts on the hotel lawn include the price of two cocktails. Food also may be purchased. The Michigan Inn is next to the Northland Theater at 16400 J.L. Hudson Drive.

Other entertainers at Dewey's will be featured throughout the rest of the summer.

JUST TO KEEZ things (rumba, Oscar's disco in Southfield) will be held at the Black Ivory on Friday and Monday starting June 1. The Black Ivory is a disco and lounge. The price is \$5 for the first Sunday and Monday but on the fourth and fifth it's \$10.