

# 'Space pilot' trods the boards

By ETHEL SIMMONS

When Dirk Benedict (then Dirk Newmeyer) was a student in the first class at Oakland University's Academy of Dramatic Art, he had visions of becoming an actor in the classic, Shakespearean tradition.

Today, he finds himself a star in what is becoming a contemporary tradition — an inter-planetary flight pilot — Lt. Starbuck in the movies and television's "Battlestar Galactica."

And this summer he is back trodding the boards with the Kenley Players touring for the first time after a number of years in a musical production. Benedict is Curly, the swaggering but soft-hearted hero of the venerable "Oklahoma!"

The Rodgers and Hammerstein show opens Tuesday, July 3, for a week's stay at the Star Theatre of Flint, with Benedict heading the cast that includes Laurie Lea Schaeffer, Miss America of 1972, as Curly's sweetheart.

"I LIVED IN Rochester for two years, and was at Meadow Brook for two and one-half to three years," Benedict said in a telephone interview Thursday from Columbus, O., where "Oklahoma!" was playing.

He said his first role at Meadow Brook Theatre was in "Troilus and Cressida," where he played Ajax. Other Meadow Brook roles include "The Imperial Nightingale," a children's show, "The Magistrate," and the original play "The Second Coming."

Benedict also did a lot of plays with the Studio Theater Company, the Academy of Dramatic Art students' performing group on campus near Rochester. (The university closed the acting academy a few years ago.)

Benedict said, "I was a college graduate and got interested in acting. I wanted the English training and auditioned for the London (Royal) Academy of Dramatic Art."

"Then, I read a flyer saying John Fernald (director of the Royal Academy) was starting a school in Michigan. I thought, That sounds perfect!"

"It was a very wise choice. I spent a full two years there and was indoctrinated into classical theater. With success came films in Hollywood."

Frank Bollinger, assistant to the general director at Meadow Brook Theatre, was asked if he remembered Dirk Benedict.

"I remember him very well," Boll-

inger said. "He seemed to be a very dedicated actor and very pleasant to be with. I'm not surprised he enjoyed the success he has."

Bollinger said he is peevish when he reads press reports that imply Benedict attended the Academy of Dramatic Art in London. He wants credit to go where it's due — to OU in Rochester.

"I DON'T KNOW how that error got carried through his biography. Dirk would be the first one to tell you he studied here," Bollinger said.

Adding more recollections, Bollinger said, "He worked awfully hard, but he had a good time. He never seemed to be under the pressure other kids were."

"He seemed to have the attitude, 'I can go back to Montana and be a rancher.' I think he could drop it tomorrow. For a time, he did go back to Montana. Everybody wondered what happened to him. I said, 'Good for you!'"

"Dirk couldn't be much hotter than he is now. I liked him. I think everyone did," Bollinger concluded.

During the Benedict interview, the star told how he "retired" from 1974-76, and didn't work.

"I've always had frustrations over the artistic aspect vs. the business," he explained.

BENEDICT'S FIRST professional job was at Houghton Lake in northern Michigan, where "Ten years ago to the day I was doing Ensign Pulver in 'Mister Roberts.'"

He also mentioned he played at Flint in 1968, when the entire Academy of Dramatic Art class did shows in the summer "for 40 bucks a week."

Benedict's career has included his own ABC-TV series "Chopper One," movies "Georgia, Georgia" with Diana Sands, a snake movie "SSSSSSSS" and "W" co-starring Twiggy. He also played on Broadway with Gloria Swanson in "Butterflies Are Free."

THE FEATURE FILM "Battlestar Galactica" has been playing Detroit-area theaters. The movie was the pilot for the TV series, re-edited with some major changes and additions, and released internationally, Benedict said.

"It was a huge success for Universal Studios."

The ABC-TV series "Battlestar Galactica" is full of glorious moments, as well as full of difficulties, according to the handsome blond performer.

"It's sad it won't be on next year on a regular basis. It had something for the public to watch besides situations com-

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— Star Dirk Benedict, who studied at the Academy of Dramatic Art

edies. The critics were a little too cruel about the show."

Benedict said he has just finished a feature film "Scavenger," a mad, mad, mad comedy with an all-star cast, which will be released around Christmas.

"Battlestar Galactica" will be back as a two-hour special "where we find

earth," Benedict said. Another feature film on "Battlestar Galactica" with Lloyd Bridges, plus the regular cast, will be released this summer.

Benedict did "L'il Abner" with Lucie Arnaz for Kenley Players in 1977, but otherwise hasn't done musicals in seven years. On playing Curly he said, "It's a very brave thing for me to do."



Dirk Benedict goes musical again as Curly in "Oklahoma!"

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