

Two-gun totin' Annie comes to dinner theater

By SHIRLEE IDEN

Psychologists tell us everyone plays roles in life, consciously or unconsciously. For Nancy Gurwin, there's nothing subtle about role playing.

The vivacious Southfield actress, producer, director, singer, dancer and wife and mother is a mover and shaker, to say the least, in area dinner theater.

Having already filled houses with her productions of "Funny Girl," "Once Upon a Mattress," "Facades," "Glee Lights," and "Owl and the Pussy Cat," Mrs. Gurwin is preparing to open in her dream role.

A vehicle that appears perfect to showcase her multiple talents, "Annie Get Your Gun" the Irving Berlin musical comedy and theater classic opens

Saturday.

The show, as the past several Nancy Gurwin productions, will be presented at the Paradise Dinner Theatre, 17630 Woodward in Detroit.

An all-new production, it is the 11th major show by the Southfield-based Nancy Gurwin Productions, a dinner theater company specializing in extravagant musicals.

If each new show has its special challenges for her, this one brings a new twist. For in the cast of 19, including six children, is 9-year-old Danny Gurwin, youngest of the four Gurwin children.

NANCY GURWIN will have his own personal challenge. For he will play Annie Oakley's brother "Little Jake" to

his mom's Annie.

A second interesting twist about the two-gun-toting Annie Oakley role is that it was once played by Betty Hutton, a blind comic, to whom Mrs. Gurwin is often compared.

Two years ago, she said the all-consuming demands of producing made it doubtful she would continue to star in her own productions.

But the lure of the footlights has proved too strong and she was right in the middle of it all again for "Funny Girl" and "City Lights" recently.

"I love the legitimate theater. I play to the audience and I love the faces," she says.

"You can just feel the love when you walk out there and people are waiting

for you to do something."

Mrs. Gurwin contends that actors are basically very insecure.

"We're happiest when stepping into other roles," she says. "I wasn't that crazy about myself. I wanted to be other people."

She began to try being other people as a little girl at the Will-O-Way Theater in Bloomfield Township, studying there for four years.

LATER she worked at the Detroit Conservatory of Music for two years and appeared in numerous productions at Oak Park High School.

At age 17, she left Oak Park after being accepted at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theater in New York.

"New York was very exciting and frightening all at once," she says. "At Oak Park High, I was very well known, but for every one of me there's another 1,000 in New York."

She completed two years at the playhouse, appeared in a few off-Broadway plays and then decided to come home.

Enrolling as a drama major at Olivet College in Marshall, she studied the background and history of the theater and made life decisions for herself.

The most important was to forsake an acting career and marry attorney Donald Gurwin and raise a family.

"I was happiest when I met and married my husband, and had the children," she says. "In theater, when the curtain goes down, the audience stops clapping."

"Now, I've found real fulfillment and I've never regretted not making it big on Broadway."

Mrs. GURWIN finds her roles in the theater and as wife and mother quite compatible. Rehearsals are usually in the evenings, and Gurwin takes over the parenting role. He also provides business and legal advice for the production company.

A number of shows already produced, including "Funny Girl," can be moved and re-staged. Mrs. Gurwin says there's a great deal involved with re-staging and re-lighting but with adjustments it can be done.

"Our company has the advantage of having a group of dedicated professionals who are now comfortable with one another," she says.

Her own special dream is that someone will build a theater especially for dinner theater with the space and flexibility necessary.

"We could run a repertory type of theater and do more than one show a week," she says.

Once she wished aloud of another dream: to do "Annie Get Your Gun" and added, "But there's not a room big enough to stage it in."

THAT WAS one year ago. Now Nan-

cy Gurwin as Annie Oakley is practicing her pistol shots as well as songs and dances including "Doin' What Comes Naturally," "You can't Get a Man with a Gun," "There's No Business Like Show Business," and "Lost in His Arms."

Norris Andersen is playing the man she loves and nearly loses in a shooting contest.

"Annie Get Your Gun" marked composer Irving Berlin's greatest success, playing more than three years on Broadway with Ethel Merman, on tour with Mary Martin, and as a successful movie with Betty Hutton.

In 1965, Ms. Merman re-created her role in New York and even brought it to Detroit's Fisher Theatre, packing the house.

Edgar A. Guest III is directing the Gurwin production of "Annie Get Your Gun" while Barbara Anne Gowan is musical director. Dennis East is the show's choreographer.

"Annie Get Your Gun" will be performed every Friday and Saturday night for an unlimited engagement. Dinner is at 7 p.m. with the curtain going up at 8:30 p.m.

Group rates are available. For reservations or information call 869-3988.



Ready for curtain time Saturday night are Norris Anderson (at left), Bill Hoffman, Joe Lannen and Nancy Gurwin, who takes the title role in "Annie Get Your Gun" in Paradiso dinner theater. (Photo by Tom Treuter)

Women Religious meet in convention

Sister Helen Marie Burns, RSM, administrator of Sisters of Mercy, Province of Detroit, based in Farmington Hills, has returned from the annual assembly of Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in Philadelphia. She was one of 600 Roman Catholic sisters who attended the assembly.

"Despite our diversity, there was a prevailing spirit of openness and unity," she said.

The group, representing 100,000 religious women in the country, heard outgoing LCWR president Sister Theresa Kane, RSM, challenge them to broaden their ministries and "to speak the truth in love to each other, to the institutional church and to the institutional society."

She further urged her audience "to rejuvenate the missionary spirit, to respond anew to the needs of the poor and the oppressed."

AMONG THOSE oppressed, Sister

Theresa said, are women, who form 51 percent of the world's population and account for 66 percent of all working hours. But they earn 10 percent of the world's income and own less than 1 percent of the world's property.

In both church and society, sisters need to "address the social sins of sexism and paternalism," Sister Theresa said. "We need to be in close union with lay women so that together we can work and search for a church system which is more just."

Sister Helen Marie said that ministry — the services sisters perform with and for others — was a major focus at the meeting of nuns. The results of a national study were made public, reflecting the status and satisfaction of both lay and religious Roman Catholic women as doers and receivers of ministry.

During the five-day assembly, delegates also engaged in theological re-

flections, seeking to deepen and broaden their understanding of religious life in contemporary American society.

"The need today," said Sister Helen Marie, "is to come to a fuller, even a different, understanding of core values which shape our lives, but whose everyday practice has changed."

SISTER HELEN Marie is a member of LCWR because of her position as

provincial administrator with the Sisters of Mercy.

The leadership conference helps top administrators in women's orders to develop their skills. It also serves as the chief liaison between U.S. congregations and the Sacred Congregation for Religious in Rome.

The LCWR members represent about 100,000 sisters in 361 orders in the U.S.

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