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Star Nancy Dussault enjoys musical's run

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

REDHAired Nancy Dussault, the petite star with the big voice and personality, apparently has got her act together.

Starring in "I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road," at the Birmingham Theatre, Dussault puts on an energetic, confident and thoroughly engaging performance. She has been doing the show there since the beginning of April and the run extends through June 5.

On a recent afternoon, she breezed in to the theater lobby for an interview that took place across the street at Punchinello's restaurant. She sipped lemon tea and a zucchini-rutabaga soup while she talked, laughed, batted her full, fake eyelashes and generally had a good time.

A toddler who wandered over was invited by Dussault to have a seat at the table.

"IT'S BEEN harder work than I anticipated," the performer said, about the show. "I haven't done anything on stage live for three years. I've never done anything where you never leave the stage."

During the musical about an almost-40 pop/rock singer who is putting a new act together, Dussault performs two backup vocalists perform many of the songs that make up a large part of the show.

She also carries on a feisty, at times funny, dialogue with her stage manager, played by big, rugged Howard Platt, and mugs with style.

"The conversation is so difficult and rambling," she said. While this is Dussault's first time with the show, some of the players in the cast have appeared in other productions and helpfully "can give me my lines!"

Dussault said she is on an allergy-free diet that's all the fad in Los Angeles. She went on the diet because she had been getting headaches and nasal congestion. But temptations to go off the diet surround one. She has become hooked on the chocolate-chip cookies from Marty's in Birmingham and has even sent out for them.

"This has been the only successful musical that's about a relationship," the actress said. When the show was first produced, she considered it "a real women's lib show" and didn't go see it, even though it was written by a friend, Gretchen Cryer.

SHE WENT TO see the show in Los Angeles a few years ago, and "the ladies in the audience went crazy" during some of the numbers, Dussault said. She doesn't think the show is dated today but does think some of the terms are. The musical number, "Strong Woman," however, still gets the biggest response.

When she first arrived in Birmingham, the actress stayed at the Barclay Inn but has since moved in with her ex-husband's family, who live in Bloomfield Hills.

"We're enjoying it," she said, explaining that the entire cast is happy doing the show in Birmingham. "When actors are in town for two days, they know every restaurant and health club. The cast should do a where-to-go column."

Dussault has a following of TV fans who watch her regularly on "Too Close for Comfort," the series going into its third season. She costars with Ted Knight, playing his wife and older mother of a brand-new baby.

Twins rotate in the role of the child, almost a year-old now, and arrive in a limousine. "I don't generally approve of kids in the business," Dussault said, "but the twins are used to being handled by people who help out."

SHE SAID she gets along great with Knight, who had seen her perform in New York in "Side by Side by Sondheim" a couple of times. When she tried out for his TV series, Knight read with all the women auditioning.

"We even read well together. I'm very good for him," she said with a laugh.

"Ted had a job with all of us. He really trained us." She has a knack for comedy but, "They didn't want me to get funny on this."

"Ted is really a gifted man," she said admiringly of her famous funnymen costar.

In real life, Dussault has never been a mother. She and her fiancé were discussing children recently, she said. The actress is engaged to Valentine Mayer, who was stage manager of the Sondheim show when she appeared in it in New York.

"He wants to be a writer and director in television," she said. "He is very talented." Her fiancé visited her in Birmingham and she had just seen him off to the airport on his way to Los Angeles.

DUSSAULT SAID she is in her 40s and the uncertainties of the acting profession have led her to have moments when, "I want someone to take care of me."

Generally, she's quite independent. She has known Mayer for about five years. "We've hardly spent any time together. I've been away a lot. It doesn't mean your relationship is going to erode or break up, but it's hard, no doubt about it."

When she was married, she wouldn't take any jobs out of town.

She and Mayer are looking for a show they could do together, perhaps a major tour, with him directing the production.

Besides her present comedy series, Dussault also has been a familiar face on television as co-host with David Hartman on "Good Morning, America."



GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Vibrant performer Nancy Dussault talks about the rigors of being onstage throughout the whole

show, "I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road."

"It was a very valuable experience for me," she said. "I was always fearful I was not well informed. Most people, we do well on one or two things. It forced me to talk to people."

tharine Hepburn for two years and Dussault was a bit anxious about meeting the celebrated star but found Hepburn was not difficult to talk to.

"I admire her courage and dedication," she said. While growing up, Dussault tra-

veled around the country because, her father was with the Navy. "I was a lot of people in this business are from families in the service," she said. When you're an actor on the road, "You move in with your plants, put the pictures up, move the furniture and within a day or two, you've got your home."

MAYER HAD worked with Ka-

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The Star Theatre of Flint will open its 12th season of professional, star system summer theatre in Flint's Whiting Auditorium - July 5th with the Kenley Players production of the musical "Annie".

Producer Frank Kenley recently announced that the production will star on stage, in person Martha Raye, as Miss Hannigan.

• Week of July 12th, David Birney and Meredith Baxter Birney, in the comedy "Goodbye, Charlie."

• Week of July 19th, Van Johnson and June Allyson in the musical "No No Nanette".

• Week of July 26 Gary Sandy from TV's "WKRP Cincinnati" in the new musical "Barnum".

• Week of August 2nd, Patti Page, Eddie Fisher and the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra in Star Theatre's only 1983 concert.

• Week of August 9th, Joel Grey - Alexis Smith in the musical "Pajama Game".

• Week of August 16th, Gavin MacLeod, the captain on TV's "Loveboat" in the musical "High Button Shoes".

• Week of August 23rd, William Conrad, TV's "Cannon" in the musical "Fiddler On The Roof".

The Star Theatre will continue its policy of presenting eight performances per week.

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:30.

Sunday evening at 7:30, with matinees on Saturday and Sunday at 2:45.

The single ticket price will remain \$12.50. Special senior citizens discounts are available for Saturday matinee of \$9.95.

Students (18 and under) are admitted for one-half price for all performances.

Season tickets are on sale now for all eight shows at \$68.00 for all performances. Senior Citizens may purchase season tickets for Saturday matinee, Sunday



matinee or Sunday evening for \$62.00. Special group rates are available for groups 25 or over Tuesday through Saturday evenings at \$10.50 per ticket. Group tickets for Saturday matinee, Sunday matinee or Sunday evening are available at \$9.95. Senior Citizen Groups - Saturday Matinee, Sunday Matinee and Sunday Evening \$9.95. All tickets may be charged to Visa or MasterCard. Season ticket and group reservations are being accepted now. Call Flint; 239-1464. Single ticket sales will begin May 15th. Mail orders for season tickets or group reservations can be made by writing: Star Theatre of Flint, Box 1500, Flint, Michigan 48501. For ticket information call 239-1464.