

Entertainment

Ethel Simmonds' editor/644-1100



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(O7C)

Star enjoys first day off from rehearsals, show

By Ethel Simmonds
staff writer

IT WAS JACK WESTON'S first day off in 2½ weeks, and the casually dressed star of the current Birmingham Theatre production was making the most of it, over a luncheon interview at Birmingham's Panache restaurant.

He ordered a double Beebeater martini on the rocks and the Panache Tower sandwich, enjoying both as he talked about his role as Nat, in the provocative comedy hit "I'm Not Rappaport."

Nat's a man in his 80s, and Weston resembled the shabby, old character he portrays only because of his slightly bearded face. Weston is a cheerful, chubby guy, with an enthusiasm for life, even though he professes to be going through some difficult personal times.

Although his name isn't a household word, he's familiar to stage, movie and TV audiences through the many different roles he has played over a lifetime in show business.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER remembered him fondly for his role in the TV comedy "The Hathaways." He played Mr. Hathaway, co-starring with Peggy Cass. "Three monkeys were our children," he said. "Don't ask me to explain it. It's too early in the morning. The show ran one year (in 1981) and was never rerun, but people keep coming out of the woodwork asking about it."

The waitress, also one of the actor's fans, came over to say, "Everytime I think of you, it's with a feeling of warmth."

Obviously, Weston has been doing something right. As a matter of fact,

he said he considers himself very lucky because all these years he has had the opportunity to get lots of work.

Weston also played in another short-lived TV series, "The Four Seasons" based on the Alan Alda movie comedy hit. "It's sad. It ran 12 weeks," he said of the series. "I would have liked doing that. It didn't work as well as the movie."

Weston declares "The Four Seasons" is his favorite of movies he has made. "I loved it. I thought it was wonderful."

He's looking forward to playing the dentist-hypochondriac again. "With good luck, if Universal give us the go. Alan has written a sequel to 'The Four Seasons.' He's called us (the movie's original cast including such stars as Rita Moreno, Carol Burnett, Len Cariou, Bess Armstrong and Sandy Dennis, along with Alda), and we're all ready to go."

Weston usually does two movies a year. "This is my slowest year," he said. The actor recently finished the sequel "Short Circuit II." Other recent films are "Dirty Dancing" and "Ishtar."

PLAYING IN the Birmingham Theatre production of "I'm Not Rappaport" is the second time Weston has worked in a show written by Herb Gardner. The first was a musical, "One Night Stand," for which Gardner wrote the book and lyrics.

"It closed in previews," he said. The show played at the Nederlander Theatre in New York, in 1979-80. What character did he play then? "The same guy," Weston declared. "The father with a son."

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STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Jack Weston relaxes over lunch, away from the Birmingham Theatre where he heads the cast of "I'm Not Rappaport."

Actors forceful in performances

Performances of "I'm Not Rappaport" by Herb Gardner continue through Sunday, Dec. 18, at the Birmingham Theatre. For ticket information call the box office at 644-3533.

"I'm Not Rappaport" is my favorite kind of play — a very funny comedy that is also warm, touching and thought-provoking. The current production at the Birmingham Theatre offers some strong performers in Herb Gardner's Tony-award-winning show.

Nat (Jack Weston) and Midge (Lawrence James) are two old men with widely divergent outlooks on life. Their friendship miraculously endures repeated verbal clashes on



Barbara Michals

their favorite Central Park bench.

A cantankerous octogenarian, Nat is a Socialist who has done lifelong battle with "the system" and is not ready to quit. Retired, he spends his time spinning tall tales to the gullible Midge and looking for windmills to tilt at.

Midge is an elderly apartment superintendent who survives the system by trying to be as invisible as

possible. In a neat bit of cliché reversal, militant Nat is white and Midge of the silent majority is black.

AT NAT'S INSISTENCE, the two do battle with a yuppie building committee, a neighborhood punk, a drug pusher and Nat's daughter Clara (Beth McDonald).

Weston gives a powerhouse performance despite some line stumbles

on opening night. His voice rangles with indignation, his face reddens with exasperation as the old warrior refuses to be daunted by time or reality. Though Midge reminds Nat, "Between us there's not one good hip on this bench," the only thing that intimidates Nat is his fear that Clara has "visions of nursing homes dancing in her head."

Though Judd Hirsch originated the role on Broadway with less bluster and more nuances of character, Weston's feistier Nat is still oddly lovable.

James is not given co-star billing because he is not a "name," but this very talented actor more than holds

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Juliet Prowse "shows some flesh," as she says — which audiences expect of her — in song and dance number "The Story of Lucy and Jesse" from "Follies."

Juliet Prowse: She's a natural

By Ethel Simmonds
staff writer

In "Follies," the Stephen Sondheim musical through Sunday at Detroit's Fisher Theatre, tall, shapely actress-dancer Juliet Prowse looks dazzling under the stage lights, in her Bob Mackie-designed costumes.

She's a stunner by day, too, in the morning light, emerging from her downtown Detroit apartment hotel. The cast had given a matinee performance the day before, then gone that night to a Michigan Opera Theatre benefit party with the stars of "Follies," which is an MOT production.

But instead of being exhausted, Prowse and some of the cast members ("the young kids in the show") went over to a club in Windsor where they danced until 4 in the morning.

"I needed that," Prowse said, appearing fresh at 11 a.m., on the way to a breakfast shop for a bowl of chili. She wore dark glasses, a bomber jacket, with a pink blouse underneath that complemented her bright red hair, and trousers. The long-legged star walked briskly and seemed quite at home in town, although she's only visited Detroit once before ("About 10 years ago I did a Ford Industrial," she said).

AT THE RESTAURANT, she greeted the waitresses like old friends and was relaxed and unassuming. She talked in an easy, open manner about all sorts of things — keeping few secrets (if any).

She disclosed her age, when men-

tioning the probably limited length of her career strictly as a dancer ("I'm in my 50s," mentioned, "My boyfriend," David Chavez, a choreographer who lives in Albuquerque and wants her to move there; and even, when asked, recalled when she was engaged to Frank Sinatra (she broke the engagement — and it was a tough decision — but he wanted her to give up performing).

"I was only 24," she said, "and he was a superstar." But she did say no to Sinatra who "wanted to marry me desperately — desperately!"

Her role in "Follies" is Phyllis Rogers Stone, a sophisticated, bitchy former chorus girl of the Weissman (read Ziegfeld) Follies. Nancy Dussault is Sally Durant Plummer, an incredibly naive former chorus who was Phyllis' best friend. Eddie Adams is Charlotte Campion, a gutsy movie queen.

Prowse wears a slithering long Mackie gown in red for most of the show, where she appears as one of the guests at the Follies reunion, just before the old theater is about to be wrecked. In a sequence in which each girl recalls her youth and her dreams, Prowse does a number, again in red, in a brief costume from her own Las Vegas night club act. This one she says Mackie designed for her to be washable because she dances in it and sweats.

Singing, dancing to "The Story of Lucy and Jesse," she performs in a real high point of the show. Incidentally, Prowse, who first studied to be a ballerina, is 6 feet 4 "on pointe." Because of her height, she

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