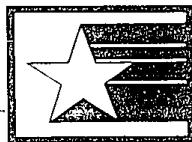


Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor 644-1100



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Perfect partners

Actress is one of a duo in Meadow Brook's newest

By Cathie Beldonbach
special writer

WEET BLOOMFIELD actress Juliet Randall says, "It's a revelation how audiences gravitate to these two people," referring to the characters of Essie and Rudy Sebastian in "The Great Sebastian." In the play, which opened last week at Meadow Brook Theatre, Randall plays Essie, the part originally written for Lynn Fontaine of the famed Lunt-Fontaine duo.

Essie and Rudy star in a vaudeville mind-reading act playing Prague after World War II and get entangled in political intrigue. The pair survive by their wits and by the psychology learned from yearning to read people with their bugs," said reading.

They "skate over the rim of life," Randall says of the characters, but beneath their veneer as theatrical con artists, "There's a kind of integrity, something quite solid at the bottom."

THE PLAY OPENS with live "mind-reading" using members of the audience. "It's wonderfully wise to open with the magic," says Randall, who played Essie two years ago for a production of "The Great Sebastian" at the Missouri Repertory Theatre. She has never had a better performance after performance, she leads endear themselves to the audience right from the opening scene.

Making the "mind reading" successful demands that she and co-star David Regal memorize a signal code, then use the code impromptu in live audience interactions. Randall says the play is "horrendously difficult to do" both because the code calls for skills above and beyond learning the script, and because, "Every little thing has to be timed so

Rehearsals at first are "just like shoveling coal until you get hold of the tail of the play and can fly." The demands of "The Great Sebastian" have brought her fresh appreciation for the workhouse reputation of Lunt and Fontaine, the original Rudy and Essie.

A comic melodrama like "The Great Sebastian" departs from the heavy-duty drama role Randall usually plays, roles like Medea, Cleopatra and Clytemnestra from the Greek classics and Shakespeare's leading ladies including Kate, Cleopatra, Portia and Portia, as well as roles in modern classics.

She likes playing parts "a little outside" what people expect of her, and says, "I'm an actor," as if that simple declaration sums up the classic dramatic challenge — to transform oneself chameleon-like and "become" her character. She says she always bristles at the statement, "You're wrong for that role," but acknowledges acting can't over-

come all obstacles, height being one of them.

AT THE BEGINNING of her career, when she played with the Phoenix Theatre in New York as one of the company leads, she was in line to play Ophelia. But she is five foot nine, and the actor playing Hamlet wasn't tall. "So it wasn't to be," she says. "I don't see Ophelia as 'weird.' I don't think I ever was an ingenue, but I did get to play Juliet once." She has never, however, been Lady Macbeth. Playing the driving woman behind Macbeth's lust for power is high on her wish list.

Three years ago Randall debuted on the Meadow Brook stage in "The Good Doctor," which is based on Chekhov's short stories. The next season she played Queen Elizabeth in Shakespeare's "Richard III," followed by her starring role in "Dear Liza."

She played Mrs. Patrick Campbell, the actress with whom George Bernard Shaw carried on a long, passionate correspondence. In her heyday, Mrs. Campbell was the reigning star of London and the actress for whom Shaw wrote "Pygmalion." Randall says, "Campbell's brilliant career went down, down, down," and on top of professional misfortunes, her son was killed in the war. Randall adds that Mrs. Campbell's life offers several lessons: "It cuts close to the bone. She could have been so high," but the lightning faded and, "She ended in poverty and isolation."

Two roles she played under Dutch director Eric Von remain favorites — Euripides' Medea and Shakespeare's Cleopatra — as much because she worked with the outstanding director as for the challenge of the roles themselves.

The man speaks Greek, knows history and is an innovator," she says, and goes on to explain his enthusiasm for Shakespeare. "When he directed 'Anthony and Cleopatra' he said, 'If only you knew what it means to me to work in Shakespeare's own language!'

RANDALL SAYS her role as Queen Elizabeth is one of the sleeper roles of all time. "Mostly they cut it to ribbons, but it's better than Gertrude in 'Hamlet.' Elizabeth has more to do and worse things happen to her."

On stage Randall craves the high drama of tragedy and trouble. In real life she strives for balance between career and family. She grew up in Kansas City, Mo., attended Avila College, then earned master's degree in theater from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Like many aspiring actresses, she went to New York looking for work. Unlike many actresses working dead-end jobs while waiting for a break, she landed a job first time



In her West Bloomfield home, Juliet Randall discusses her current role at Meadow Brook Theatre, where she has appeared in many productions (staff photo by Dan Dean). (Right) Randall and David Regal co-star in the title roles as "The Great Sebastian," who conduct a mind-reading act.

out. "I went on a weekend audition trip," she says, "and wangled an appointment at the Phoenix Theatre. I got the job and started out in little parts in all sorts of plays. Then somebody said, 'By the way, do you sing?'"

She has trained in opera and musicals as well as drama, so she got the part of the Welsh lady who sings in Henry IV, Part 1. "After that I got to sing." She says. Randall admits her bad luck good fortune was "sort of bad for me" in her early 20s.

While working in New York, she met and married her husband, and they moved to Michigan when he got a job in Detroit. Over the years she has taken two career interruptions to balance family and career.

"I'VE BEEN very lucky to be able to juggle a stage career," she says. "And I don't have the feeling I've shortchanged the family."

During the first interruption, she

had three children in three and a half years. "That put a monkey wrench in my career for a little while," she says of the 10 years while her children were small that she didn't act.

Her children are now grown and spread across the country. Her 25-year-old son works for the Senate Republican Policy Committee in Washington, D.C. Her 23-year-old son will graduate this year from the University of California at San Diego and her 21-year-old daughter also

will graduate from Williams College in Massachusetts.

During her second career interruption, she accompanied her husband to England on business where they lived for seven years until 1986. He is a lawyer with Ford Motor Company and served in England as general counsel for Ford of Europe. Due to British Actors Equity laws, the son was "no way" she could work in England. Each time she was ready to rein-

state her career, she returned to her "home stamping grounds, the Missouri Repertory Theatre" in Kansas City. While her children were young, she worked the four summer months in Missouri as part of the rotating repertory company. After her return from England, she met Carl Schurr who is active both with Missouri Rep and Meadow Brook. He introduced her to Meadow Brook where for the last four seasons she has played to critical acclaim.

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