

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor 644-1100



6B(O/S,F-6C)

O&E Thursday, February 21, 1991



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Jennifer Jay Myers, originally from Bloomfield Hills, shows off a jacket for the show "Nonsense," in which she appears as Sister Amnesia.

It's fun to play Sister Amnesia

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

SISTER MARY AMNESIA is the only role Jennifer Jay Myers has ever played in the musical comedy "Nonsense," but she has appeared as the sweet, slightly dippy young nun in more than a half-dozen different productions.

Myers, who is originally from Bloomfield Hills, is staying with her parents, Rodman and Jeanette, during the run of the show, through Sunday, March 10, at the Birmingham Theatre. Detroit-area residents vacationing up north last summer, who saw the Cherry County Playhouse version of "Nonsense," might remember Myers appearing there in the show, which she also co-directed.

"I first saw the show off-Broadway," Myers said during an interview at the Birmingham Theatre. She knew then she would like to play Sister Mary Amnesia someday. "It's one of the roles that really fits my type."

"Nonsense" has been running off-Broadway since 1986, the year Myers saw it originally. She first

appeared in a production of the hit musical in Cleveland, along with Alvaleta Guess as Sister Mary Hubert. Guess is in the Birmingham show as Hubert again. "She has been doing it off and on also," Myers said.

PERKY and soft-spoken, Myers describes Sister Amnesia: "She's a nut. She lost her mind. She was hit on the head by a crucifix and wandered into a convent. She's real sweet, but she keeps screwing up."

Myers said she has been performing in "a rash of religious shows." Besides "Nonsense," these include "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," "Godspell" and "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?" Doing religious shows wasn't planned. "It's a weird coincidence," she said.

She appeared at the Birmingham Theatre in the early 1980s as Charlotte, "a loose woman," in the musical "Oliver!" Other roles she has played include Annette, the character she describes as "the weird beautiful," with a Southern accent, in "Steel Magnolias," and

Please turn to Next Page

Sister Mary Cardelia is a perfect role for her

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

THE ROLE OF Sister Mary Cardelia in the musical comedy "Nonsense" has been played by such stars as Kaye Ballard, Peggy Cass and Phyllis Diller, but no one is more suited to the part than Marilyn Farina.

Meeting Farina for the first time, in the lobby of the Birmingham Theatre, you sense immediately that she is a live-wire kind of gal.

Brassy, sassy — there are lots of adjectives to describe her personality.

She has close-cropped blonde hair, dramatic eye makeup and a figure that is ample.

She's outgoing — the kind of character she portrays as Sister Mary Cardelia, who is the Mother Superior of the Little Sisters of Hoboken.

Dan Goggin, who wrote the book, music and lyrics for the show, is a friend of hers, who wrote the part for her.

Goggin is directing the current Birmingham Theatre production of "Nonsense."

The entire cast is a friendly, familiar one to each other (many cast members have appeared together in previous productions of the show).

Goggin, leaving the theater through the lobby, is a willing "joke," asking Farina if he can bring her back some coffee.

FARINA AND GOGGIN are long-time friends.

She first became known to the public after posing in a nun's habit for greeting cards, at Goggin's request.

The cards were successful, which led to a "Nonsense"-style revue and then the musical.

"He had the crazy idea of doing a nun greeting card," she said.

"A friend gave him a store mannequin and a real nun's habit."

Instead of using the mannequin, he asked Farina to pose.

Twelve cards were printed and shown at the National Stationery Show in New York.

"The character started to come alive," said Farina.

Over a three-year period, she appeared on about 75 cards and made personal appearances at card stores.

Then, as Sister Cardelia (her name taken from the card), she starred in a revue-type show, for which a co-

median supplied "blue humor" and Goggin the music.

The cast of five performed as three nuns and two priests.

"It was just a hit," she said simply. They played New York and Boston.

The next step was converting the revue into a book show and holding a backers' audition. "Nonsense" (with all cast members as nuns — priests just weren't as funny) opened at the small off-Broadway Cherry Lane Theatre in 1985.

It moved to the Sheraton Lane Theatre on Seventh Avenue, then to the Douglas Fairbanks Theatre, on Theatre Row on 42nd Street.

"The reviews were never that great," she said, of critics' responses to the show, but the public loved the mix of comedy and song — heavy on puns and nonsense that would especially be enjoyed by anyone who grew up Catholic and attended a Catholic school.

"THEY STARTED doing star companies," Farina said.

"Kaye Ballard was the first, at Coconut Grove, Fla."

She praised Ballard's performance, was lukewarm on Phyllis Diller's, and said that Peggy Cass (who played Sister Mary Cardelia in a previous production at the Birmingham Theatre) had trouble with the physical aspects of the role.

There's one scene in the show where the Reverend Mother keeps slipping off a stool after mistakenly sniffling a substance that makes her high.

Farina deftly does the repeated slips and falls, which require skill and good physical condition (the latter caused problems for Cass, Farina said).

Farina left the New York show, then went to San Francisco for seven months, and Los Angeles next.

"I was out for about one and one-half years with the show. Now I go wherever they hire me."

Appearing in New York in "Nonsense" is not that profitable for her, she said.

The big stars make the big bucks because they have the "name."

She makes better money in productions on the road.

She laughed, remembering some of the derogatory things reviewers have said about the show.

And while the musical itself generally has not earned plaudits from the critics, "the girls got good reviews" for their individual efforts.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Marilyn Farina stars as the Mother Superior in "Nonsense" at the Birmingham Theatre.

'You can't kill this thing! It's a real word-of-mouth show. It's such a ridiculous piece, but it works'

— Marilyn Farina

"YOU CAN'T KILL this thing!" she declared, praising "Nonsense." "It's a real word-of-mouth show."

Speaking of the investors, Farina said, "Everybody's gotten their money back about 10-fold. It's such a ridiculous piece, but it works!" She claimed Goggin has made millions.

Farina, who attended Benedictine Academy in Paterson, N.J., always

wanted to be an actress and played the lead in "Our Miss Brooks" in a high school production.

She worked for many years as a doctor's and dental assistant before she got her big break as Sister Mary Cardelia.

Describing the Mother Superior, she said, "She's the head honcho. She acts like she's in control, but she's really a mess."

MOY'S
Japanese & Chinese Restaurant
18225 Middlebelt - Livonia
For Reservations Call: 421-3170

Two Oriental Restaurants Under One Roof!
— Carry-Out —
On Chinese Food

JAPANESE STEAK HOUSE
Table Top Cooking
(Reservations Accepted)
Early Bird Specials
5-6:30 p.m. Time-Limit
Served Daily

CHINESE & AMERICAN TRADITIONAL
Cantonese & Sze Chuan
Lunch & Dinner Specials
Served Daily

Both restaurants open daily at 11 A.M.
Closed Mondays

24386 Grand River
(3 blocks west of Telegraph)

DON PEDRO'S OPEN 7 DAYS
537-1450

• Margaritas • Mexican Beers • Cocktails • Lunch Specials • Carry-Out • Catering • Banquet Room

\$9.95 MEXICAN SAMPLER FOR TWO
Includes: Steak Fajita, 2 Tacos, Cheese Quesadilla, El Padre Burrito, Tostada, Guacamole Dip, Rice & Beans
Expires 2-19-91 - Not Valid With Any Other Offer

AUTHENTIC MEXICAN CUISINE & DECOR

DISTINCT CHINESE

Hon Jai Lau

Lunch • Dinner • Late Night Dining • Take Out
1515 EAST MAPLE RD., TROY • (313) 689-2332

MICHIGAN'S BEST KEPT SECRET IS OUT!

Your Choice Fri. & Sat. = Sun. FREE
Of One. Sat. = Sun. @ 1/2 PRICE

You have seen the rest now stay with **Best Western Lapeer Inn**

Rooms From \$49.00

- ★ Indoor Pool/Whirlpool
- ★ Indoor Waterfall
- ★ Whirlpool Suites
- ★ Heart Shape Jacuzzi Rooms
- ★ Fun Center
- ★ Rooms To Fit All Needs

*Kids 12 and Under, Stay Free

20% OFF ROOMS
SUNDAY thru FRIDAY
Expires March 31, 1991
For more information call 667-9444

On M-24 1 1/2 Miles North of I-69

Kids Stay Free, And We Clean Up The Room.

\$39 Kids 18 and under stay free in room with parent

Enjoy our indoor pool and whirlpool and let us worry about the clean up! Limited number of rooms available at special rate—call soon

Call 553-0000

Clarion Hotel & Executive Suites
Farmington Hills
11525 W. 12 Mile Road at Orchard Lake Road