

Thursday, January 8, 1981

Ellen Burstyn reads favorite poems



By ETHEL SIMMONS

Ellen Burstyn, the Tony and Academy Award-winning actress from Detroit, will bring her talents back home in a poetry reading she has put together just for the Bushnell Performing Arts Series.

Ms. Burstyn will read from her favorite poets when the Bushnell series presents "The Genius of Ellen Burstyn" at 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Bushnell Congregational Church, 15000 Southfield Road, Detroit.

The series is made possible through funding from the Michigan Council for the Arts. Tickets at \$5 may be purchased at the door. Further information is available by phoning 272-3550.

It was the day of New Year's Eve when Ms. Burstyn talked about herself, in a phone call from her home in Palisades, N.Y.

She lives there in a 100-year-old house on the Hudson River, where "we can sit on the front porch and watch the boats go by."

"WE" INCLUDES her son, Jefferson, 19, and the actress' two friends from Detroit who also share the house, actor and painter Bill Smith and actress Kathryn Cortez.

The house has 12 fireplaces, which they keep stoked up, so they can sit in

front of the fireplace reading and relaxing.

The three friends became acquainted in New York, although they are all Detroiters.

Ms. Burstyn said that in Detroit, "I grew up on Hazelwood and Dexter, near Grand Boulevard and Clairmont." She attended Cass Technical High School, where she was an art major and did some acting.

She and her present housemates "all went to New York when we were young." Early on, she auditioned and got a part in "Fair Game," a Broadway show that ran for a season in 1957.

"SINCE the time I've started working, I've always been able to get work," she said. She has done TV shows and commercials and started making films in the late '60s, continuing through all the '70s.

"I guess I made about 10 films," she said. "I was nominated for Oscars for five of them."

Among her films are "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore," for which she received the Academy Award, and "The Exorcist," "The Last Picture Show" and "Same Time, Next Year."

The latter is the film version of the Broadway hit that earned her the Tony, the Drama Desk Award and the Outer Critics Circle Award.

Asked to name a film she particularly enjoyed, Ms. Burstyn said, "I like 'Resurrection' (a film in current release). She plays a woman who is in an automobile accident, 'dies' seven minutes, is resuscitated, has the experience of being on the other side, and she develops the power of healing."

ANOTHER FILM, "Silence of the North," will be released in the spring. In this autobiography of a woman who homesteaded in the Canadian wilderness, she portrays Olive Frederickson, who is now in her 70s.

On the phone, Ms. Burstyn's voice was soft and gentle. She answered questions readily, yet seemed almost shy.

She said she would spend New Year's Eve at home alone, as she always does, "making out a list of intentions." She likes to "sit quietly at midnight," contemplating qualities both personal and in her work.

For the Bushnell Performing Arts Series, she will read from the works of Edna St. Vincent Millay, T.S. Eliot, Audre Lorde and John Keats, in an intimate semi-round setting.

She SAID it was her choice to do

poetry, because she believes facing an audience directly seems to need something more personal than a dramatic presentation.

Of her work on stage and in films, Ms. Burstyn said, "I like both. I would hate to do only one." Appearing on stage is "an act of love. These days it costs money to do a play."

But it's worth it.

"It's what you learn with the contact with the audience," she explained. "The live audience tells me a lot."

She likes making films because the work goes faster and because it has an intimacy of scenes not possible on the stage.

"You can think what you want to express and it will be seen by the camera."

BUSY NOT only as an actress, Ms. Burstyn has done directing as well. Her upcoming work includes a play she's going to direct and another she's going to act in, as Sarah Bernhardt.

"I'm now reading all the plays she has done," she said. The scenes will be prepared at the Actors Studio, then the show will be tested out of town before taking it to New York.

Describing Bernhardt, she rhapsodized, "She was fearless and bold and extraordinarily talented and innovative and smart, kind of a heroic figure."

Stage, screen and TV actress Ellen Burstyn will give a poetry reading at the Bushnell Congregational Church in Detroit.

'Don Juan' lacks fire

By HELEN ZUCKER

Meadow Brook Theatre's production of George Bernard Shaw's rarely seen "Don Juan in Hell," directed by Charles Nolte, is rather like a class lecture performed by a quartet of Ivy League professors.

The four principals stand at their lecterns, turn the pages of large voluminous bound volumes and deliver their lines with great, slightly patronizing wit.

We know they know all the lines; they are simply keeping their notes — the bound volumes look so terrific. It's the sort of class no one asks questions in; the professors would stare as if you had committed an error in fact.

They are very certain of their opinions and you are there to listen politely.

"Don Juan in Hell" runs through Jan. 25 on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

THE USUAL reason for omitting "Don Juan" from Shaw's wonderful "Man and Superman" is that it simply makes the play too long to bear. The logical reason for omitting the "Don Juan" section is because it is static theater, extraordinarily difficult to pull off.

"Don Juan in Hell" makes great reading, and it's fascinating on the radio if you happen to be driving through miles of boring country, but a "play" that consists of two hours of philosophizing has got to have an undercurrent of urgency, a feeling of ideas flowing spontaneously, tremendous energy and fire to make the audience forget the total lack of physical action.

Shaw's ideas do have a torrential vitality behind them, and the Meadow Brook Quartet very nearly pulls off the difficult feat the script demands.

But the pacing is just a shade too careful, the acting a shade too subdued. The production nearly makes it into the realm of truly exciting theater. Nolte and cast seem to have chosen polish over fire, however.

The lecture method is not the only way "Don

review

"Juan" has been performed, but whether the actors move about the stage is not really vital. Delivery is the key to this unique barrage of Shawian eloquence.

BARBARA BERGE as Donna Anna, the lady who is shocked to find herself in Hell, turns in the best performance of the evening. Perhaps because she is a new arrival, unused to killing time, let alone "killing eternity," as Don Juan puts it, the lady Anna has an advantage over the three gentlemen who have been politely arguing for decades.

Donna Anna has borne 12 children during the course of her earthly existence, and her character and her purpose for being do not change because she has died.

Shaw leaves Anna with the final words; she is going to find a man and create a "Superman." So much for the impact of three ferocious minds tossing about ideas in the presence of a conventional woman.

You can do what you like in Shaw's version of Hell, and Barbara BERGE siffs and sorts and tosses aside Darwin, Nietzsche, her father, Don Juan, The Devil himself — or rather, she takes what she likes, turns her 30-year-old body into a 28-year-old body, scrambles all their ideas and goes looking for her own version of "the life force."

Ms. BERGE is tuned to the nuances of her lines, and I wish she had more of them.

DONALD EWER is immensely likable as Anna's father, The Statute. "He can talk," Ewer says, shaking his head in slight exhaustion after one of Don Juan's outbursts.

I loved Ewer's performance when he seemed to forget he was a statue and lent his lines a W.C. (Continued on Page 14C)



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