

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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He likes people

David Groh isn't like rough characters he portrays

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

Unlike the abrasive character, Lennie, whom he plays in the Birmingham Theatre production of the comedy "Doubles," actor David Groh is a nice guy, who likes people and shows it without a rough exterior.

The show was in the first week of its five-week run when Groh was interviewed over lunch at the Midtown Cafe, just down the street from the theater. The good-looking Groh, with his headful of dark curly hair and distinctive jawline, ran the gamut in his conversation, from talking about the show to such special interests as restoring old houses, photography and psychiatry.

It was toward the end of the interview when a casual question, "What other profession would you like to be in if you weren't an actor?" elicited this response: "I'd like to be an analyst. I'd like to help people. I like people. Although they're different, they have similar problems."

Then he reached into his briefcase and pulled out a soft-cover copy of "Bioenergetics" by Alexander Lowel.

GROH, WHO HAD BEEN enthusiastic up until then, became even more revved-up as he talked about the author and his particular type of analysis. The actor said he goes to that analyst, who deals with the body. "That's not a normal jaw," Groh explained about himself. "I wasn't born with it."

He said Lowel told him, "You hold yourself up on your jaw." Groh declared he is a very determined person, which is why his jaw developed that way.

"I'm exposing myself," he said, although he didn't really appear concerned about the public learning more regarding his personality development.

He said that, as part of his analysis, he has been taken back to his early years. "I've gone back to the high chair." The purpose of the regression is to recall lost memories, which leads to the removal of tensions.

On stage, when Lennie appears for the first time, Groh strides across the locker-room set with an angry expression and manner. He almost looks like a different

person than the actor interviewed.

This is the third production of "Doubles" in which Groh has appeared this year. He played in the comedy in Westport, Conn., where he lives, and in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

"IT HAS WITTY dialogue on a par with Neil Simon," Groh said of the play written by David Wiltsie. Groh saw "Doubles" during its New York run. "It ran on Broadway less than a year. It wasn't a smash," he said. "I saw it, enjoyed it and made a mental note I'd like to be in it."

Groh is a name familiar to audiences primarily because of his role as Joe, husband to Rhoda (Valerie Harper) on the popular TV sitcom "Rhoda." His face is also recognizable to fans of the leading daytime soap, "General Hospital." For a year and a half, he played D.L. Brock.

Describing the character, Groh said with understatement, "He wasn't a nice fellow. He started out as a diamond in the rough. Then they made him into a real louse."

Actors in daytime dramas get some unusual reactions when viewers see them on the street. D.L. Brock may be a meanie but, "People laugh—a funny, peculiar laugh—like, 'Hey, man, you're cool,'" Groh said. Groh had signed on to play the character for a year and stayed for a year and a half. "It was OK for awhile." But he wanted to leave the show, and the problem was solved with directness by the writers: "They murdered him."

Groh, who has a lot of stage experience, said, "I'm kind of a self-imposed exile from TV. I moved from Los Angeles three years ago."

BESIDES "RHODA" and "General Hospital," Groh also starred in a TV series where he played a businessman-husband. "We had done 13 shows," he said. "They kept getting better and better." But the show didn't last.

"That was not a good character for me. A good character for me is... Lennie's a good character for me. Lennie's an abrasive character. He's a bit outrageous. Lennie is obnoxious," Groh said.

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David Groh says if he wasn't an actor he'd like to be an analyst and help people. He stars in "Doubles" through Sunday, May 8, at the Birmingham Theatre.

Guys bare their chests, hearts in comedy 'Doubles'

Performances of "Doubles" by David Wiltsie continue through Sunday, May 8, at the Birmingham Theatre. For ticket information call the box office at 644-3533.

Art Linkletter's observation that "Kids say the darndest things" seems to apply equally well to men at midlife crisis in David Wiltsie's "Doubles"—an engaging little comedy now playing at the Birmingham Theatre.

The backdrop for the evening's fun is a tennis club. More specifically, the upscale Norwalk Racquet Club in Connecticut. Four successful, middle-aged, men show up weekly for a game of doubles.

As we meet them a substitute arrives. Except for tennis, he doesn't

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IT HAS THE STYLE and substance of a 30-minute TV sitcom that has been stretched to accommodate a two-act locker-room farce. Nevertheless, there are just enough onliners and gags to make it work. And there is some fine ensemble-like acting.

The central character is played skillfully by David Groh (of "Rhoda" and "General Hospital" TV fame). He makes it easy for others to play off his loud, opinionated, poor-loser character who turns out to be very likeable when not trying to be a macho man.

Richard Cottrell is excellent as the outsider who finds a way to be one of the guys—despite his lofty philosophical verbosity. "Tennis is

have much in common with the others. The storyline revolves around three male friends accepting a new man into the foursome. When men change the pecking order (especially over 40) guess what happens. That's right. They say and do wild and crazy things.

They badger each other about — careers, finances, wives, marital problems, friendships and whatever. Occasionally, the locker room talk becomes a bit garish, and once or twice a bare derriere is seen while they change clothes (which occurs often).



Bob Weibel

more than a game. It's life at the most basic. It's like medieval combat between knights of honor."

Steve Pudenz gets his share of laughs as a once-a-week athlete who is always injured and at less than 100 percent.

Matthew May scores as the too-handsome-for-his-own-good tennis pro, and Debra Dickinson gets high marks as the attendant who is a foil for several locker-room jokes.

Bob Weibel of Westland is a freelance writer, who has spent more than 25 years in community theater as a director, designer and performer.

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