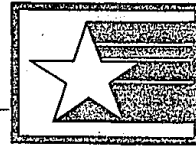


Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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(17)

Actors 'grow old' for stage roles

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

PLAYING OLDSTERS in the comedy "Driving Miss Daisy" at the Birmingham Theatre, co-stars Rosemary Prinz and Ted Lange each have their own individual ways of becoming their characters.

Prinz, the petite actress who starred for many years in the TV soap opera "As the World Turns," plays the role of Miss Daisy, an elderly Southern, Jewish widow who goes from 72 to 97. "Aging is from the neck," Prinz explained, in a backstage interview one afternoon last week. She moved her neck forward, demonstrating how she uses her body, in the role of the spunky, well-to-do, ex-schoolteacher.

"Her neck kind of glides out," she said. Later in the play, "I walk with a cane and I'm stooped." As for Miss Daisy's voice, "It just seems to happen. It does change. It becomes less resonant," Prinz said.

Describing the storyline, she said that "Driving Miss Daisy" is about "her relationship with her chauffeur. She makes the same journey we all make. Fortunately for her, it's a growth experience."

THE SHOW OPENED in previews early last week and opening night (last Friday) was still a day away, but Prinz seemed very comfortable with her characterization.

Having been in show business for 42 years, she has played many roles on stage, as well as on television. She did 40 stage plays at the same time she appeared on "As the World Turns." In "Steel Magnolias," the off-Broadway comedy, she created the role of M'Lynn (the mother's role that Barbara Rush played in the recent production at Detroit's Fisher Theatre).

Prinz spent 12 years playing the character Penny in "As the World Turns." "When I did it, it was live," she pointed out. Penny was, she recalls, "just the sweetest and the



Backstage at the Birmingham Theatre, Ted Lange and Rosemary Prinz talk about their



roles in "Driving Miss Daisy," which continues through Sunday, Oct. 22.

most goody two-shoes. It was very 1950's."

The actress, who herself displays a sweet nature, is enjoying working with director Charles Nelson Rilly and costar Ted Lange. Of Rilly, she said, "He is one of the best directors I've worked with — the depth, knowledge and craft that he has. He was an actor. He really deals with the process."

Lange plays the black chauffeur who drives Miss Daisy and, through the years, develops a warm friendship with her. He is best known for his TV role as Isaac Washington, the cheerful bartender aboard "The Love Boat."

PRINZ LIVES in New York, with her husband, former jazz drummer Joe Patti, who now works as a bartender at 21. Lange, who lives in California, came to New York for re-

hearsals of "Driving Miss Daisy" prior to the Birmingham opening.

The show will go on tour "a bus and truck," Prinz said, after it leaves Birmingham. Next stop will be Ann Arbor, and seven weeks of one nighters. "Following a four-week breather around the holidays, the production will continue in February, taking over the national company from Julie Harris. ("Driving Miss Daisy," starring Harris, had a quick stop at Detroit's Music Hall last year.)

Lange praised the work of costar Prinz, saying it was a shame that his TV role on "Love Boat" didn't give him an opportunity to show his range as an actor. She mentioned he recently starred in a production of Shakespeare's "Othello."

When the interview with Prinz was winding up, Lange arrived in her dressing room, where he in turn was interviewed. The two actors later would go over lines together for the show.

Lange (pronounced Lan) is an

easy-going guy, who was wearing a jaunty cap, plus a beard he had grown for the role. In the play, half-haired Prinz wears a grey wig with a bun in back, but Lange wears his own hair, to which he adds gray streaks. He said the gray in his dark beard was real, however.

THE CHAUFFEUR "ages from 60 to 85. He's a widower, who has a daughter," Lange said. "It's in Atlanta, Ga., where change takes place, in the late 1940s to the 1970s."

"He's a very active guy. He gets a job working for this woman who's a bit cantankerous. He wants his job and keeps his own dignity. Through the years, you see the growth of what becomes friendship and appreciation of each other as human beings. You see the incidents in their lives that change them."

To create his role of Hoke, "What I'm really doing is my grandfather," Lange said. "He was a great man. He was a cook, in the house, very beloved by the family. Everyone came to the house on Saturdays."

For his characterization, Lange wears the kind of shoes his grandfather wore. They're called Stacy Adams shoes, he said, "with little round toes and a high top — an older man's shoes."

Lange grew up in Oakland, Calif., where he went to high school with the Pointer Sisters. "In Berkeley, I used to go to the coffeehouses, back in the '60s, and intellectualize."

"I'D MAKE UP a history for peo-

ple walking down the street," he said of those days at the cafes. "I still do it. I was at dinner with Rosemary yesterday and she said, 'What are you doing?' I'm people watching because you don't know what you're going to use (for a characterization)."

"When you take a specific characterization, there's a universality that everyone will recognize. That's the fun."

On TV, as the bartender, he said he tried to create a guy you would like to have serve you drinks. Many viewers thought he was just playing himself, the same as they did when he appeared in another TV series, "That's My Momma," as a street character. Some people thought he was very talented — for a real-life street character.

The versatile Lange has always done theater, and he directed productions of "Hamlet" and "Richard III." In an off-season he studied theater at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. He also directed and starred on stage as "Othello," then produced and directed a film version of "Othello" that he took to the Cannes Film Festival this year. The movie will be out next February.

Among Prinz's favorite roles are some of her most recent ones, including "Steel Magnolias," her one-woman show based on the poems and letter of Edna St. Vincent Millay; and as Jack Lemmon's wife in "Tribute," which ran nine months on Broadway.

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