

OTTERBEIN NEWS

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GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT

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Once in a while, New York-based actress Betty Miller wishes she had invented a glamorous stage name to use in her career. Usually though, the veteran of Broadway, Off-Broadway, television and regional theatre is too busy acting to think about using anything other than the name her parents gave her.

The actress -- that's right, her real name is Betty Miller -- is currently in town helping Otterbein College Theatre celebrate a banner year -- the silver anniversary of its guest artist program. The visiting actress will play the leading role of Liz Madden in the school's upcoming production of Kevin O'Morrison's "Ladyhouse Blues," opening Thurs., Feb. 6, at 8:15 p.m. in Otterbein's Cowan Hall.

Otterbein was fortunate to catch up with the Colleen Dewhurst look-alike back home in Greenwich Village, New York. Most recently she spent nine weeks on the West Coast with the Seattle Repertory Company playing the lead of Kate Kellar in "All My Sons," until the play closed December 28.

Next on tap for the actress after the Otterbein play closes, is "a small film" called "Dottie," which Ms. Miller will be making with fellow New York actress Elizabeth Franz. "We begin shooting my scenes in mid-February," she said, "on location at a big old house in the Pennsylvania countryside."

Hard-pressed to name one favorite project over the years, Ms. Miller cited "You Can't Take It With You," in which she appeared in two different Broadway productions, with Colleen Dewhurst, Jason Robards, and later Eddie Albert.

Although she loves live theatre, the film she made will always stand out in her mind. "I never cried so many tears as in 'The Pope of Greenwich Village,'" she reminisced. "Director Stuart Rosenberg kept telling me he could help me out with artificial tears if I needed them, but I was determined to make my own. And I did."

On Broadway, Ms. Miller appeared in such plays as "The Queen and the Rebels," with

Colleen Dewhurst, and "A Touch of the Poet," with Jason Robards, directed by Jose Quintero, who also directed Ms. Miller in seven productions at the Circle in the Square. She received an Obie award for her performance in James Joyce's "Exiles" at the St. Mark's Theatre in New York.

Other New York credits include the Duchess of York, Gertrude, Cordelia and Lady Macbeth for the New York Shakespeare Festival, four seasons with the APA Phoenix Repertory Company, and appearances in "Before the Dawn" at the American Place Theatre and "Eminent Domain" at Circle in the Square.

She was also seen as Lady MacDuff at the Cambridge Drama Festival and was directed by Douglas Hughes in Edward Bond's "Summer" at the Manhattan Theatre Club.

She enjoys appearing in several different productions of the same play, as was the case with Peter Schaffer's "Equus," in which the actress performed in regional productions in Florida, Los Angeles, and Chicago, working with Brian Bedford, Brian Murray, and Ken Howard. She toured with the national company of "Deathtrap," working again with Brian Bedford, and toured in "The Price" with Joseph Buloff. At the Guthrie Theater she appeared in "Eve of Retirement," directed by Liviu Ciulei. Last summer the actress worked with Robert Redford's Sundance Institute.

"This is really the first time in my career that I have worked with college students. It's extremely fascinating," she smiled, "but also a little frustrating not to have more time to prepare." Ms. Miller arrived in the Columbus area on January 20, just a little more than two weeks before the Feb. 6 - 9 weekend run of Otterbein's "Ladyhouse Blues." With 3-4 hour nightly rehearsals at the College, this schedule is a far cry from the usual four weeks of full-day rehearsals called for in most of her contracts. She is not overly concerned though, because she's "so impressed with the caliber of students and how prepared they are." (In addition, the Otterbein cast was in rehearsal together for two weeks prior to the guest actress's arrival.)

She is excited about her role in "Ladyhouse Blues," although the "mountain" flavor of the dialogue is somewhat of a departure for Ms. Miller, who seems to have made a habit of playing genteel, educated, upper-middle-class matriarchs. To help her prepare

the proper phrasing and distinctive flavor the part, she rented the classic film, "The Grapes of Wrath," before coming to Ohio. "I felt Jane Darwell's role of the mother was similar to the role I would be playing at Otterbein, in its lack of education and sophistication," she said.

"I really like Liz Madden" she continued, referring to her role in the Otterbein production. "Underneath the somewhat gruff exterior of a busy woman always giving her daughters directions, there is a special warmth that emerges at odd moments."

Although Betty Miller wants audiences to remember her as "warm and appealing" in "Ladyhouse Blues," the versatile actress may already be remembered by some as another not-so-warm long lost mother who got stabbed in the back two years ago in the popular daytime drama, "Another World."

Although it has been a few years since Betty Miller's days in the Los Angeles City College drama department, if the actress had any qualms about returning to college, her downstairs apartment neighbor back in the Village, Robert Moss, put her fears to rest.

"Robert is a very dear friend," she explained, "and was so excited when he found out that I was coming to Ohio to play this role in 'Ladyhouse Blues.' It seems that when the play was presented at Playwrights Horizons back in 1979, Robert Moss was the producing director! He knows the play as well as he knows me," the actress smiled. "How can I go wrong?"

Performances of Otterbein's "Ladyhouse Blues" are set for 8:15 p.m. Thurs., Feb. 6 through Sat., Feb. 8, with a special matinee performance on Sun., Feb. 9, at 2:00 p.m. Tickets are available at the Cowan Hall box office (890-3028) weekdays (and Sat., Feb. 8) from 1 - 4:30 p.m.