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Other Strangers

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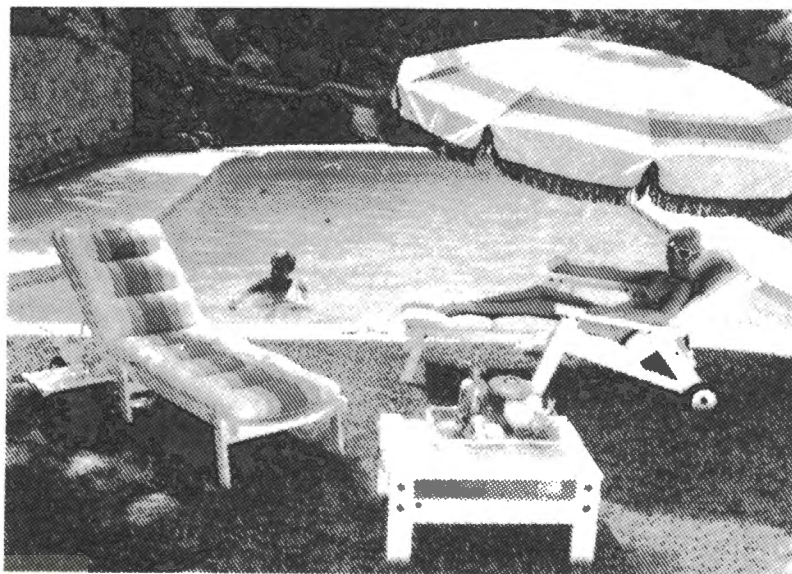
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OCTOBER 1987

5. Civic Theatre Board of Directors
6. Actors and Other Strangers
By Michael Tennenbaum
The show's director reveals his casting tricks
9. The Program
Including cast information and who's who in the cast and on the staff
16. Cast Photographs

Cover: Illustration by Ken Tirado

Volume 6 Number 1

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Actors

And OTHER Strangers

*The director bares all in his "unusual" quest
To cast a repeat Civic Theatre comedic show stopper*

By Michael Tennenbaum

When I was originally chosen to direct this production of *Lovers and Other Strangers*, I knew my work would be cut out for me. Here I was, faced with the job of mounting a revival of one of the most successful shows Staten Island Civic Theatre has ever presented, and I knew I would have to deal with the inevitable comparisons to the original, which was done six years ago ("That's not a bad idea, Mickey, but when we did it *last time* ..."). So, the best defense still being a good offense, I vowed to start from scratch a production of *Lovers and Other Strangers* that would stand on its own, but without destroying the memory of what everyone agrees was a great show.

My best bet would be a fresh approach to casting, I reasoned. And herein lies a tale.

After a week of arduous auditioning, I had decided on a group of actors that best fit conceptions of the characters as I perceived them. Interpreting character is part of the director's job, but never say that to an actor—they like to believe *they* came up with it. In

fact, a smart director knows that casting a show well is the toughest part of his six-week task. Make a serious mistake here and you pay for it right through to the final performance.

There are some basic do's and don'ts to follow when casting:

1. Never cast "cute" — as in "Doesn't she have a cute voice," or "She's so fat and he's so thin. Aren't they cute?" It never works past the first reading.

2. Never cast really close personal friends. They may be able to act, but they can't take direction.

3. Never cast your own mother.

4. Try to cast people with large families. This rule applies mainly to struggling community theatre groups, but it also works well in small off-Broadway houses.

5. Always cast your wife.

This being said, let me now share with you the reasons behind the choices for tonight's production.

Dan Sheehan and Susan Anderson seemed ideally suited for their roles, and even though I had never directed either one before, there were some connections.

I had worked with Dan last spring in *Noises Off* and found him to be a reliable actor who

could pratfall on a dime while always maintaining a serious demeanor, and still find the energy to satisfy his extraordinary lust for baked goods.

Susan became lost in our old theatre on Franklin Avenue during one night of auditions and had to call Jennifer Straniere, our president, who then called me at home. When I reached the theatre there was Susan still as perky and chipper as she appears on stage. And despite the fact that her voice is "cute" (see Rule #1), I cast her anyhow.

Casting Ellen Mitchell was as natural as rolling off a log (which does not come naturally to me, by the way). Ellen and I have worked together many, many times here at Civic Theatre and I would consider it bad luck not to use her; never mind that I think she's a terrific actress.

John McAteer and I speak the same language when it comes to comedy. He understands the importance of the well-timed line and the perfectly-placed gesture, and if you're willing to sit and listen to his endless tales of woe, you've got a great actor on your stage.

Nick Cianciotto is that rare combination of actor and firefighter that one is privileged to meet only once or twice in a generation. And when you watch his bedroom scenes tonight, see if you don't agree with me that this is a guy who *really* knows how to put out a fire.

Karen O'Donnell stunned us at the audition with her range, variety, nuance, timing, expressions and gestures. I was compelled to cast her as Wilma, but it wasn't until we were well into the rehearsal period that I discovered that this woman was, in fact, my wife—thereby

fulfilling casting Rule #5. A lucky break for us all, wouldn't you agree?

Robert Marra was hot. As Bernardo in our production of *West Side Story* just a few months ago, he lit up the stage, and his commitment to character is so intense that he insisted on using a switchblade during rehearsals for this show until his leading lady made me take it away from him (actually, I asked Edie Barry, my stage manager, to do it).

Karyn Cardinali probably spoke less at the auditions than she does in the play (she says about 100 words), but, boy, can she listen! That's acting.

John Gatti is a personal friend of mine, as is Julie Corbin. So much for Rule #2. They both have exactly the right qualities for Richie and Joan, and they both have large followings here on Staten Island, which is close enough to cover Rule #4.

Casting the last two remaining roles was no trick. Everyone who saw Civic Theatre's original production of *Lovers and Other Strangers* six years ago still remembers the two actors who played Bea and Frank ("So ... what's the story?"). They are the stuff of theatre legend. So, for all my big talk about refusing to carbon copy the old show ... well, I asked Anita Capogna and Rich Cardinali to recreate their roles for this show. Hey, I may be stubborn but I'm not stupid!

And so the show was cast.

Tonight you see the results of the process that can bring both actors and directors to tears. And if the job was done right, the proof will be in your laughter.

Enjoy the show. ■

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Michael Tennenbaum directs this production of "Lovers and Other Strangers."

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MICHAEL TENNENBAUM

Set Design
Jerry Nadal

Lighting Design
Stathi Afendoulis

Assistant Director
Karen O'Donnell

Stage Manager
Edie Barry

This production is made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, Staten Island Council on the Arts and Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Jerry DAN SHEEHAN
 Brenda..... SUSAN ANDERSON
 Hal JOHN McATEER
 Cathy ELLEN MITCHELL
 Johnny NICK CIANCOTTO
 Wilma KAREN O'DONNELL
 Susan KARYN CARDINALI
 Mike ROBERT MARRA
 Frank RICHARD CARDINALI
 Bea ANITA CAPOGNA
 Richie..... JOHN GATTI
 Joan..... JULIE CORBIN

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WHO'S WHO in the CAST

SUSAN ANDERSON (*Brenda*) returns to the stage after a three-year hiatus. She began her acting career with the Talisman Players at St. John's University, and acted in numerous productions for the Stager Society, also at St. John's. Susan portrayed Tzeitel in two separate productions of *Fiddler on the Roof* one of which was taken on the road. She is a public relations associate at Drexel Burnham Lambert and is currently involved with Northern Light Productions, Off-Broadway.

ANITA CAPOGNA (*Bea*) is happy to be able to reprise one of her favorite roles with one of her favorite husbands. Other credits here at Civic Theatre include *The Shadow Box*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *On Borrowed Time*, *A Man for All Seasons* and *Torch Song Trilogy* at Staten Island Shakespeare Theatre. Anita is a Staten Island Civic Theatre board member.

KARYN CARDINALI (*Susan*) is a drama major at the High School of Performing Arts in Manhattan. She was last seen here at Civic Theatre in *Funny Girl*, and in the past has appeared in several productions at Seaview Playwrights Theatre. Karyn is glad to be in this show, and she thanks Mickey Tennenbaum for giving her the opportunity.

RICHARD CARDINALI (*Frank*) is reprising his role of Frank in this production. Some of his credits here at Civic Theatre include roles

in *The Ritz*, *Night of January 16*, *The Odd Couple*, *Bye Bye Birdie* and *Guys and Dolls*. He has also acted with SIST and Seaview Playwrights. Richard was seen as Leo in *When Tomorrow Comes*, an original play at the Adelphi Players in Brooklyn.

NICK CIANCOTTO (*Johnny*) has appeared here and there, doing this and that, and is glad to be back here doing this again. After appearing as young Richie when we last did *Lovers and Other Strangers* six seasons ago, Nick has gracefully matured into the role of Johnny. Nick is a firefighter by profession, and he spends his off hours with his wife Debbie, and Jason, Dana and Nicky. Isn't that nice?

JULIE CORBIN (*Joan*) was last seen in *Noises Off* here at Civic Theatre in the role of rocket scientist Brooke Ashton. Earlier last season she appeared as Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls* and Lily St. Regis in *Annie*. Julie wants to be a soap star and is just waiting (and waiting) for her career to take off. Julie has appeared in the popular daytime television soap operas "Ryan's Hope" and "One Life to Live." She is happy to be a part of this wonderfully ... ethnic ... family.

JOHN GATTI (*Richie*) recently switched careers, bought a house, directed our production of *West Side Story* (and with kids, yet, his all-time favorite theatrical experience), and took up body surfing -- all in the last year! Although all of these gambles proved to be rewarding, he wants to play it safe for a while. John states that this is the first time a director could not tell him he was "too Italian" to play a part. John thanks Mickey for the chance to get back on stage and for the opportunity to appear with three of his favorite performers. VIVA ITALIA!

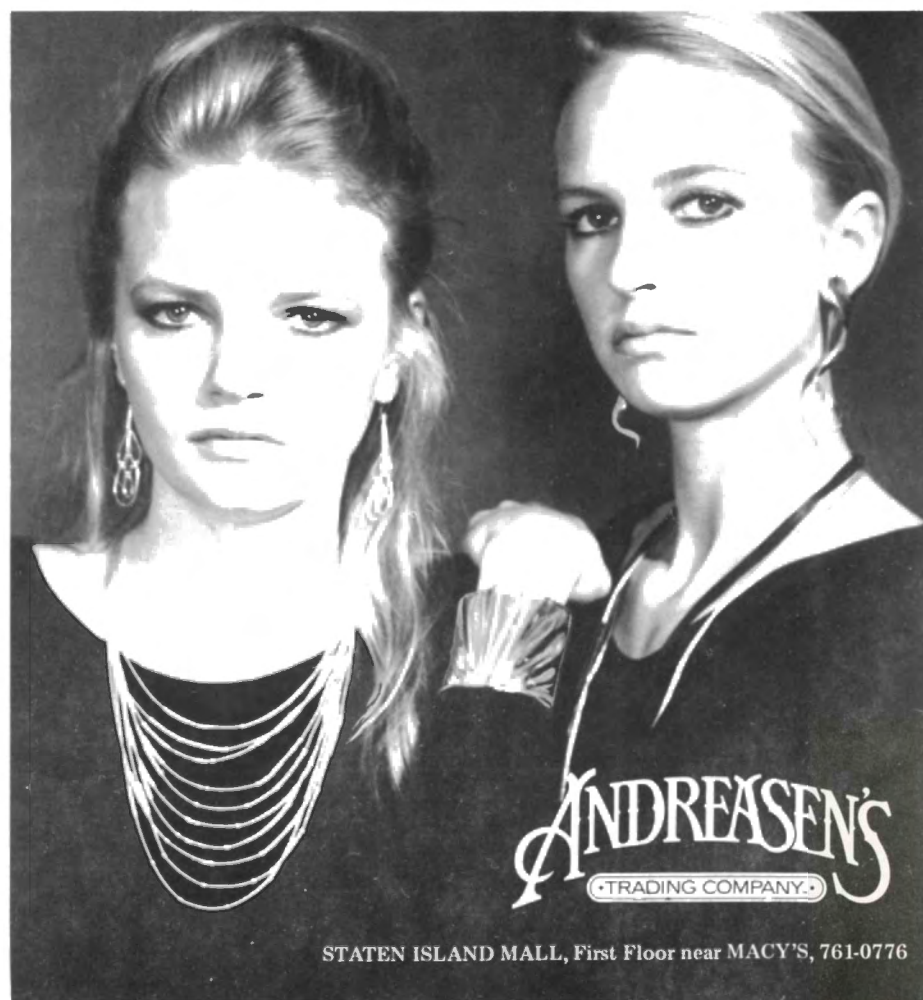
ROBERT MARRA (*Mike*) has recently completed choreographing and playing the role of Bernardo in our production this summer here at the College of Staten Island. Some of his credits include Danny in *Babe*, Zappy in *Angels Fall*, Doody in *Grease*, Luis

in *Runaways*, and *Side By Side By Sondheim*. Stock credits include *A Chorus Line*, *Evita* and *Whorehouse*. Robert performed in and was dance captain of the Shawnee Playhouse productions of *The King and I* and *South Pacific*. Love and thanks to JT, DDM, EB, MT, KO and Susan and Mike.

Waiting for Godot, and most recently Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. John feels that the Giants will repeat this year.

ELLEN MITCHELL (*Cathy*). Ellen's most recent appearance was as the tap dancing

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WHO'S WHO in the CAST

Stella Deems in *Follies*. Other shows include *Annie*, *The Odd Couple*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Tintypes* and *Is There Life After High School?* She is employed at a large Brooklyn medical center, and is a full-time student here at the College of Staten Island where she was awarded a full tuition scholarship. Ellen is a Staten Island Civic Theatre board member and co-chair of our fundraising committee. This one's for Dad.

KAREN O'DONNELL (*Wilma*) is glad to be back on stage this fall after taking a much-needed break when she finished our production of *Noises Off*. Karen looks forward to seeing a glimpse of herself this winter in two feature films: "Moonstruck" and "Wall Street." And thanks, as usual, to the kids and her husband, director Mickey, who gives her support, encouragement and "lots of advice."

DAN SHEEHAN (*Jerry*) was last seen as the battered and bewildered Garry in our production of *Noises Off*. Before that he appeared in RTC's *The Cradle Will Rock* as Yasha and Buggs. Originally from Massachusetts, Dan is a new Staten Island resident. He loves his new home and neighbors, but remains a die-hard Red Sox fan. Dan thanks everyone in the cast, especially Mr. Tennenbaum for his insights into the science of comedy.

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Think of being in the first audience for the revival of *Cabaret* and then going on to a supper party at Sardi's honoring Harold Prince and the musical's cast. Isn't that what New York and glamour are all about? A check for \$125 for the Friends of the Theatre Collection of the Museum of the City of New York will get you there. The date is Wednesday, Oct. 7. Information: 212-534-1672.

MICHAEL TENNENBAUM (*Director*) is directing his third show for Staten Island Civic Theatre, after his successful productions of *You Can't Take It With You* and the female version of *The Odd Couple*. He also directs at New Dorp and Moore Catholic high schools. He believes in the science of comedy as a way of life, and in KMOD, the heart of rock 'n' roll.

EDIE BARRY (*Stage Manager*). This is Edie's first attempt at the offstage role of stage manager. She survived her first crack at prop mistress for *Noises Off* last season, in her opinion a show all about props. On stage she was seen in *Baby* and *Hello Dolly* at CSP and in *Guys and Dolls* and *The Odd Couple* here at Civic Theatre. Edie is assistant vice president for an investment banking firm by day — her most challenging role to date. She gives special thanks to Alice.

PLEASE DO NOT TALK DURING THE PERFORMANCE. IT IS RUDE AND DISTRACTING TO PERFORMERS AND AUDIENCE. THANK YOU.

Information in "Who's Who in the Cast" is provided by Staten Island Civic Theatre. Where opinions are expressed, they are those of the players, not necessarily those of SHOWTIME.

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Staten Island Civic Theatre

CAST



BRENDA and JERRY

CAST



JOHNNY and WILMA



BEA, JOAN, RICHIE and FRANK



MIKE and SUSAN

CAST



Cast photos by Janet Somma

HAL and CATHY

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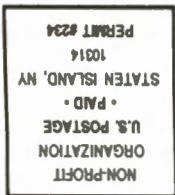
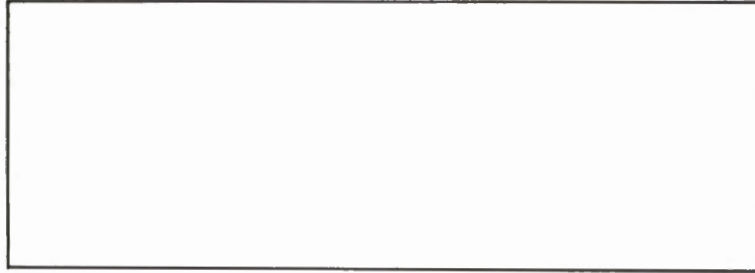
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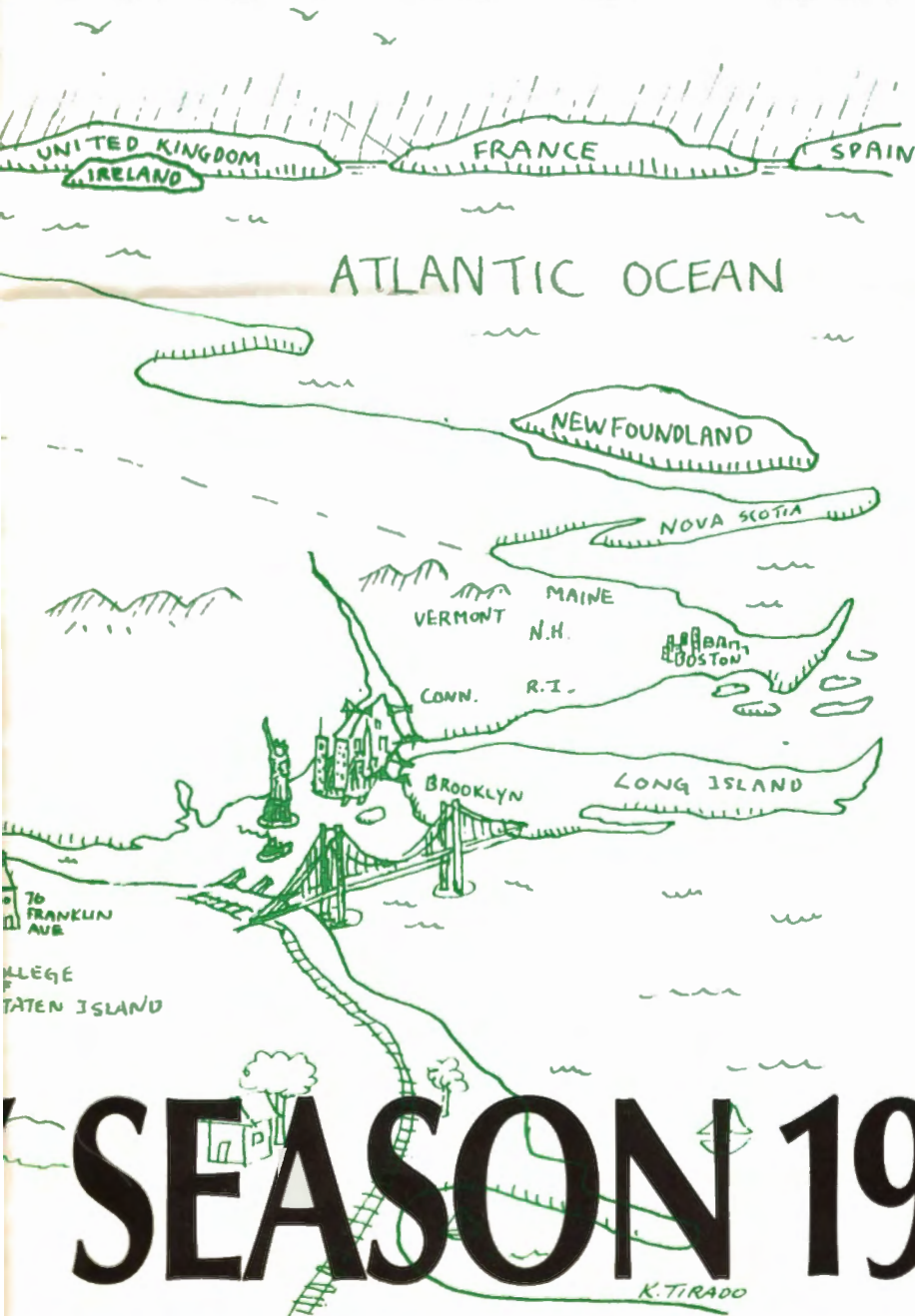
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SEASON 1987-1988

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