

'Flamingo Road' star Barbara Rush headed for Broadway

By Jackie Hyman
Associated Press

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — When former *Flamingo Road* star Barbara Rush originated a one-woman show in a tiny suburban theater, she didn't expect it to turn into a surprise hit that would carry her to Broadway.

"I never when I began this had grandiose ideas about it," said Miss Rush, who opens on Broadway May 3 in *A Woman of Independent Means*. The best seller was adopted for the stage by its author, Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey, a longtime friend of Miss Rush.

The production at the Biltmore Theater will be the Broadway debut for both Miss Rush and Henry Mancini, who has written a theme and incidental music. Sets were designed by

Roy Christopher, who also designed this year's Academy Awards show.

It's an unlikely candidate for the stage, the engrossing tale of the author's independent-minded grandmother as told through letters.

"It's the eloquence of the letters that makes it such a valuable piece," said Miss Rush, taking a break at her Beverly Hills home from packing for a possible lengthy stay in New York. "I felt it would translate well to the theater. Do you know, I'm the only person who thought so? I showed it to four directors and they turned it down flat."

Finally, she discussed her idea with Norman Cohen, who agreed with her and directed both the production at the Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys, which has fewer than 100 seats, and

the remounted Broadway edition.

For three months in the summer of 1983, in between other commitments, Miss Rush worked with the author and Cohen in refining the play.

It opened without fanfare in autumn, with performances on weekends only. Reviewers trickled in and issued raves.

"When I read the first review, in *Variety*, I just fell down," said Miss Rush.

The critique said in part, "... this deepening, shaded, and varied portrait represents Rush's best performance ever in a play that is cleverly written by Hailey and deftly directed by Norman Cohen."

Then came a Los Angeles Times review that called the play "delightful." The next day, the theater had

6,000 requests for tickets.

Among those making the trek to the San Fernando Valley during the five-month run were well-known actors and directors.

"The biggest problem we had was the ticket problem, trying to get people in," said Miss Rush. "I was literally calling people and saying, 'Would you mind, since you've seen the show once, giving up your ticket?'"

Miss Rush said that although the Broadway production boasts new sets and costumes, she's been firm about retaining the play's simplicity.

"I do not want to ruin this show with improvements," she said. "I said I do not want a grandiose set. It has to be a living room of the mind because it has to be railway stations, a pastry shop, lots of things."

Miss Rush, who has numerous stage and TV credits, turned down several film offers to go to Broadway.

But she did find time to shoot the pilot for a situation comedy, *Help!* She plays a wealthy woman with an estate in Santa Barbara. While she travels, her staff members run wild, renting out her limousines and otherwise making a profit from her property.

If it sells and the show is a hit, Miss Rush said, she'll fly to Los Angeles on Monday mornings, shoot her scenes in the afternoon and fly back.

That would be a hectic schedule but she's willing to do it.

"There is no joy in this business like working on something of quality, something people will always remember having seen," she said.



Barbara Rush
Makes Broadway debut May 3