

Actress Barbeau will take 'A Walk on the Wild Side'

By LAWRENCE ENSCOE
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VAN NUYS — Here are some clues about today's featured personality.

She has worked in Broadway musicals, a famous television series, several horror films and termite control. She is a devoted mother, a play producer, was married to a thriller-film auteur and was a spokeswoman for the feminist movement in the '70s.

Time's up. The mystery guest is Adrienne Barbeau, who seems to have filled her 20-plus-year acting career with about as wide a variety of experiences as one can imagine.

And she is about to recreate her role as a stage lead when she opens in the original musical "A Walk on the Wild Side" on Sept. 4 at the Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys.

Barbeau came to the interview looking tan and well-toned and remarkably relaxed for being only a few days away from previews for the play, in which she plays Hallie, the prostitute with "passion and integrity."

"This show has some of the most beautiful music I've ever heard," Barbeau said, after settling into the cool, semi-dark Back Alley backstage. "After five or six weeks (of rehearsals) I'm still fighting back tears. (The play) uses minor melodies. I was raised in an Armenian household, so I grew up with minor melodies."

"A Walk on the Wild Side," which is based on a novel by Nelson Algren, looks at the seamy underbelly of the American dream. It follows the journey of Dove, an illiterate country boy in the Depression era who ends up in a bordello where he eventually is blinded by a legless man.

Barbeau is excited about working on the project.

"Since Cody (her 4-year-old with director John Carpenter) was born, I haven't been willing to go back to work full time. Stage work is better for that (raising a child). I'm gone at night when he's asleep."

Though there have been some short forays into stage work recent-



Adrienne Barbeau
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THE FACTS

- **What:** "A Walk on the Wild Side."
- **Where:** Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys.
- **When:** 8 p.m. Thursday, 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 & 7 p.m. Sunday, through Nov. 14.
- **Behind the scenes:** An original musical based on the Depression-era novel by Nelson Algren. Written by Will Holt. Directed by Alan Miller and Patricia Birch. Musical direction by Sam Kriger.
- **Starring:** Adrienne Barbeau, Jeb Brown, Richard Ryder and Talya Ferro.
- **Tickets:** \$14.50 to \$18.50. For more information, call (818) 780-2240.

ly — last year she acted in and produced the Vietnam drama "Strange Snow" in Orange County and at the Hollywood Playhouse — Barbeau has spent the last 10 years or so working in feature films. In 1978, when she left the Norman Lear-created TV series "Maude," she had to eschew all television roles to pursue film work.

"Back then they didn't hire you for movies if you were in TV," she said. "They felt if people didn't have to pay to see you, they surely wouldn't be at the theater."

Still, persistence paid off and she

landed a role in John Carpenter's thriller "The Fog." Then came several films, including Carpenter's horror send-up "The Swamp Thing," and George Romero's cartoonlike spooker "Creepshow," where she got to chew up the scenery with her performance of the tyrannical Wilma.

"I go for the character," Barbeau said, smiling when Wilma is mentioned. "The only thing I avoid playing is mothers. They're boring. Well... depends on the mother."

Though she has made many feature films, Barbeau is still probably best known for "Maude," in which she played the Bea Arthur's daughter from 1972-1978.

"They were a wonderful family." She said. "But, the acting was not as gratifying as things I'd done before or since. But it had quite an affect on my life. I became a spokesperson for the feminist movement before I really had a chance to make my own mind up on the subject."

Barbeau began her acting career at the San Jose Civic Light Opera in the early '60s. She also attended a nearby college two days a week and worked for a termite control concern. She saved \$1,000 and left to find a career in New York on Sept. 19, 1964.

But it was not until 1972 that she landed her first major Broadway role, the part of Rizzo in the original production of "Grease." When she was nominated for a Tony award, Norman Lear read about it and decided to audition her for "Maude." She claims to have done terribly, but said Lear "took a chance on me."

Recently, Barbeau has finished work on the film "Piranha Women in the Amazon Jungle of Death," a take-off on Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness."

She said there are now several factors she looks at when choosing a project.

"First of all, do I like the script? Is it a career move backwards or forwards? Can I do it and still raise my kid? Is the director someone I trust? But first of all, there are the words on the paper."