

## **"A Walk On The Wild Side" With Adrienne Barbeau**

**I**t seems appropriate that one of the most beautiful actresses today, started out in a beauty salon in Northern California. And when you think of Adrienne Barbeau, you might think of the scenes in CANNONBALL RUN. When she lowered the zipper on her jumpsuit in the movie, she raised the blood pressure of approximately fifteen million men across the country. A lot of people believe that's when she began her career. Allow me to tell you a little story.

Just out of high school, Adrienne's interests in acting were nil. On a whim she took a role in a community theatre production of *The King and I*. Having so much fun and enjoying the "family feel" of a show, she signed up with the touring company and went to the Orient to entertain the Armed Forces. Arriving back in the United States, she decided to continue her plans for college, but after one year in school, at the age of 19, she followed her



heart, and took off for New York.

Being a little green, and after eight months of no work, Adrienne finally began to land some roles. She began a three year stint with summer stock in and around the city and her first Broadway role surfaced as a replacement of the second

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**By Jeff Cole &  
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## Adrienne

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daughter in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Still no agent. Her voice teacher had been telling her for the last three years that her voice was damaged and that she didn't sing well.

She stayed with *Fiddler* for two and a half years. "After having been told you can't sing for three years, I guess you start to believe it. But, one night as I was leaving the theatre, I walked past a man who was standing outside waiting for someone in the cast. And he said to me, 'you have a beautiful voice.' I automatically said thank you and went on my way. And then I started thinking, and I thought, gosh he didn't have to say that, he doesn't even know me! And it was then that I first realized, that maybe my voice coach wasn't right." It hadn't dawned on her that most people don't land roles in musicals if they can't sing.

After *Fiddler* came *Grease*. Adrienne smiles, "I remember when I auditioned for it and everyone was excited about the rock-n-roll aspect, because we all grew up in that era. The director was asking everyone who their favorite group was and when he asked me, I said, I don't know... The Drifters?" She laughs. "And I almost didn't do it, because I came home for Christmas and they called and said they wanted to see me again. And where am I? In California! So, I said, well I don't know, it's Christmas and I don't really want to come back. So they finally decided on New Years day and I went back and got the role."

Ask anyone who Adrienne Barbeau is and another common answer

might be the wise-cracking liberated daughter on *MAUDE*. Falling into a stereotyped character is a nightmare every actor or actress dreams about. And Adrienne definitely got stereotyped. "Most people in Los Angeles don't even know I can sing. People in film think of me as a horror actress and T.V. thinks I'm a sitcom comedienne. So, I do wish I could avoid that. But, I loved the people on *MAUDE*, I wasn't thrilled with the character, but only because it was already molded and therefore not very challenging.

Her favorite medium is stage. "Although, I do love the process of film, I love getting up at 4 a.m. and I love sitting in a chair talking to people, discussing the project, I get more satisfaction from stage because it feels right. There's a very real sense of it. Film, on the other hand, gives me the opportunity to sit back and see myself, and then I think, 'well maybe I could have done that better', or I think, 'that could be nicer and I'm not quite as happy with it'.

The last few years, for Adrienne, has been spent on the stage. She played the tough prisoner in the play, *WOMEN BEHIND BARS*, and more recently produced and starred in *STRANGE SNOW*, which she played an unattractive, (imagine the chore for make-up) old spinster. In March of 1988 she took on her first singing role in eight years, with *PUMP BOYS AND DINNETTES*.

Currently in *A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE*, at the Back Alley Theatre, Adrienne again plays a "tough" woman role. She laughs, "That doesn't really bother

me. If I'm going to do a role, it has to be challenging and it has to affect me. I only do things that I have a special feeling for. When I first heard about *WILD SIDE*, and that Pat Birch, who choreographed *GREASE*, was directing it, I said, 'Oh, I'd love to see it, let me know.' They responded with... 'See it? Why don't you be in it?' And when I heard the music, I couldn't say no. Some of the songs are just so beautiful."

Almost always the opposite of what everyone thinks, Adrienne can always be counted on for telling you something about herself that no one's ever suspected. Her very active role in Southern California theatre can easily be misconstrued as not being able to get "good" roles. Her reasons however are quite the opposite. "I've turned down a lot of jobs. I'm just not ready to go back to sixteen-hour days or travel on location." Those reasons begin with her four year old son, Cody. "Theatre gives me a lot of time to spend with him and right now that's the most important thing to me."

She doesn't balk at accepting co-starring roles and she'll take on anything she believes in. She has her own production company and is very content with what she's doing. But is she satisfied overall? "Yes, I think so. I'd love to be in a position where I could pick and choose any role I wanted, but right now I'm not ready for that either. Some day I will be, and then I'll work harder to put myself in that position. Right now, I'm having fun." And, *A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE*? She sighs, "I fell in love with the music. I guess it's an affair of the heart." 