

Bernhardt on Broadway: The Musical comes to Detroit in March

Submitted by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

Before mass media and modern travel, Sarah Bernhardt ingeniously master-marketed her meteoric rise to superstardom. The world's first superstar, she was the daughter of a Jewish courtesan and the granddaughter of Orthodox Jews from the Netherlands. Through perseverance, determination, great talent and marketing savvy, she became "the greatest actress of all time."

Before Lady GaGa and Marilyn Monroe posed nude for national magazines and Janet Jackson "accidentally" bared one breast at the Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show, Sarah Bernhardt shamelessly posed nude for renowned 19th century photographer Felix Nadar while still in her teens.

Before Britney Spears and Madonna French-kissed at MTV's 20th annual Video Music Awards, Bernhardt spread rumors that she studied her parts in a coffin and played croquet with human skulls. Before Elizabeth Taylor was led to the altar seven times and Zsa Zsa Gabor sampled marital bliss with nine men, Madame Sarah received over 1,000 proposals of marriage.

Before Joan Crawford and Bette Davis endorsed Lucky Strikes, Sarah Bernhardt touted Ogden cigarettes as well as Vaseline, Pears soap and Guerlain perfume and got paid well to do it. She was an unrivaled success in the first full-length silent film, *Queen Elizabeth*, before Cate Blanchett and Helen Mirren offered their interpretations of England's great queen. Before Richard Burton and Sir Lawrence Olivier performed *Hamlet*, Sarah Bernhardt played the young prince at Stratford-on-Avon in French.

During her career, Bernhardt appeared in Toledo at the Valentine Theatre and Wheeler Opera House.

Mark Twain punctuated Sarah Ber-

nhardt's Avant Garde status when he identified five kinds of actresses: "bad, fair, good, great – and then there is Sarah Bernhardt." Nicknamed "The Divine Sarah" by Oscar Wilde, Bernhardt was the undisputed queen of theatre during her lifetime. It is said she almost single-handedly revolutionized the place of women in the theater. Her bravery and bold abandon has become the archetype of successful women to this day.

Bernhardt on Broadway is a no holds barred exposé about the daughter of a courtesan who overcame countless obstacles to become the most famous woman in the world. Now, a century after her last appearance in the United States, audiences can once again experience the wonder of Madame Sarah in the one-woman musical, *Bernhardt on Broadway*.

The show opens with Bernhardt welcoming the audience to her drawing room, a warm and cozy setting for the audience to become rapt in intimate self-disclosures via story and song about the actress' legendary life.

Playwright, composer, lyricist and lead Carol Dunitz read over 100 books and articles on Sarah Bernhardt before writing *Bernhardt on Broadway*. Dunitz was raised in Detroit and now resides in Ann Arbor. She holds a Ph.D. in Speech Communication and Theater and is author of several books in addition to *Bernhardt on Broadway*. Her love of musicals dates to her childhood when her mother, who often told her she was "a little Sarah Bernhardt," took her to see *Gypsy*.

Bernhardt on Broadway will have a three-week run in Detroit at 1515 Broadway Theatre in March to coincide with Women's History Month. Tickets are \$25. Please call 734-864-3244 for more information.

