



REMEMBER HER? 1980s sitcom star gets on with her life E4

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WHAT'S ON

THEATRE

Old comedy, new situation

Known for enthusiasm as 1980s sitcom star, Mindy Cohn stars in *Glorious* at Stage West

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THEATRE CRITIC

You're never too young to learn *The Facts of Life*. Or too old, for that matter.

Ask Mindy Cohn, who was still a teenager when fate cast her as Natalie in that long-running 1980s sitcom and now, at 43, is taking on a whole new challenge as Florence Foster Jenkins in the comedy *Glorious*, currently playing at Stage West.

Jenkins was an amazing woman whose voice defied all conventional standards of quality, yet deeply desired an operatic career. She funded her own tour and, although most people mocked her, she finally appeared at Carnegie Hall at the age of 76, a month before her death.

"You have to understand about Florence," says the ebullient Cohn on a day off from rehearsal. "It wasn't just a pitch problem. She knew music well. She just didn't hear what everybody else heard."

"But there were people who fell in love with her, because they fell in love with her, not her voice. Hey, it's all timing. Who's to say that in the wrong place at the wrong time, Ethel Merman might have showed up and people would have looked like, who is this lady?"

It's quite a treat to talk to Cohn, who still maintains the high-energy enthusiasm and relentless honesty that she brought to her character of Natalie on that long-ago show about a fictional girls boarding school where nothing too terrible ever really happened.

But she's not living in the past and what she readily dispenses is a sassy, practical wisdom about every aspect of her life and career.

"Look, let's put things in perspective with that show," she begins. "NBC was the No. 3 network when we started and we were never a runaway hit. Naw, we were the little engine that could. We were on for nine years, but we were only in the Top 20 for five of them. Sure, we always did well and beat our competition, but hey, not the stuff of TV history!"

Cohn admits that as the years have gone on, people's attitude about *The Facts of Life* has changed.

"When it was first on, they'd look around before whispering to you. 'I love your show. Don't tell anyone.'



Mindy Cohn, right, stars in *Glorious*, about Florence Foster Jenkins, the singer who didn't know she was bad. Cohn still gets noticed for her role as Natalie in *The Facts of Life*, below, at top.

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But then later on, it became a guilty pleasure they were proud to admit and now they shriek across malls at me, 'Natalie! I loved you!'

Does that bother her?

"Not at all," she laughs. "I feel the same fondness for Natalie that the fans do. I can't be one of those actresses who disassociate themselves from the sitcom roles they've played."

"You have to honour what you did in the past, but still have a career in the present. As I age and different parts come along, I say, 'So be it!'"

Cohn says she learned a lot from Cloris Leachman, who appeared on *The Facts of Life* with her during its later seasons. (Leachman also appeared at Stage West in 2000 in *Over the River and Through the Woods*.)

"She told me that if you're a working actress, you have to be just that, a working actresses. Take the good stage parts when they come along



and do what you have to do to pay the rent in between."

For Cohn, that's involved a lot of voiceover work, most notably as Velma in *What's New, Scooby Doo?*, for which she was nominated for a daytime Emmy Award.

"Yeah, that keeps me in the style to which I've become accustomed," she jokes, "but sometimes it bites me in the butt, because think I must've died and gone somewhere!"

Along the way, she's had a varied career that included a memorable HBO version of James Lapine's *Table Settings*, in which her co-stars were Stockard Channing and Robert Klein, plus an assortment of independent films including *Violet Tendencies* ("I play Violet, of course"), which opens this April.

But right now, she's here and she's happy playing Florence, "because she's terminally optimistic, just like me. I believe in follow your bliss. No, not the rub-a-Buddha, light-a-candle kind of thing; just enjoying your life."

"Florence has real joie de vivre; that's why I like her."

Then she cuts loose with the kind of guffaw that Natalie used to dispense 30 years ago on TV.

"Hey, look at me. I'm still playing a broad!"

Just the facts

WHAT: *Glorious*
WHEN: To April 16
WHERE: Stage West, Mississauga
TICKETS: 1-800-263-0684 or www.stagewest.com

MOVIES

Opens Tomorrow

SHUTTER ISLAND Scorsese. DiCaprio. Scary.

DEFENDOR Harrelson. Hamilton. Funny.

REEL INJUN Doc on the frequently stereotypical portrayal of aboriginals on the big screen, from the silent era to the present day.

Other Screens

CINECYCLE Wed.: Films by Chris Kennedy 8 p.m. (PWYC). 129 Spadina Ave., down the alley. Info: chris@signaltotheground.com

CINEFORUM Lectures & Screenings - Tonight: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* 7 p.m., *Zatoichi: Darkness Is His Ally* 9 p.m.; Sat. Best of the Sex & Violence Cartoon Fest 9 p.m.; Sun.: *It Came From Outer Space* 7 p.m.; Mon.: *Orphans of the Storm* 7 p.m.; Tues.: *Bob Clampett's Wickedest Animated Cartoons* 7 p.m., *Bijou* 9 p.m.; Wed.: Michael Jackson Tribute 7 p.m. (\$50/\$10 per program). 463 Bathurst St. 416-603-6643 or www.cineforum.ca

CINEMATHEQUE ONTARIO Tonight: *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* 7 p.m., *Longing* 9 p.m.; Fri.: *Distant* 7 p.m., *Mulholland Drive* 9:15 p.m.; Sat.: *The Wind Will Carry Us* 7 p.m., *Eloge de L'Amour* 9:15 p.m.; Sun.: *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* 4:30 p.m., *Russian Ark* 7 p.m.; Mon.: *Rois et Reine* 7 p.m.; Tues.: *Russia Ark* 7 p.m., *Saraband* 9 p.m. (regular tickets \$10.14/\$5.90; special/limited runs \$11.56/\$7.08). Jackman Hall, 317 Dundas St. W. 416-968-3456. www.cinemathequeontario.ca

DANTE ALIGHIERI ACADEMY Lina Wertmüller Retrospective - *Io speriamo che me la cavo* (*Ciao, Professore!*) tonight 7:30 p.m. (free). 60 Playfair Ave. Info: 416-921-3802 ext. 221.

DRAKE HOTEL Tonight: *Wavelength* with Elizabeth Legge and Michael Snow, 7 p.m. (free). 1150 Queen St. W.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL kicks off with a screening of *Last Train Home*, Wed. 6:30 p.m. at the Isabel Bader Theatre, 93 Charles St. W. The festival, featuring 10 documentaries and features, continues to Mar. 6 at Cinematheque Ontario. www.humanrightsfilmfestival.ca

INNIS TOWN HALL Tues.: Queer Stage-to-Screen Adaptation in Quebec and Canada screening & lecture, 6 p.m. 2 Sussex Ave.

JERUSALEM FOUNDATION OF CANADA's New Leader's of Toronto presents *Sit Your Tuches Down* 2 program Mon. 7 p.m. (tickets at www.jerusalemfoundation.ca). Varsity Theatre, 55 Bloor St. W.

NFB MEDIATHEQUE Wed.: Nordic Night - *Veoramot (Quiet Storm)* 7 p.m. (\$10/\$8); free digital viewing stations offer films for Black History Month, available to Feb. 28. 150 John St. 416-973-3012. www.nfb.ca/rme theatque

POWER PLANT GALLERY Tues.: New Snow with Michael Snow films plus Q&A, 7 p.m. (\$6). 231 Queens Quay W. 416-973-4949.

REEL ARTISTS FILM FESTIVAL showcases artists and their work. Runs Wed. to Feb. 28. full info at www.canadianart.ca/raf
TORONTO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL's *Chai Tea & a Movie* series has *Sugim* episodes 1-3 Sun., tea 4 p.m., film 5 p.m. (\$15). Silver City Richmond Hill, 8771 Yonge St. Inf 416-967-1528 or www.tjff.com



Woody Harrelson (and the city of Hamilton) star in *Defendor*.