



BWW Interview: Barbara Andres in I REMEMBER MAMA at Two River Theater

by Marina Kennedy

Two River Theater (TRT), under the leadership of Artistic Director John Dias and Managing Director Michael Hurst, has announced the full cast and creative team for its production of *I Remember Mama*, directed by Jack Cummings III. This version of the play was originally produced in New York by the Transport Group Theatre Company. *I Remember Mama* is written by John Van Druten, based on *Mama's Bank Account* by Kathryn Forbes. Performances will begin on Saturday, June 4 and continue through Sunday, June 26.

In *I Remember Mama*, a group of 10 veteran actresses—all in their 60s, 70s, and 80s—perform all 25 roles in this beloved classic about a working-class Norwegian family in turn-of-the-century San Francisco. Broadwayworld.com had the opportunity to interview Barbara Andres who is a member of the show's ensemble.

Barbara Andres feels blessed to recreate her role of Mama from the 2014 critically acclaimed Transport Group production of *I Remember Mama*, for which she received a Drama Desk nomination for Outstanding Lead Actress. Born-in-a-trunk to the musical comedy team, Masters and Rollins, she began touring with them at three weeks of age. Her Broadway career started in the 1969 musical, *Jimmy*, followed by *The Boy Friend*, *Rodgers & Hart*, *Rex*, *On Golden Pond* and more. Off-Broadway she has been featured at Roundabout, Lincoln Center, Manhattan Theatre Club, Signature Theatre, Public Theater, Naked Angels, and Transport Group. Ms. Andres has guest-starred on all three *Law & Orders*, as well as *Gossip Girls*, *Damages*, *Rescue Me*, *All My Children*, *As the World Turns*, and *The Sopranos*. Her films include *What About Bob?*, *After the Storm*, *Random Hearts*, and *Thirteen Conversations About One Thing*. The sometime mother of Glenn Close, Jodie Foster, Annette Bening, Kate Burton, John Rubinstein, Laila Robins, Howard McGillan, Grant Shaud, Roma Downey, and Barbara Barrie, she is the real-life grandmother of Maddie, Keala, Aubree, Daniel, Annie Rose, Lily, Griffin, and Gracie. She and her husband Andy will soon celebrate their 57th wedding anniversary.



What was your earliest interest in theatre and performing arts?

My interest in theater developed over my entire childhood because I was literally "born in a trunk". In fact my mom and dad were stage show comedic headliners before and during WW II during the years of post vaudeville shows and I was literally on the road with them by two weeks of age. Trying to pinpoint when I knew I was going to be a performing artist is truly impossible because for many years I only knew show business and not until my

'school years' was I introduced to 'everyday life' as a choice. I realized early on that I loved the "legitimate" arm of the theater rather than musicals because that was something my parents never were involved in and it's why I majored in DRAMA in college, always choosing Shakespeare and Shaw over Irving Berlin. Of course ironically my first four Broadway shows were ALL musicals and I learned a lot about myself and perhaps my destiny.

Who have been some of your favorite performers?

In no particular order these great artists come to mind....Julie Harris, Fred Astaire, Judi Dench, Marlon Brando, Angela Lansbury, Maggie Smith, Jason Robards, Peter O'Toole, and Ella Fitzgerald.

What is your best advice to people pursuing acting?

WORK. Easier said than done I know, but in fact the best education is to "do it", perhaps in school or community or stock or even professional theatre. Paint sets, get cast, listen to your director, study the craft of the good actors you are working with, respect the text and never stop discovering the relationship you have with an audience, and the chance to connect with them in live theater. Of course, the STUDY OF THE HUMAN CONDITION is the ongoing homework...live your life and take it all in. The world and the people that matter to you will always be your best teachers. Listen. Watch. (Oh and yes, it won't hurt to get a college degree to help pay your rent!)

What have been some of the challenges of your role(s) in I Remember Mama?

At my age the physical requirements to hold focus on stage for two or three hours is a huge challenge.(and for two show days it's doubled!) None of us leave the stage for the entire text and our brains and bodies and souls are engaged throughout. Luckily the script, the text, is so well written that once the story begins it sustains you. But it requires complete vocal and body rest when I'm not doing the play.

How do you like working at TRT?

Two River Theater is quite special. First the quality of the productions is absolutely the BEST of our profession. The Artistic Director, the creative teams, the actors, the staff --- everyone is there to make our play work at the highest level of theater and ultimately entrance their audience. The spirit is so positive....AND the actual theatre space is great. As we like to say: not a bad seat in the house!

What would you like area audiences to know about this production of I remember Mama?

Hopefully the audiences will embrace the uniqueness of our production. Never have so many elder female actors been given a chance to tell a story with the simple truth of their talents, playing all the roles with no attention to gender or age. Together we have more than 500 working years experience and I know it makes a difference because our 2014 Transport Group production in NYC, totally created by Jack Cummings III (Artistic Director of TG and our director here) had a grand run.

Anything else you'd like Broadwayworld.com readers to know!

One final connective thought. For many years I have hoped that the general public might learn to respect the deep talents of non-celebrity artists. I have been privileged to work over the years with so many truly great "unknown" actors. Unfortunately in our current media saturated world people tend to be so impressed with "stars", never appreciating the lesser known underappreciated actor, until they are fortunate enough to experience a live theatre surprise. Perhaps "I Remember Mama" will fulfill that promise.

I Remember Mama will be performed from 6/4 through 6/26 in Two River's Rechnitz Theater at 21 Bridge Avenue in Red Bank. The lead production sponsor is Springpoint Senior Living Foundation at The Atrium at Navesink Harbor. Ticket prices for the show range from \$37 to \$65, with discounts available for groups, seniors, and U.S. military personnel, their families, and veterans. A limited number of \$20 tickets are available for every performance; \$20 tickets may be partial view. Tickets for patrons under 30 are \$20 and include the best available seats at every performance. Tickets are available from www.tworivertheater.org or 732.345.1400.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Two River Theater