

Erika's World

Off the Cuff

April 27, 2011

Erika Slezak

Official Fan Club

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Founded

January 1972

Dear Friends,

Three words come to mind regarding One Life's cancellation: shock; devastation; and probably most of all, sadness. Speaking for myself, I've been a viewer since day one, back in 1968, as it was the lead-in to my very favorite show at the time, Dark Shadows. I thought Gillian Spencer was a fabulous Viki, and then my life literally changed when Erika took over the role. I met Erika in the spring of 1971; received permission on October 7th of that same year to start her fan club, and officially launched the fan club in January of 1972.

At this point, it's not worth echoing my anger at the network, because I highly doubt that anything will change. I feel for all of those in front and behind the camera, who will lose their jobs. Everyone on the show has worked so hard and has brought such passion bringing Llanfair into our homes for the past 43 years. And while Erika IS the heart of OLTL, Frank Valentini is certainly the heart behind-the-scenes. I am grateful that we still have seven months of storytelling. I think it gives Ron Carlivati and his team a decent amount of time to bring the show to an ending that its faithful fans deserve.

How wonderful is it that Erika made it to her 40th year on the show! Erika was so humbled by the surprise anniversary party that Frank threw in her honor. And the club presented Erika with a surprise 40th Anniversary Booklet from not only the current cast and crew, but from former cast members and crew dating back to 1971. It was a terrific complement to Erika's 40th festivities!

Our plan is to have another newsletter before the show's end in January. Fans have asked if we plan to continue the fan club, and the answer is yes. When there is Erika news to report, we'll share it with everyone, just like we do now. Thanks for all your support, and let's continue to enjoy OLTL to the very end.



Walter on Llanfair set in 1972.
That is Eugenia's portrait over the mantle.

Sincerely,

Walter

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Telephone Interview April 25th

On April 14th it was announced that OLTL and AMC would be cancelled. Thank you for your message to the fans. You're very welcome. As I said, I am so deeply sorry to be losing this wonderful show, and I know the OLTL fans are the most passionate and certainly most loyal group of all of daytime. As far as discussing the cancellation today, I just want to say that I don't want to dwell on the closing of the show. We will deal with that in the future, as we have another 7 months, and we are going to be telling wonderful stories, and it is going to be a very exciting time for the show – lots of good things apparently in store for everybody!

The last time we spoke was late October, before the holidays. Kim Zimmer had just joined the show and her early scenes were airing – the new Joey had yet to air.

We are so glad that you were able to celebrate your 40th anniversary with the show without being overshadowed by the cancellation news.

The week of March 17th I [Walt] visited the set to present you with the fan club gift – a booklet of congratulatory messages from your friends and colleagues. I was so overwhelmed and blown away by everyone's kindness. It literally took me days to read through the booklet because I was so touched by the messages, that I couldn't read it through from start to finish. I don't know how you all did it.

It took a lot of sleuthing – emailing, phone calling, and old-fashioned letter writing. I've finished reading the book and have started to send thank you notes to everyone. I'm not through yet, but I'm emailing people to thank them for their generous and kind messages. I've actually been receiving thank you notes to my thank you notes. I just heard from Janie Badler, and we haven't seen each other in probably 35

years. She's in Australia now and I was completely delighted to hear from her.

We were able to contact people from each decade you were with the show. The earliest person we got was Roberto Ferrantini, the photographer who took the photos you used to help get the job on OLTL. Were there any that completely surprised you? Oh, yes – they were ALL a surprise. I think Roberto Ferrantini was the absolutely biggest surprise and Allan Miller [Dave Siegel] – that was a very long time ago.

The way that Roberto came about was through Joan D'Incecco, the casting director who hired you for OLTL. We were able to talk to her, and she still had your file with your publicity photo that your agent used to send to the show back in 1971. She mailed me the actual photo and on the back of the photo was Roberto's name. I found him on Facebook, I emailed him, and he responded – in ITALIAN! I was able to have it translated through Google and was able to

converse with him and he sent us the lovely message to use in the booklet. Isn't that incredible – I was VERY surprised – I thought "Holy Cow, how did they find him?" I didn't know if he even remembered me.

Obviously he has photographed thousands of people in the past 40+ years and he remembered you. His photographs of me were my favorite ones that were ever, ever, EVER taken, because they were so real. They had me outside with very little makeup – actually, no makeup at all. I was very young, and they were lovely.

That's what Joan said – besides your audition, she said that picture did it for her. When she saw that picture she said, "We've found our Viki Lord." You had that look that they wanted. I was so happy that we were able to contact both Joan and Roberto.

a viki moment to remember



Banks fraud

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You know whom we heard from after the fact? Teri Keane! Oh really?!

Yes – we sent individualized notes to all of the people whom we contacted from the past, to let them know how much we appreciated their work (like Teri). [Teri played Naomi Vernon, Will Vernon’s wife when Farley Granger played Will.] I just remember that death scene when she took her life and she thought Brad was going to find her – that really moved me, and that was 30 or so years ago! I had written that in a letter and she sent me a very nice note saying how much she appreciated it. She said, “It was unfortunate - I don’t think Erika and I really had scenes together, but I love her as an actress – please give her my best for her 40th Anniversary!” That is so very sweet. We really didn’t work together because we were in different stories within the show. She was very funny. She had been on Edge of Night for so long – she knew what she was doing. She was a funny and very nice lady.

So, the book was a hit with you. Yes, a very big hit. It is incredibly touching and so different and unusual, and something, especially now, that I will carry with me forever.

You know who was a big help was Brynn Thayer [Jenny Wolek]. She put us in touch with Julie Montgomery [Samantha Vernon] and Margaret Klenck [Edwina Lewis]. Oh good! You know I saw Maggie on the street not too long ago – isn’t that funny. She’s a therapist now.

Yes, she sent me a lovely email telling me what she was doing now. They are all such nice people! Judith Light [Karen Wolek] was great. You know, I don’t have a way to reach her – though I could send it to the theatre.

That’s what we did and she received it, along with Dan Lauria [Gus Thompson].

Are there any particular memories or people that come to mind as you think through your 40 years? Particular memories? Hundreds and

thousands of memories – too many to even discuss. I remember everybody.

The studio party was filmed and has been posted on YouTube – the video they showed was so touching! You appeared genuinely shocked! Oh, I was. I was totally surprised! Even though David Coleman (security) – the first thing he said when he saw the notice posted, “Really, a party on St. Patrick’s Day – on your anniversary?” And I said, “No, no, no – they have done this before. They have given me parties but they always tell me.” You know, you don’t spring that kind of thing on somebody, so I really thought it was just Frank saying that it’s been a rotten winter – long hard winter – let’s have a party! I was very surprised – I was stunned!

I could tell! And what a great reel they showed. Oh, wasn’t that special? Very, very special.

This week they are showing the special Viki episode in honor of your anniversary. Is there anything you can share about that? Just that it was unbelievable fun to do. We shot it over two days. We shot all of the stuff in the courtroom first. Then we shot the stuff in Viki’s mind – that was a full day – in the most amazing set I have ever seen. Roger Mooney did the most extraordinary job with that set. That set was really an idea of our director Larry Carpenter and Frank. They put that set together. It was just an amazing day.

What time did you start? Was it an early call? I came in early and we rehearsed for a long time. I came in at 7 am. We rehearsed from around 7:30 – 10:00. I had two doubles – two other women who were incredibly nice and very helpful. They worked so hard – because they had to learn everything as well. Even though you are shooting over the back, you can’t be holding a script.

They were basically shadowing everything you were doing. Yes, I did Viki first, then Jean, then Niki – so they were switching parts as well. You

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know with wigs and costumes – Susan Gammie did a remarkable job with the costumes. It was quite a day. We didn't finish until about 8:30 at night – but it was well worth it. Larry was amazing!

It just goes to show how much the show respects you - to dedicate an entire show where you are going to be in about every scene. I mean, they did that one other time for the breast cancer storyline but it's remarkable! I heard about this in December through Frank. He said, "Oh, we're planning a very special episode and I think everyone is going to enjoy it."

When they get these body doubles, I guess they have to get someone your height, your hair length...No, not hair, because they use wigs. There must



have been miscommunication because the first people they sent – and it wasn't casting's fault – were all wrong – one girl was almost 5' 10" and another girl was very short. And I thought, "No that really isn't going to work – we need somebody who is like 5'5" and about my weight." And that's what they did. They hired really nice, good people who understood exactly what it was they had to do. It is not an easy thing to do because they can't really act – they just have to feed me the lines, because if they start giving a performance, then I get confused as to what I'm going to do, and I have to react to what I'm going to do. And that is hard because – especially playing Viki first and reacting to Jean and Niki – I have to, in my mind, not listen to the actor playing the part – I have to know exactly how I'm going to be reading the lines and reacting to that.

They truly have to follow the script. Yes, absolutely – but they have to do it in a very flat way. They were terrific.

I can't wait to see it! Have you seen any of it? Nope, not a bit. I will watch it on Wednesday.

Why is Brian Kerwin leaving? Was it storyline dictated or did he want to leave? It was storyline dictated.

Do you think when Kim came on that that was their intention all along to break you guys up?

No, I don't think so. I think it developed as the story went on. I don't think they intended to get rid of him at all and then they thought this could actually be a kick off to more story for Viki. But I really have no idea what's in their minds.

Why did they have to use the storyline of him cheating with Echo to set it up for Charlie to leave? I have to say that it made me angry that they had to hurt Viki. I was hoping that Viki's alter, Jean, would come out to temporarily take care of Echo. (laughs) Nope, better story the other way.

Do you think they will kill Charlie off or will he leave town with his lover? He eventually leaves.

He does find out about Echo, right? Yes, he does.

How would you like to see the show end? Not a clue – it's not my job.

Do you like this new studio better than the one at 56 W. 66th? Yes, I do. I was very fond of the other studio - it was a cozy little home. I loved it. But this one affords more space - it's more practical, and it's a little more professional. And I love it.

If Erika could please share with us how it was working with Joan Copeland, Arthur Miller's sister. She played Viki's Aunt, Gwendolyn Lord Abbott, Richard's Mother, AKA Kiki Bourbon. Ms. Copeland returned probably a decade later playing Nora's Mother, Mrs. Hanan from Chicago, IL. It was lovely working with her! She was just herself – she's a very funny, very positive, outgoing woman. She came on and she played Aunt Gwen, and for years I have said that we should bring characters like that back – bring her back because she was funny. She was sort of

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Victor's wealthy sister who married Counts and Princes over in Europe. It was a delightful bit of history and it was a whole different type of character - somebody with a lot of authority and really very little patience for normal life. She was terrific.

Who is the next love interest? Reformed Clint? I did not like Charlie too much. I'm not sure where they are going, but it would make sense.

I have loved the Natalie and Viki scenes we have gotten lately. Your scenes with Melissa always come across so real and tender. Will there be more scenes of Viki and Natalie supporting each other coming up? I hope so.

This latest storyline arch has not been my favorite but I am grateful that it has given you something to sink your teeth into. Your portrayal of Viki has been phenomenal but so heartbreaking. After the Charlie stuff is over, what is next for Viki? You got me! I really don't know. I'm not working this week and I haven't seen the scripts for next week, so there you go.

Did you have fun filming those scenes with Kim Zimmer, when Viki finds Echo and Charlie in bed? Yes, I love Kim. She's a wonderful actress – but she is a GREAT, great lady. I have such fun with her, and we have fun together – we laugh a lot. Sometimes it is very hard to be that angry with her.

Is she still on the show? Yes, she's on – she has gone off to do a play and she should be back pretty soon. She was going to do Curtains for about three or four weeks in Houston, Texas, I think, and then she is coming back.

Does Tess, (Jessica's alter personality) hate Viki? Is that the reason why Tess asks for Niki? Tess asks for Niki because Niki will destroy any chance of Viki getting the baby. And she does hate Viki because Viki was weak and let Niki out and Niki is the reason that Tess exists. Yet it is a very complicated story – because I think actually Tess wouldn't hate Niki at all – because she was able to be out.

Great performances. So where do you see Viki headed in terms of romance? I have no idea, God knows, in 7 or 8 months – I have no idea.

Did you ever play Nick's mother on Special Unit (2001) that airs on SyFy network? You were given credit and only talked at the end, but it did not look or sound like you when you talked? Did you ever do this? Never, and I haven't a clue why my name is listed.

That is the weirdest thing Erika. On IMBD, your name is associated with this show – it's part of your resume on IMBD. So the show was on air two months ago, so I recorded it and this woman, who is unconscious, in a coma, looks exactly like you and then the final scene when the woman wakes up it resembles you. I know that it must be a different actress. It's not me.

I'll try to get that off your credit on IMBD.

What is the best thing you ever ate? Oh, God – best thing I ever ate? I haven't a clue; I've had so many good meals in my life.

If you could have something named after you, what would it be? A dish of food.

Do you have a guilty pleasure movie? It's not a guilty pleasure – I have a lot of favorite movies, and Bringing Up Baby is one of them. I love the movie Three Amigos – I find it hysterical. I have lots of favorite movies.

You had back surgery last year and you look wonderful now – can you share why you had the surgery? Because my back hurt! No, I had terrible sciatica.

I have a special needs son (Down Syndrome) and he's very fussy with his food. A long time ago Erika mentioned a recipe she makes that is a favorite in her family, and it is something like a scalloped ham dish, and I think one of the ingredients is peas. I might be wrong...sorry. Nathan certainly loves his ham, and of all the veggies, he loves peas. If she knows the recipe

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I'm talking about, could you please ask her???
I'll have to send it to you.

Have you traveled anywhere recently? Any travel plans? No.

Will you still be taking your annual August vacation now that taping ends November?
Don't know yet. I have to talk to Frank and see what he wants to do because I think after November I'm going to have a long vacation. So we'll see.

What is Amanda doing? Amanda is working and going to class and doing very well.

How is Michael? Is he in London now? No, he's here and he's looking for a job.

Any thoughts on the passing of Jacquie Courtney [Pat Ashley] and Farley Granger [Will Vernon]? Farley was older than Jacquie – Farley was a lovely guy...the sweetest, nicest man. He just didn't want to do daytime – he found it too taxing - and so he left by his own choice. I was stunned about Jacquie because she wasn't that old. But then again, I hadn't seen her or heard from her, or heard anything about her for so long, and obviously she was very ill.

It was skin cancer – melanoma. That's terrible – just terrible.

She was 64. She was the same age as I am.

I think she had semi retired from acting. I guess, I don't really know – that's why it is so strange. You know, there are people who just

kind of fall off the map. She was one of them. Nobody ever knew what she was up to.

It's incredible news that Roger Howarth is coming back to the show. Have you started working with him? No, I think Roger starts next week.

You suggested a while back that they should do a "Who's the real Todd" story. No, I didn't suggest it – they suggested it. I think that was their idea.

You commented on it. I think it is a great idea. You know, to have Roger, who obviously looks like the real Todd, come back, and then say, "Who is this other guy who has been saying he is Todd all along but doesn't look like Todd," I think is a great story.

You have been reading the messages on our 40th Anniversary Guestbook. Oh my, yes, I certainly have. It's unfathomable! They are all so lovely. It's very hard to deal with that kind of praise – it's very hard to deal with it. Then to have people thank me that much and say such nice things about me, it is very humbling. But I'm very grateful – very grateful and delighted that I have been able to bring some pleasure to some people through my work.

Have you been able to think much about what you will do once the show ends? Nope – I called my agent and said "Find me a job!"

We would love to see you, even if short term, have scenes with Susan Flannery at B&B. Would you consider doing a soap on the West Coast? Oh, absolutely!

Erika's Ham and Peas with Noodles

1 bag egg noodles	1 bag frozen peas, or fresh peas
1 pound cooked ham, cut into small pieces	1 tsp salt
1/4 pound butter or margarine	1 tsp pepper or to taste
4 eggs, separated	1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 cup sour cream	Bread crumbs

Boil the noodles in salted water. Separately, cream the butter with the 4 egg yolks, add the ham, the peas, the sour cream, salt and pepper. Beat the egg whites until stiff. Combine the cooked, drained noodles with the ham and peas mixtures, add the parmesan cheese and mix well, then fold in the beaten egg whites. Put into an oven proof casserole dish and sprinkle the top with bread crumbs and bake for one hour in a 400 degree oven.

thank you

The fan club reached out to the cast and crew that worked with Erika over the years. We were overwhelmed by the responses! We succeeded in our goal of getting friends from each decade Erika was on the show — and we were thrilled when we realized we had reached back to the people on the show from the first year.

Thank you to everyone who responded and especially to those listed below.

Roberto Ferrantini – Photographer – Italian photographer that shot Erika's photo used to get Viki role
Agnes Nixon – Creator of One Life to Live
Joan D'Incecco – ABC/OLTL Casting Director – Auditioned and hired Erika in 1971

OLTL Sixties Contributors

1968 **Doris Belack** – Anna Wolek Craig (1968-1977)
1968 **Allan Miller** – Dave Siegel (1968-1972)
1969 **Lynn Benesch Chester** – Meredith Lord Wolek (1969-1973, 1987)
1969 **Michael Storm** – Larry Wolek (1969-2004)
1969 **Lee Warrick** – Julie Siegel (1969-1974)

OLTL Seventies Contributors

1970 **Francesca James** – Marcy Wade (1970-1971)
1972 **Marilyn Chris** – Wanda Webb Wolek (1972-1976, 1980-1994)
1972 **Alice Hirson** – Eileen Riley Siegel (1972-1976)
1974 **Leonie Norton** – Julie Siegel Toland (1974-1976)
1975 **George Reinholt** – Tony Harris Lord (1975-1977)
1976 **Julia Montgomery Reede** – Samantha 'Sam' Vernon Buchanan Garretson (1976-1979, 1979-1981)
1977 **Jane Badler** – Melinda Cramer Janssen (1977-1981, 1983)
1977 **Judith Light** – Karen Wolek (1977-1983)
1977 **Lori March Williams** – Adele Huddleston (1977-1979) / Eugenia Randolph Lord
1978 **Hank Behar** – Director
1978 **Phyllis Behar** – Anna Wolek Craig (1978-1982)
1978 **Linda Dano** – Gretel Rae Washburn Cummings Faulkner Buchanan (1978-1980, 1999-2004)
1978 **Andrea Evans** – Tina Lord Roberts (1978-1981, 1985-1990, 2008)
1978 **Brynn Thayer** – Jenny Wolek Siegel Vernon Renaldi (1978-1986)
1979 **Margaret Klenc** – Edwina 'Cookie' Lewis Dane (1979-1985)

OLTL Eighties Contributors

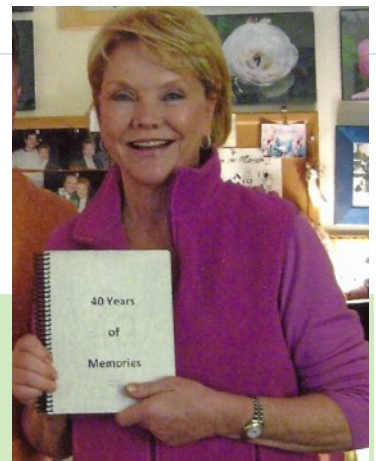
1980 **Tania Elg** – Olympia Buchanan (1980-1981)
1981 **Arlene Dahl** – Lucinda Schenck Wilson (1981-1984)
1982 **Shelly Burch** – Delilah Ralston Buchanan Garretson (1982-1987, 1988-1989, 2001)
1984 **Frank Converse** – Harry O'Neill (1984-1985, 1987)
1984 **Dan Lauria** – Gus Thompson (1984)
1984 **Paul Rauch** – Executive Producer (1984-1991)
1984 **Barb Treutelaar** – Didi O'Neill Buchanan (1984-1988)
1985 **Blair Underwood** – Bobby Blue (1985-1986)
1986 **Barbara Luna** – Maria Vasquez Roberts (1986-1987)
1988 **Jill Larson** – Ursula Blackwell (1988-1989)
1988 **John Loprieno** – Cordero 'Cord' Roberts (1988-2008)
1988 **Jessica Tuck** – Megan Gordon Harrison (1988-1992, 1993, 1999, and 2004.)

OLTL Nineties Contributors

1990 **Thom Christopher** – Carlo Hesser (1990-1992, 1996-1997, 2005, 2006, 2008-) / Mortimer Bern (1992-1993, 1997)
1990 **Erin Torpey** – Jessica Buchanan / Megan Buchanan (1990-2008)
1990 **Tonja Walker** – Alex Olanoff (1990-1997, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2009)
1991 **Laura Bonarrigo** – Cassie Cramer Carpenter (1991-1999, 2010)
1992 **Michael Malone** – Writer / Head writer (1992-2004)
1993 **Robyn Goodman** – Producer (1993-1994)
1994 **Susie Bedsow Horgan** – Executive Producer (1994-1996)
1994 **Josh Griffith** – Writer / Head writer (1994-2004)
1994 **Lonny Price** – Director (circa 1994 +)
1994 **Krista Tesreau** – Tina Clayton Lord Roberts (1994-1996)
1997 **Donnie Jeffcoat** – Joey Buchanan (1997-2001)
1999 **Mark Derwin** – Ben Davidson (1999-2002, 2004, 2008)

OLTL Millennium Contributors

2000 **Laurie Cacioli** – Hair stylist (2000-2009)
2003 **Dan Gauthier** – Kevin Buchanan (2003-2010)
2006 **January Lavoy** – Noelle Stubbs (2006-2009)



Erika and the booklet of messages from her friends in the soap community and those she work(ed) with on OLTL.

Peers in the Soap Community Contributors

Peter Bergman – Jack Abbott, Young & the Restless
Jeanne Cooper – Katherine Chancellor Murphy, Young & the Restless
Jane Elliot – Tracy Quartermaine, General Hospital
Susan Flannery – Stephanie Douglas Forrester, The Bold & the Beautiful
Josh O'Connell – Associate Producer Young & the Restless
Michelle Stafford – Phyllis Summers Newman, Young & the Restless
Jess Walton – Jill Foster Abbott, Young & the Restless

Joan D'Incecco was the casting director that hired Erika back in 1971. We spoke with Joan to get her memories of that time for the 40th Anniversary Booklet. She still had her file on Erika and was gracious enough to share with us one of the reviews she was given when considering Erika for the role of Victoria Lord.

Joan says, "Erika Slezak walked into my office and I found my Victoria Lord."

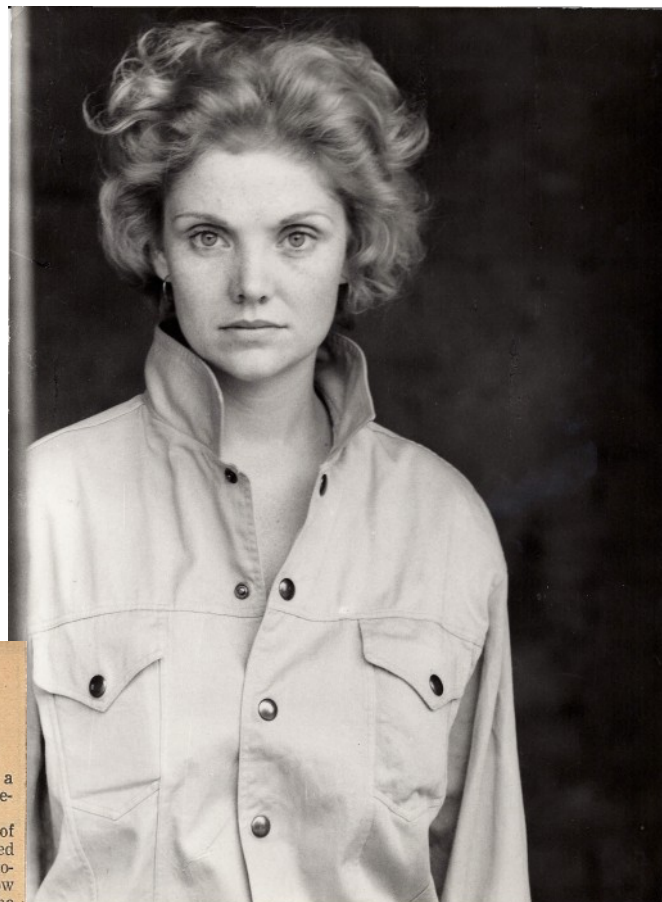


Photo by Roberto Ferrantini

Review BUFFALO COURIER EXPRESS - 5 FEB. 1971

Erika Slezak Superb in 'Othello'

By BOB SOKOLSKY

There are, undoubtedly, better ways to introduce William Shakespeare to the Studio Arena Theater.

On the other hand, there could also be many worse and it is on that count that a new venture for Buffalo's downtown playhouse achieved a measure of success Thursday night.

It is for now a partial success and it has come with director Louis Criss' staging of "Othello," a monumental work that at times has struck dramatic excellence while less frequently trying, perhaps, too wisely rather than too well.

Virtues Seen

Certainly, there is much to recommend in this "Othello." There is even the impression that there will be much more once the production has steadied itself, balanced out and settles into a stage that should be ready to receive it.

Yet, just as certainly, there are flaws to correct, rough edges to smooth off and style to be obtained.

In present form, Criss' work is a strong effort, marred primarily by its reaching from one extreme to another. Slow in starting, the play comes to some thundering heights late in its first act only to remain at such a pitch that it leaves itself no contrast off which to play its softer moments.

Role Overdone

That scene, especially true of Clebert Ford's handling of the title role, a portrayal that borders upon the overdone, all the while indicating a great quality that may yet come to the surface.

Opening evening Ford was a total energy source, given to too much grimacing, too many the-

"OTHELLO"
THE CAST

Othello Clebert Ford
Brabantio ... Frederic Warriner
Cassio Tom V. V. Tammi
Iago Nicholas Kepros
Roderigo John McMurtry
Duke of Venice ... Bryan Hull
Montano Robert Patterson
Lodovico Stephen Keep
Gratiano David Zirlin
Desdemona ... Erika A. Slezak
Emilia Nancy Zala
Bianca ... Carol Mayo Jenkins
Messenger, Gentleman,
Herald Tom Mardirosoian
Attendants ... Andrew Deutch,
Stu Goldstein, Al Meyers, John Stevenson

Directed by Louis Criss. Written by William Shakespeare. Playing at the Studio Arena Theater through Feb. 28.

Clebert Ford
... 'Othello'

... But opening evening Ford also was a potentially fine Othello and the suspicion exists

that his Moor could yet be a stellar figure before this engagement ends.

The same might be said of Nicholas Kepros' Iago, played with an air of conniving joviality that is semi-effective now and should be more so once he gains more control of the role.

To a lesser degree, it might also be said of most of this Studio Arena company, some of whose members appear out of place in their assignments, but most of whom indicate a promise of better things to come.

Portrayal Superb

The lone exception to that is the Desdemona of Erika A. Slezak. Miss Slezak is not hinting of potential. For her it is already present, beautifully developed and carefully brought out. The result is a superb portrayal, filled with all the qualifications the role could require.

Criss' staging suffers from a setting in a rather undefined period of time. Still, once its pacing is made firm that fault could yet dissolve into an offering that will never rival Stratford but could still command respect.

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