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Comedian enjoys life of stardom after one-woman show success

EDITOR'S NOTE — Since her one-woman show, "Without You I'm Nothing," opened off-Broadway in March, Sandra Bernhard has at last tasted the stardom she dreamed about as an insecure little girl in Arizona.

Critics praise her brilliant monologues of fantasy and pop cultural commentary. Night-life columnists dog her through downtown forays. Success has, unfortunately, led to severe interview burnout.

She refuses to talk about her early, struggling days as a manicurist. ("Oh," she pleads. "It's old news.")

If she's called a stand-up comic one more time, she'll spit venom. "You can't call my show stand-up comedy," she says. "It's somewhere between humorous theater and rock 'n' roll."

Hot and bothered, Bernhard heads back to Sandraland. A question about her favorite time period provides the catalyst.

"The Forties," she says, and her eyes flash. "There was a sense of glamour and excitement that I feel is lacking now."

A smile sticks on her face. She sounds excited.

"It would've been great to be friends with Vivien Leigh and Bette Davis and Katharine Hepburn..."

Real life, in Bernhard's case, began in Flint, Mich., 33 years ago.

"My father's a proctologist," she says in her show. "My mother's an abstract artist. That's how I view the world."

All true. She spent her teen years in Scottsdale, Ariz., then after high school graduation in 1973, followed in her three older brothers' footsteps to an Israeli kibbutz, where she worked for eight months.

"I was scared to leave home, but I wanted to get out of there," says Bernhard, who never exactly fit into Scottsdale's suburban mold. "I had this weird kind of dichotomy of feeling really competent and at the same time feeling really scared of what people were thinking of me."

She demanded approval and got it by performing. An addiction to the spotlight took hold early.

"It was my second nature to be dramatic or funny or entertaining," she says. "In school I was always sitting outside the door because I'd talk out of turn. They should encourage kids to talk out of turn. It's the only time they make any sense."

— Sandra Bernhard

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So what better way to make a living than by talking.

Upon her return from Israel, she headed to Los Angeles to kick off her comedy career. There she served time in a posh Beverly Hills salon as a manicurist.

"It was weird," she says. "Kind of trashy. Why not?"

She spent almost a decade on her

have survived ("Tina Turner is us, of course") and tattered donna roams the streets alone.

"People in the know like it when talk about them," Bernhard says.

Madonna liked it so much that she and Bernhard have become friends.

These two and co-starlet Jenifer "Dirty Dancing" Grey have become so pals that Michael Musto, a life columnist for The Village Voice, dubbed them "the witches of Elysium, delightfully so."

Such associations bring Sandraland closer and closer to reality, making Bernhard a bona-fide star.

"Fame is immortal," says Bernhard. "When people reach that of success, they have a certain mortality that's very appealing. Private club."

Don't get her wrong, though. "I make fun of celebrities because being famous is the only thing they're about," she says. "It's not about that with me. I don't really long in their world, and there's a select group of people there I want to be a part of."

"Accompanying the stardom to be another unique point of and intelligence and style. Otherwise, what's the exchange? 'I'm ulous, you're fabulous?'"

If Bernhard has only just summated her relationship with seductress called Stardom, the veritable orgy awaits her. This August Harper and Row will publish her story collection "Confessions, Pretty Lady." In the fall she'll appear in Nicholas Roeg's film "Track," as a libidinous nurse.

She also hopes to move her Broadway show to Los Angeles, where she can drive a car and indulge her fascination with lances. In New York, she says, "I just pass you on the street."

"When I pass an intersection in Los Angeles and see flashing lights, she writes in "Confessions," "the thing I want to do is slow down so if anyone was hurt."

"Will someone be lying there to a disfigured, warped motorist, barely clinging to life, bleeding, praying, lost in another world, want to see things that I would want to have happen to anyone I love."

In L.A. she'll continue her performances while rewriting a screenplay called "It came from the land," which she plans to star in as a cynical writer. "Writing screenplays is a bit of a drag," she says. "I'll stick to books, essays, short stories. They're more enjoyable."

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She demanded approval and got it by performing. An addiction to the spotlight took hold early.

"It was my second nature to be dramatic or funny or entertaining," she says. "In school I was always sitting

feet in comedy clubs, and gained a following at L.A.'s Comedy Store.

In 1983 came the Big Break: Director Martin Scorsese cast her as a rich neurotic who was involved in the kidnapping of Jerry Lewis in "The King of Comedy."

"I don't like comedy clubs," Bernhard says. "Comedy is a very schlocky kind of outlet for performers."

"The King of Comedy" took her away from all that, and provided her with her first appearance with Letterman, an old friend from the Comedy Store.

Eventually she put together "Without You I'm Nothing." Backed by a band, she sings rock 'n' roll, dims the lights and turns her flashlight on the audience, reads an airplane menu from first-class, shares some of her favorite fantasies and winds it all up by shedding a mink coat and singing "Little Red Corvette" in a bra and panties.

"We're going to film the show," she says, "and inter-cut it with all these witnesses, a la 'Reds,' where people create this myth about me and my career."

She wants to cast among others, Mary Tyler Moore, Lily Tomlin and Madonna, who told Bernhard she loved being mentioned in the show.

Bernhard shares a post-nuclear fantasy, where only the strongest

well. I was proud of him," Jason Jenkins said.

Aside from some hazards, rodeoing is just like any other sport, he said.

"Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect," Jenkins said as he watched his son and two other boys during an afternoon workout.

Several years ago, Jenkins' brother, Ray, became the first American Cowboy at the high school level in Kentucky.

The brothers went on to win a team roping event at the National American International Livestock show in Louisville, a rodeo that attracts the best cowboys from across the United States.

Youth says rodeos like any other sport

FAIRVIEW, Ky. (AP) — Jason Jenkins twirled the lasso above his head as he stood patiently and waited for the steer to run from the chute on the sidelines.

When it did, he perfectly timed his release and roped the animal like an old cowhand who had been doing it for years.

But the steer, who had a good running start, wasn't going to give up easily and appeared to be ready to take the 12-year-old boy for a wild ride when Jason's father, Jimmy, shouted from the sidelines, "Sit down! Sit down!"

The boy dropped to the dirt and held tight until the steer grew tired and relaxed enough for him to remove the rope.

Seven years ago, Jenkins had

shouted, "Let go! Let go!" when his son had successfully roped his first steer but forgot to turn loose of the rope in the process because he was so surprised and excited about catching the animal.

The steer dragged him the length of the corral, father and son recalled, both laughing.

The boy began learning to rope and ride at such an early age, in fact, that some of his schoolteachers have accused him of telling a tall tale or two about "roping wild cows with his daddy."

"One teacher sent home a letter saying we shouldn't let his imagination run so wild," laughed Jenkins.

Jenkins hopes his son will someday earn a college scholarship with the skills he's learning in the corral.

Jenkins said he realizes that rodeoing can be at times be a very dangerous sport.

"I'm not going to push him to practice if he doesn't want to. But when we're in here, it's all business," he said. "You can't fool around in here because you could easily get tangled up in one of those ropes and snap off a thumb or finger in an instant."

During the team roping event — the object of which is for two riders to rope the front and back of a steer — the son "heads" and the father "heels."

The father and son team competed in their first rodeo in early July at Sturgis.

"He handled the pressure real

well. I was proud of him," Jason Jenkins said.

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 - Swallow It Whole**
Wed., Sept. 7, 9:00 @ The House
 - Delta Chi Smoker***
Thurs., Sept. 8, 7:00-9:00 @ The House (Coat & Tie Required)
 - Open Party**
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