



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for Comin' Uptown

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[[advertisement]]

[[image - color photograph of a red rose]]

"With torrential force, Bette Midler sweeps 'The Rose' into a film experience ... an extravagant performance and an explosive debut."
Gene Shalit
NBC-TV

[[image - black & white photograph of Bette Midler singing]]

BETTE MIDLER
ALAN BATES
A MARVIN WORTH/AARON RUSSO PRODUCTION

A MARK RYDELL FILM THE ROSE

FREDERIC FORREST

She gave...
And gave...
And gave.
Until she had
nothing left
to give.

Produced by Marvin Worth & Aaron Russo Directed by Mark Rydell
Screenplay by Bill Kerby and Bo Goldman Story by Bill Kerby
Executive Producer Tony Ray Director of Photographer Vilmos
Zsigmond, A.S.C.
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Records and Tapes Read the Warner Book

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37-year-old Mr. Klein could easily have passed for an after hours businessman rather than a comedian. On his dressing room wall was the 1979 Tony nomination for "Best Actor in a Musical," some fan letters, and a picture of his wife Brenda Boozer, Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano.

"The other thing that attracted me to They're Playing Our Song," continued Klein, was Neil Simon. He just about custom-made the role for me ... Of course, I naturally sort of identified with the character. I'm a nervous, neurotic guy like Vernon. I used to have this thing about pleasing men in positions of authority, which obviously goes back to



trying to please my father," continued Mr. Klein, who spent three years in analysis a few years back. "But that stopped on this show. I wanted to please Neil but I think we had an equal admiration for each other. What's amazing about him is that if a certain line doesn't work he just knits his brow, disappears for a few minutes and returns with a new one. I don't know anyone else in the business who can do that.

Robert Klein said that doing the show eight times a week is like an "aerobic exercise" that leaves him physically spent. "Some nights I drop three or four pounds," he said. "but what I love about the theatre is the basic concept. It's not interchangeable with any other kind of entertainment. Films are light rays on celluloid. the theatre is the real thing freshly made for you like a Caesar salad on your table. The phlegm on my vocal cords is half the beauty of it. if I see someone not responding in the front row I start directing things toward them. I'm used to having people respond."

Henry Kissinger has come backstage to see him. So have Ginger Rogers and Barbra Streisand. "Katharine Hepburn said that I reminded her of Bogie. Ingrid Berman thought that lines in the show referring to her were added just because she was in the audience that evening." He shook his head and laughed. "The recognition has tickled me," he said, still grinning. "Ego-wise, it's been very satisfying. I can get more money doing an hour and 20 minute concert once a week than I do performing eight times a week on Broadway, but it's all been worth it."

Robert Klein is the son of Ben and Frieda Klein, respectively a textile salesman and a medical secretary before they retired to Florida. He also has an older sister Rhoda. "All my family was funny in their own crowd," he said. "But we were basically middle-class Bronx folk. I slept on a foldout sofa in the living room. My sister would point at it and say, 'Go to your room!' When I told my father that I wanted to be a comedian, he said, 'I want to back you in this but I don't know anything about show business. I'll do what I can.' That was enough for me."

As a kid the closest Mr. Klein got to show business was when at age 14 he was on the Ted Mack "Amateur Hour" with his own singing group the Teen Tones. They lost to a one-armed piano player.

"I don't know why," he said, "but comedy is my gift. I think the idea of getting up and making people laugh is very special. My schtick began with my friends. I believe the world is full of amateur comedians. You start by making your friends' lives a little easier, by making them laugh. The next step is strangers. The ultimate, of course, which separates the professionals from everyone else is when you can make people laugh for a fee at a place and time not of your own choosing.

"The person who said comedy is hardest speaks the truth. If you asked me how many comedians I respect, the list wouldn't be long."

At Alfred University where he majored in political science and later at the Yale School of Drama where he spent one year, Mr. Klein became an admirer of Lenny Bruce. "I never saw him in person but his records excited me. Bruce was special to me because he was hysterically funny, which is the main mission of any comedian. But Bruce had the added dimension of being relevant."

Mr. Klein is also a big fan of Jonathan Winters. "I think that if you combined Winters and Bruce you'd have the consummate comedian. Winters would never engage you intellectually in what he did, but he has the great power to change his face and voice."

After Mr. Klein left Yale and was doing stand-up work as substitute teacher in Westchester County he used to try out his material at Monday Night Hootenanny in

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