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The Weekend Sun
Entertainment
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ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR • BART JACKSON • 732-2120 / FAX 732-2521 SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 1994 C7

COLUMN one

JESSIE nominees Marilyn Norry, Chancz Perry, and Jennifer Fahrni

NOMINEES and theatre fans are getting ready for Sunday's Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards, which honor outstanding achievements in the Vancouver professional theatre community. The awards ceremony starts at 7:30 p.m. at the Vogue Theatre, 918 Granville St. Tickets are still available through the Arts Club Box Office or TicketMaster, 280-4444. Watch for the winners in Monday's Entertainment section.

BETTE GIG

Bette Midler will be coming to the Pacific Coliseum on Tuesday, Aug. 23. Tickets come in three tiers: $69.50, $55.50, and $35.50 plus service charge. American Express holders get first crack at the tickets this Saturday, through the Front of the Line program. Card holders can call 280-2639 to purchase tickets. The rest of the public has to wait till June 19 then call TicketMaster.

QUEEN KUDOS FOR COLLINS

British rock star **Phil Collins** was honored by Britain's **Queen Elizabeth** yesterday for his charity work. The 42-year-old singer, who won fame with rock group Genesis before becoming a solo performer, was made a Lieutenant in the Royal Victorian Order.

The title is a personal recognition bestowed by the Queen for services to the realm. The rock star works for the Prince's Trust, which helps disadvantaged young people.

Collins was among 1,000 Britons, including actor **Alec Guinness** and actress **Diana Rigg**, who were honored in a list to mark the Queen's official birthday.

Also honored were **Lord Owen**, the EC's peace negotiator in Yugoslavia, former English soccer star **Bobby Charlton** and **Tim Rice**, who linked up with **Andrew Lloyd Webber** to write a string of sell-out musicals.

— *Reuter*

RALPH FOR LAUGHS

Ralph Benmergui, the sacked variety show host, returns to TV this summer with a two-minute comedy routine recorded at last summer's International Comedy Festival in Montreal.

On the slate with such accomplished comedians as *SeinfeldS* **Michael Richards**, *Kid in the Hall's* **Scott Thompson** and **Mike MacDonald**, Benmergui is genuinely funny in the annual CBC-TV series *Just for Laughs*.

The eight-week program of highlights from the Montreal festival starts Monday (10 p.m., CBC), with Benmergui on the show's final episode.

"I come from that world and I hadn't been part of it for a long time," Benmergui, 43, said. "So it was important to me that I do well because these were peers, and this is the best standup festival in North America."

Since it was cancelled mid-season last January, Benmergui has made the occasional return to radio, both on CBC and Toronto's CFRB. But he says he is spending most of his time writing a still untitled autobiography.

"It's sort of still evolving really. It's kind of about being in the business 20 years, the different things I've done — stand up, and singing and radio and television — and the people I've met."

Although it will be ready sooner, Benmergui has asked his publisher for a spring 1995 release.

"I didn't want it to come out in the fall because I don't want everyone to be just sitting around waiting for me to do a *Friday Night* story. I mean, I think everybody has had their cup of blood. It's time to move on."

— *Canadian Press*

TV HIGHLIGHTS

SATURDAY: PBS's annual *Black Adder Marathon* (1 p.m. on KCTS) runs 17 episodes over the next 11 hours, with more episodes coming up Monday. Romp through the centuries with **Rowan Atkinson**.

Those who aren't laughing at the *Stanley Cup Hockey* game (8 p.m. on CBC) can get a giggle from *Best of Comic Relief* (7 p.m. on ABC), featuring routines by **Billy Crystal**, **Robin Williams**, **Richard Belzer** and **Louie Anderson**.

This week's *Saturday Night Live* rerun (12:05 a.m. on NBC and U TV) features **Charlton Heston** and musician **Paul Westerberg**. The best of late night movie offerings: **Eric Bogosian** in a stunning one-man show in *Talk Radio* (12:05 a.m. on BCTV); **Max von Sydow** as a Swedish widower in *Pelle the Conqueror* (1:35 a.m. on CHEK); and **Diane Keaton** and **Mel Gibson** in the mysteriously romantic *Mrs. Soffel* (2:30 a.m. on KVOS).

SUNDAY: *Pledge* drive continues with the singing of **Luciano Pavarotti** in *My Heart's Delight* (KCTS at 7:30 p.m.). Later in the evening you can catch **Kiri Te Kanawa** do her thing (9 p.m. on KNOW).

What with *Melrose Place* in reruns now, soap addicts may get a kick out of a repeat of *Dynasty: The Reunion* (9 p.m. on U TV), a 1991 effort that brought back most of the cast for one final fling.

See the best of Broadway on *The Tony Awards* (9 p.m. on CBS). **Anthony Hopkins** and **Amy Irving** are the hosts, and scheduled performers include *Grease* star **Rosie O'Donnell** and last year's winner, **Martin Short**.

BARBRA IN CONCERT

Rough notes open fans' trip to heaven and back

NICHOLAS READ
Vancouver Sun

SAN JOSE, CALIF.

THERE WERE moments in the first half of Barbra Streisand's second San Jose concert on Thursday when it wasn't quite "like ballet."

The latyngitis she suffered two weeks ago in Los Angeles led to a raspiness in some songs that never would have been there otherwise.

Not that there weren't glorious moments too. *People* was sweet and stylish. *Don't Rain On My Parade* was performed with the same heart-charging verve so memorable in the film *Funny Girl*. *Or, A Clear Day*, a song that shows off the famous Streisand pipes like few others, was spectacular.

But other songs suffered slightly, both from a less-than-healed voice and the now equally famous Streisand nerves.

At her best, no one can work a ballad like Barbra. She has a way of holding a note against the ropes that can stop your heart. She tugs and tugs and tugs, then releases it, and slays you.

She almost did that with *He Touched Me*, but what could have been magic wasn't because she took it to fast. She let go too soon.

The whole first half — 12 songs in all — went a little too briskly, as if she didn't believe the audience loved her quite as much as they said they did.

After the interval, however, she was sublime. In changing her clothes — from a flowing and formal black velvet and chiffon evening gown with diamonds, to a less dressy white suit with waistcoat and ankle-length skirt — she changed her attitude. Suddenly she was relaxed, and the voice was as good as it gets.

In 11 more songs, including *The Way We Were*, *You Don't Bring Me Flowers*, the rare *Lazy Afternoon* "dusted off from 1973," *My Man*, which she described as "the classic victim song," and *Somewhere*, the finale — she was at her best. And to her fans, nothing else is as good as that.

The show itself is a little unwieldy. The stage is someone's idea — hers probably — of a French Provincial drawing room with heavy white curtains, faux antiques, two divans, flowers, a tea service. Too much.

There is also too much psychological fanfare. Streisand has been in therapy for years. And clearly she's still not off the couch. In introducing *On A Clear Day*, she said she finally was able to see what the song means.

Her use of film footage seems self-congratulatory sometimes, but at other times, as in *A Piece Of Sky* from *Yentl*, it's used to breathtaking effect. When the live Streisand sang harmony with the Streisand on film, it brought the house down and deservedly so. She took it to heaven and back.

Streisand the film-maker, the collector, the perfectionist, obviously delights in all the trappings. So let her. But for the fans, it's enough after 28 years away from the concert stage that she simply gets up and sings.

Never mind the rough moments early on, at least she was there. After 28 years, she was finally there.

STREISAND: Sublime in the second half

Culture's stock exchange

People power: With a winning cover formula and a little chequebook journalism the magazine delivers modern morality tales

HESTER RICHES
Vancouver Sun

MONDAY MORNING at the magazine stand. Here I am, making my ritual stop. And there SHE is again. The pouting princess on the cover of *People*. "DIANA'S DARING NEW LIFE" the headline proclaims. "Topless bathing? Holistic healing? Aromatherapy? Anything goes as a liberated Diana struggles to find herself."

I'd rather not find her on the cover of this weekly magazine. It seems her suspiciously shy smile graces *People* magazine's cover every other week.

I exaggerate. The charts included in *Inside People* (Villard Books, $25.95), a new book by Judy Kessler to mark the magazine's 20th anniversary, record that, in fact, Diana, Princess of Wales has been on the cover of *People* a mere 31 times since 1981. This must be It's 32nd shot. But that number still makes her a record-holder for *People* covers, and she's back up front this week only because she sells magazines.

Kessler's book is fascinating if only for its obsessive tracking of such statistics as the Di sales charts.

It turns out the folks behind *People* itself are similarly obsessed. If nothing else, Kessler absorbed the *People* philosophy during her two-year stint as a staff reporter.

In the magazine's 20-year history, newsstand sales (rather than subscriptions) have been key to the success of the magazine. A bad cover can mean a $1 million loss in circulation and advertising revenues. So they actually care that while Kevin Costner and Robin Williams movies are extremely popular, their mugs won't sell magazines. And even though Princess Di and Julia Roberts won't give interviews, their smiles alone can peddle the product.

Solving the mysteries of who sells *People* prompted the magazine's original editor, Richard Stolley, to arrive at the following formula:

Young is better than old.
Pretty is better than ugly.
Rich is better than poor.
TV is better than music.
Music is better than movies.
Movies are better than sports.
And anything is better than politics.

Kessler notes: "After John Lennon died in 1980, and the tribute to him on the cover of the magazine in December of that year became the bestselling cover in *People's* history, an amendment was added to the formula.

And nothing is better than a dead celebrity."

Not that they wish anyone dead, but the staff writers at *People* have become masters of the celebrity obit. Most journalists dread writing them — the industry joke is that it's the way to start out or end up one's career. But *People* puts its top people on the hearse-chasing beat, and nearly every year since 1980, a dead celebrity has made the best-sellers' list: Princess Grace, John Belushi, Karen Carpenter, Jessica Savitch, Richard Burton, Ricky Nelson, Joan Rivers (after her husband committed suicide), Christina Onassis, Lucille Ball, Gilda Radner, Rebecca Schaeffer, Princess Caroline's husband, and River Phoenix. Kurt Cobain and Jackie Onassis helped get 1994 off to a fine start.

Given the unique challenges of celebrity journalism today, after the star's death is when it's easiest to flesh out a good story. At least *People* doesn't have to arrange access through the star's Hollywood publicist.

And therein lies the other half — the non-statistical side — of Kessler's tale. In the years since *People* started publishing, control of celebrities has been increasingly turned over to personal publicists and studios. The negotiations for the rights to Burt Reynolds' romance with Dinah Shore involved intense negotiations, and years later Reynolds' learned from this experience and sold the rights to *People* (for $50,000 US) to photograph his wedding to Loni Anderson.

Julia Roberts and Lyle Lovett had a *People* photographer's concert photos of the two of them, taken on the night of their wedding, confiscated by police. While the photographer battled in court to win them back, Roberts' publicists negotiated with *People* to sell their own photographs of the wedding itself.

Often, the magazine involves itself in a style of chequebook journalism. They pay a source a fee, through a lawyer or photographer, and the story is written by a staff reporter in the source's voice. It's only slightly cleaner than *Hard Copy* or *The Enquirer* methods.

Still, celebs choose to tell all to *People* — oftentimes when they're down on their luck, realizing that the standards of this newsweekly still beat the tabs. A 13-year-old Drew Barrymore, still in rehab recovering from drug and alcohol addiction, cried her way through her interviews, certain that it was easier to face the inevitable with a writer of her choosing. Oprah Winfrey told them "I'll never diet again" back in 1991, while some part of her probably knew deep down that more calorie-counting was in her future. Any week now, I expect Don Johnson to pop his head out of the Betty Ford clinic to pose for a *People* story (it surely won't be the cover, will it?), and I'll buy it, knowing this won't be the final chapter.

Please see PEOPLE, C10

BETTER READ WHEN DEAD:

PEOPLE WRITERS have become masters of the celebrity obit — (clockwise from top left) Princess Grace, Kurt Cobain, John Lennon and Gilda Radner

TOP TEN BESTSELLING COVERS EVER*

John Lennon 1940-1980: A Tribute (12/22/80) (2,544,000)
Princess Grace 1929-1982: A Tribute (9/27/82) (2,023,000)
Nice Work, Luv: Fergie and Andy Marry (5/4/86) (2,590,000)
Oh Boy! The Palace Plans a Future for Diana's Baby (7/5/82) (2,576,000)
Good Show! (Charles & Diana's Wedding) (6/3/81) (2,551,000)
Olivia Newton-John, Dressed Lightning (7/31/78) (2,508,000)
Karen Carpenter: Death Comes at 32 (2/21/83) (2,506,000)
Brooke Shields in The Blue Lagoon (8/11/80) (2,494,000)
Priscilla Presley Talks (2,461,000) (6/20/79)
Why Farrah Split (2,461,000) (6/20/79)

*Newsstand sales — excluding year-end anniversary, and Readers' Poll issues.

BOTTOM TEN WORST-SELLING COVERS EVER

Hillary Clinton: The First 100 Days (976,000) (5/10/93)
American Hostages in Lebanon (1,009,000) (7/18/86)
Michael Caine (1,039,000) (5/4/87)
Jay Leno (1,068,000) (11/30/87)
Avenging Sgt. Kenneth Ford (1,112,000) (4/29/96)
The Return of David & Shaun Cassidy (1,128,000) (11/1/93)
Jacqueline Bisset & Alexander Godunov (4/1/85) (1,133,000)
Broadcast News (1,139,000) (2/1/88)
Fabio (1,150,000) (10/4/93)
Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty (1,150,000) (5/25/87)

ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN POLITICS:

THE FORMULA is no secret — (top to bottom) John Kennedy Jr., Julia Roberts and Lyle Lovett

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