



ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW



VOL. 3 NO. 67

December 30, 1988

FREE

Meadowbrook Cinemas

**She's smart, beautiful, funny, talented.
So why isn't Susan Sarandon a star?**

By Joanne Kaufman

“SOMEONE ONCE TOLD SUSAN SARANDON: ‘YOU’VE BEEN DRIVING ALONG in Chevies too long. What you need is a vehicle.’ The speaker wasn’t talking about automobiles. These days, people are telling Sarandon, ‘You’re on the brink, you’re on the brink. I’ll take you and change all that.’”

“I don’t know what they’re talking about,” says Sarandon flatly. “I don’t think I’m on the brink of anything. Prove it to me,” she challenges. “Bring me some extraordinary project.”

All afternoon, the telephone rings in Sarandon’s Greenwich Village penthouse apartment, still decorated for a friend’s birthday party held several nights earlier. On the line: a number of friends, her agent’s assistant, her agent, the organizer of a Frank Capra tribute that Sarandon will be attending in Los Angeles. “Will there be accommodations for those of us outside the star system?” Sarandon wants to know.

The doorbell sounds a few times: her publicist’s assistant, who says her boss has a mysterious ailment, the elevator man with a package. But no one phones or charges in with an extraordinary project.

In the next several months, Sarandon has two movies coming out, both with major stars, potentially providing the same sort of one-two punch—*Suspect* followed by *Moonstruck*—that pushed her

Witches of Eastwick costar Cher to the top this past year. But the doe-eyed Sarandon (pronounced Sar-an-don) seems under no particular illusion that either *Sweet Hearts Dance* (costarring Don Johnson), the story of what happens when a Wendy type marries a Peter Pan type, or *Bull Durham* (costarring Kevin Costner), which could be billed as the *Pygmalion* of the sports world, will push her over the brink. What will happen with the film she’s now working on, *January Man*, with Kevin Kline, remains to be seen.

Becoming a star certainly has to do with good fortune, timing, and backing as much as anything else. And Sarandon will tell you that she doesn’t think she’s had great luck or gotten any significant help along the way; no one’s championing her, creating a project expressly for her, writing a script precisely with her in mind. But pushing off from the brink requires more than luck and people who really believe in you; it also requires single-mindedness. Sarandon seems at least as interested in real life as in reel life. If there are scripts lying around the apartment, they are obscured by the crayons, paintbrushes, and drawings of her three-year-

old daughter, Eva. And she devotes a lot of her time to political causes. Acting is a priority for Sarandon, not the priority.

“The problem is that having the power to get progressively more demanding parts involves some cognizance of the way the system works,” she says. “It’s pretty tough to be completely out of it, especially if you’re a woman. You have to address at some point the issues of building a power base. That can happen if something you’re in inadvertently becomes a hit.”

There have been no such inadvertencies in Sarandon’s eighteen-year career. For the most part, she has had to content herself with critical and artistic successes, such as *Pretty Baby* and *Atlantic City* (for which she received a Best Actress Oscar nomination), with being the chief reason to see such movies as *Tempest*, *Loving Couples*, and *Compromising Positions*, and with being called “mystically sexy” by someone in a preview audience for *The Hunger*. “That was a pretty interesting combination,” she says.

In the last few years, Sarandon, 41, has made more of an effort, if not to create “a power base,” then at least to take her career more seriously. “I’ve done my best with what’s been offered to me,” she says, “and turned down things that seemed repetitive.”

Sarandon concedes that maybe, yes, sure, she could use a vehicle. “But it seems so ignorant to me when people say, ‘Why did you choose that movie?’” she says. “I mean, when an actor chooses to do something, it’s a leap of faith, practically Kierkegaardian in scope.” Sarandon insists she’s never made an obvious blunder. But she did say no when asked to consider *Romancing the Stone*—she was unwilling to give up a part in a play.

“It’s all cyclical. Sometimes you’re with a director who’s just done an extraordinary film, and the next one isn’t quite so good. And some movies I’ve been in weren’t even able to get distribution for a year and then turned out to be very well received—like *Atlantic City*. There’s just no way of predicting. You don’t know you’re doing a B movie when you set out to do it.”

Sarandon didn’t set out to do movies at all, grade B or otherwise. Growing up in Metuchen, New Jersey, as Susan Abigail Tomalin, the eldest of nine children, she mainly wanted to get out of town. Her first stop was Catholic University in Washington, D.C., where she majored in drama. It was an exciting place to be in the ‘60s.

“We were blessed with so many specific issues that weren’t so cloudy as issues are now,” says Sarandon. “I was there when Washington burned and through all the various assassinations. It was a powerful time. I was very idealistic, which I thought was part of being young, but now I think it’s just part of my nature.”

Catholic University was also where the seventeen-year-old Susan Tomalin met aspiring actor and future husband Chris Sarandon. They married three years later and moved to New York, where Susan went with Chris to auditions. Within five days she got a small but important part in the movie *Joe*. “I thought being a movie star was a big joke,” she says. “Then I went on to a soap opera and just kept working.”

The first soap was called *A World Apart*. I was the girl everything happened to, so I learned a lot.” Sarandon played a seventeen-year-old whose difficulties stemmed from her being the adopted child of a single woman.

When my character took up with a Weatherman type, and he got thrown in jail, and then he volunteered for medical experiments. By this time I had aged a few years. I had seduced him and become pregnant as he was dying of mercury poisoning. God knows what our child was going to be like.” Fortunately for the baby, the show went off the air just after he was christened.

Things were hardly better for the character Sarandon played on her second soap, *Search for Tomorrow*, a stint that subsidized her night job in the Broadway play *An Evening With Richard Nixon*.

This article was stolen without permission from PREMIER magazine, May 1988. Wanna make something of it?

SUSAN, no matter how things go you're OUR

It thrills me,” says Sarandon, about “Rocky Horror,” “that my grandchildren may see me in my slip and bra, seducing a monster.”

on. “I was on for sixteen weeks to kill someone off,” she says.

“Acting was just something I fell into,” Sarandon says. Some falls have been easier than others. Falling into *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in 1975 after bumping into her friend Tim Curry was one of the more felicitous moves in Sarandon’s self-described unorthodox career. “I like that movie,” she says. “I had known Tim, and I’d gone to see him during an audition for the movie. They asked me to sing. And they said, ‘Can you hit this note? Can you hit that note?’”

“Susan is always looking for challenges,” says

star EVERY WEEKEND!

Chris Sarandon, who has remained a close friend of his former wife’s since their divorce. “She did *Rocky Horror* because she wanted to be in a musical. She wanted to give herself that challenge, to prove to herself and to other people that she could sing.”

“It thrills me,” says Susan Sarandon, referring to a key scene in the movie, “that one day my grandchildren may see their grandmother in her little half-slip and bra, seducing a monster.”

TROUBLE WAS BREWING FROM the start on the set of *The Witches of Eastwick*. Sarandon had signed on for the movie expecting to play Alex, the sculptor. But when she showed up for the first day of shooting, she learned that the producers had given the role to Cher, reportedly at Cher’s insistence. Sarandon got the part of Jane, the cellist. When something like this happens, says Sarandon, “either you leave and everyone will make sure you don’t work for a year, or you find a way to be professional and do the best job you possibly can.”

Sarandon insists that the highly publicized disquiet on the set had more to do with actors against the production team than actors against actors. “It was fairly chaotic,” she says with the same diplomacy she displays in refusing to say anything about *Witches* producer Jon Peters. “It was a bit like being in a war zone, but there wasn’t discord between any of the women and Jack. All of us were very supportive of each other. My gowns in the movie are Cher’s, because they didn’t have anything for me to wear. She would call Bob Mackie, and this stuff would arrive from the Sonny and Cher show. And Jack was beatific. He should be canonized for what he did in terms of his generosity and his guidance.”

Despite the eleventh-hour role switch, the conflicts with the production staff, and an incomplete script that was rewritten every day, Sarandon is not sorry she stuck it out. All those years in show business have given her the ability to turn disasters into, oh, learning experiences. Sarandon learned, she says, not to give in to the negativity and humiliation such situations can create. She learned to take desperation and pour it into performance. And she learned one other lesson: these kinds of problems don’t occur if Jack Nicholson’s agent negotiates your contract.

“Sue had it the worst of all of us in *Witches*,” says Cher, referring to the role and wardrobe problems. “But she got through it because she’s very focused. She lives in the real world. She really faced the challenge and decided to make the best of it. I think she’s really good, she’s very funny, and she’s very smart. With those three things you don’t need anything else. I’ve watched her in quite a few films. I just saw *Compromising Positions* and *Atlantic City*, and she has a sense of irony that comes out more than with any other actress I know.”

“When I was given the first week’s shooting schedule, with all my hardest scenes one right after the other,” Cher continues, “I just looked at it and said, ‘Fuck you. I quit.’ Susan overheard and came over. She handed me a beer and said, ‘I think you’re going to need this.’ There’s a lot of security in working with her. I’d work with her again in a minute. And,” Cher adds, “she has great tits.”

Several years ago, *Playboy* magazine honored those tits as “the celebrity breasts of the summer.” “Well, why not?” says Sarandon, who

LAST WEEK

ATTENDANCE

PRIZES

FRI 15 Linnie Upton
SAT NO SHOW

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE

(That's right. We CAN copy on 2 sides if we WANT to. WE have that power. Do YOU have the durability?????)

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? WRITE :

R.I. ROCKY, 33 Potter St; Pawtucket, RI 02860