

2 FOR THE SHOW

He's aural. She's visual. But Phil and Barbara Bock's love for the theater is as strong as their love for each other.



THE ALBUQUERQUE TRIBUNE

LA VIDA

Friday 11.17.06

By Ollie Reed Jr.

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A voice, rich and refined, leaps from a shadowy front-row seat and prowls among the several actors who are sitting on the Adobe Theater stage, draped in a glow from spotlights above.

"Everyone take a deep breath and imagine how this would be in a great theater, with a great director and a much better script," Phil Bock is saying.

There is subdued chuckling.

Bock, 72, is poking fun at himself. He is both the writer and director of "The Trial of Jose Navarro," the work in rehearsal. The play, set in a 19th-century Spanish courtroom, is Bock's imaginative and witty take on what was really behind the stabbing of the Gypsy woman, Carmen, in Georges Bizet's famous opera.

It's a work in progress.

On this night last week at the Adobe, 9813 Fourth St. N.W., Bock and his cast are running through a staged reading, which would be performed free for an audience the following evening.

"Do your thing," Bock tells the actors. "Find your character. And, above all, react to each other."

Then, Bock glances over his shoulder into the dark seats behind him and calls out to a woman sitting there quietly, thoughtfully, rubbing her forehead with her left hand.

"Barbara," he says to his wife, "I want to use your eye to redistribute people so they are not always standing in front of the judge."



Phil Bock makes some points with his cast during a reading of his play "The Trial of Jose Navarro" at the Adobe Theater recently. Bock and his wife, Barbara, share a passion for theater, as well as each other. They have been

mainstays at the Adobe — as actors, directors and crew — for more than 20 years, but they've worked with most other Albuquerque theater companies, too. "We both have the same attitude about theater," Phil says. "It's fun."

Nitty Clark Fritz/Special to The Tribune



For more than 30 years, veteran Albuquerque theater couple Barbara and Phil Bock have played the romantic leads in their own real-life story. Here, they enjoy a favorite morning ritual of drinking coffee and reading in bed while listening to the music of Mozart. Barbara says she treasures the fact that Phil is as fascinated by art, music, travel and theater as she is. "You get excited about something you're working on or have done, and you have someone to take it to and bounce it off of. I know he'll give me a straight good answer. It's marvelous."

Their world's a stage

It's not Phil Bock or Barbara Bock. It's Phil and Barbara Bock — like a team or an act, which is what they are.

Certainly no two people have a more legitimate claim to the title First Couple of Albuquerque Community Theater than the Bocks.

Since their first appearance onstage together in a January 1980 Vortex Theater production of Neil Simon's "Barefoot in the Park," Phil and Barbara have worked in scores of Albuquerque productions — onstage and offstage, sometimes together, sometimes not.

Phil acts, writes, directs, does sound and music, and makes suggestions to Barbara.

Barbara, also 72, acts, directs, designs

Please see **BOCK/C5**

sets and costumes, and makes suggestions to Phil.

"I might say, 'I think I would have done that differently,'" Barbara said during an interview at the couple's North Fourth Street home. "And he might get a little testy about it."

Phil added, "But if we have disagreements, they are usually over by the time we drive home from the theater."

"He is much more attuned to the music and aural parts of theater," Barbara says. "I'm more attuned to the visual. We respect each other's strengths, so we complement each other and help each other."

They'll tell you they are slowing down, that they really don't do all that much theater anymore.

But just this year, Phil and Barbara acted in the Adobe's January production of "The Importance of Being Earnest."

Barbara did the costumes for "Earnest," "Enchanted April" at the Adobe in April and the costumes and sets for "Gigi" at the Adobe in September.

She directed "Time Enough" at the Adobe in June, and Phil acted in the Adobe's "Gigi."

Last week, Barbara was one of the leaders of an Adobe workshop called "How to Audition for a Play."

And then, of course, there was the staged reading of Phil's "The Trial of Jose Navarro." Barbara really wasn't supposed to be part of that. But she ended up reading one of the roles and lending her studied eye to the placement of the cast.

Phil and Barbara are, in fact, so much into theater, they have to work in it together for the sake of their marriage.

"Because it's a lot of nights to be apart if we are not both involved," Phil said.

To be or not to be

Phil and Barbara were married July 30, 1976, at the Pig Tree Art Gallery in Fresno, Calif.

There was a potluck meal, a bluegrass band and a judge doing the honors. As part of a pre-arranged gag, most of the guests stood up to object when the judge got to that part.

But the funny thing is the two had met and dated more than 20 years earlier when both were students at Fresno State.

Appropriately enough, they first saw each other backstage at a 1954 college revue. Barbara, a competitive ice and roller skater, was doing a roller-skating routine in the show. Phil was providing piano accompaniment for another act.

Phil was fond of Barbara, and he knew she was fond of dance, so he took her to see "Swan Lake" on an early date. That impressed her.

"I didn't know any other guys who would go to the ballet," she said. "I liked him right away."

And then there was that time at Stan's Drive-In in Fresno when Barbara noticed a tuba in the back seat of Phil's car.

"I asked him if he played the tuba, and he crawled into the

back seat and started playing it," she said. "I was a little embarrassed. But I thought anyone who was so spontaneous and off-center had to be special."

"We dated a couple of years," Phil said. "But I missed my chance and went off to graduate

school."

He earned his master's in anthropology from the University of Chicago and received his doctorate from Harvard. He joined the University of New Mexico's anthropology faculty in 1962 and was chairman of the department for three years in the late 1970s.

Barbara got her master's in art from Fresno State and taught high school art classes in Fresno while creating her own abstract works.

Both had married other people. Phil had three daughters with his first wife.

But then both divorced and met again when Phil was visiting in Fresno. This time, they finished what they had started.

Tinkerbell and the little ham

Barbara's first taste of Albuquerque culture was in the visual arts. She did paintings, drawings and paper sculpture and helped found the Meridian Gallery, which used to be on Central Avenue in Downtown.

But in 1980, Phil and Barbara landed supporting roles in the Vortex's "Barefoot in the Park." Phil played Victor Velasco, an eccentric gourmet and Lothario. And Barbara portrayed the heroine's mother, Mrs. Banks, who stirs up some sparks with Victor.

"It was wonderful fun," Phil said. "Especially since I got the girl in that production."

Of course, he already had the girl in real life.

After that show, however, they were everywhere — the

Albuquerque Little Theater, the Adobe at its various locations over the years, the now-gone Keystone Theater on Central Avenue and on UNM's Popejoy Hall stage in roles with the venerable Albuquerque Civic Light Opera Association.

Barbara was Auntie Em in ACLOA's "The Wizard of Oz."

Phil was in ACLOA productions of "Camelot," "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Peter Pan." He was Tinkerbell in the latter.

"Tinkerbell was just some music I played, but I insisted on being billed as Tinkerbell in the program," he said.

Phil retired from UNM 12 years ago. His hair and goatee, once black, are more gray these days. But there's still something of the bohemian rake from "Barefoot in the Park" about him.

He was born in New York City and discovered his love for theater on Broadway.

His parents took him to see the original production of "Oklahoma," and his older cousin, Broadway composer Jerry Bock, took him to see a production of "The Tempest," featuring acclaimed actors Canada Lee as Caliban and Arnold Moss as Prospero.

He got his first acting break in a third-grade school play, portraying the bad boy who littered.

"I was reformed by the rest of the cast," he said.

When he was 12, Phil's family moved to Fresno, forcing him to say bye bye to Broadway.

Barbara Bock's hair is short and white, framing an exquisitely

sculpted face that makes a lie of her years.

She was born in Oakland, Calif., and grew up near there.

Her early loves were skating, dance and classical music. She doesn't recall seeing any plays when she was a child, but there was a budding performer inside her from her earliest years.

"I was hammy," she said. "My folks found it charming and encouraged it."

Her hammy nature has served her well on stage, but Barbara has found much of her pleasure in theater in the creation of sets and costumes that draw consistent praise from critics.

She considers her theater design a natural extension of her own artwork.

"More people come to see my art in theater than ever did in galleries," she said. "I've become well known for my floors."

Mangoes, blizzards and Bravos

The Bocks remember when the Adobe Theater was housed in the Old Church in Corrales.

"You had to go outside to get from stage left to stage right," Phil said. "And you had to walk up some steps and through a window to get into the dressing area."

"But it had a lot of character and atmosphere," Barbara said.

There haven't been a lot of dull moments in the Bocks' life in Albuquerque theater.

Barbara remembers the time an allergic reaction to a mango had her battling nausea and worse during the first act of a Vortex

Theater production of "Last Summer at Bluefish Cove."

Phil recalls the time the Vortex sent a truck through snow-clogged streets to fetch him to the theater to perform Falstaff in "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

"I wasn't feeling well that day,

Continued ... keep reading!



Kitty Clark Fritz/Special to The Tribune

Family photos line a hallway in Phil and Barbara Bock's North Fourth Street home. The newspaper clipping in the frame at center is about the 1954 Fresno State variety show where the two met backstage.

and I was hoping they'd cancel the show," he said. "We did the performance for just 10 people, and they turned out to be the best audience we had for the show."

Theater is not all spotlights and creativity. It's grunt work, too, and the Bocks — especially when they were younger — have never shied away from the putting up and the breaking down of sets, from the loading and the hauling and the sweeping up.

In 1996, the Albuquerque Arts Alliance recognized their contributions to all aspects of theater by presenting them a Bravo Award for art volunteers of the year.

They would not have missed a minute or a scene or an act of it, because they are as wedded to the stage as they are to each other.

"One of the things I love about theater," Barbara said, "is that you get to be around people of all ages. You have a large circle of friends."

"It's entertaining," Phil said. "Rehearsing five or six nights a week, and then — admiration. Usually."

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