



The Toronto Whiff of Grape

Marlene Smith

September 29, 2009

The Back stage History ... Behind Toronto Theatres' Front Row Seats

Marlene Smith is known to many of us as the tireless producer and through her passionate involvement with Toronto theatre. Since the founding of her **Godspell Company** 37 years ago, she has brought to the community nearly fifty Broadway musicals. At this year's Dora Awards ceremony, theatre producer and Studio 180 board member Marlene Smith earned the **Silver Ticket Award**, which is presented to an individual who has excelled in her career while also making a major contribution to the development of Canadian theatre. Marlene has been producing and co-producing live theatre for 40 years, including the long-running *Cats* (1985/87) – the first “mega-musical” to play in Toronto with an all-Canadian cast and production team which grossed \$40 million.



She was borne into the theatre as a child of the manager of the lakefront theatre, **The Palais Royale**, that stands to this day. She can recount with bold recollection hiding behind the curtains, having slipped out of the family apartment above, to witness musicals of the earlier century. Many actors and actresses gave her knowing winks as they went about their on-stage entertainment.

Marlene served as co-manager of the **Historic Elgin/Winter Garden Theatre** in its first five years of its latest revival. During her tenures, she introduced many raw actors who went on to their special places on Canadian and American stage.

Her showbiz career began as Director of Group Sales for *Hair* at the Royal Alexandra Theatre (1970). After working as publicist and company manager for the legendary *Godspell* (1972/73 - starring Andrea Martin, Martin Short, Gilda Radner, Eugene Levy, et al), she co-produced her first show (with Susan Rubes), *What's A Nice Country Like You ... Doing in a State Like This?* for Theatre in the Dell.

She has produced or co-produced such productions as *Ain't Misbehavin'* (1980), *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking it on the Road*, *Piaf*, *Tomfoolery* (The Ports), *Damn Yankees* (Royal Alexandra Theatre), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1988-Hart House Theatre), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1985-Crest Theatre), *Side by Side by Sondheim*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Napoleon*-1994 (Elgin Theatre) and *The Compleat Wrks of Wllm Shkspr (Abridged)* (1997/98-Bathurst Street Theatre).

She has also produced important fundraisers such as the star-studded *It's Always Something* which raises money for **Gilda's Club of Greater Toronto**, named in honour of the late comedienne Gilda Radner; and *DQ*, a fundraiser for **Casey House**, the most prominent Aids Hospice in Canada.

The Toronto Whiff of Grape – Marlene Smith

September 29, 2009

Smith has also given much to both the theatre and larger communities, serving on numerous boards and advisory groups, including those of the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, the Shaw Festival and the Toronto Hospital Board. She currently sits on the Boards of [Hart House Theatre](#), [Theatre Museum of Canada](#), [Performing Arts Lodges \(PAL\)](#) and [Studio 180](#).

Smith has been married to Dr. David Smith for 52 years, has four children and ten grandchildren.

Marlene's visit with us promises to be an exciting evening, for she will discuss much of the backstage history that we caught but a glimpse of when we enjoyed her career successes from the front-row seats.
