

All the Lives of Florence Henderson



Florence Henderson on stage in her one-woman show, *All the Lives of Me . . .* is coming to the greater Dallas/Forth Worth area. However, as we went to press, the dates and locations for Texas performances had not yet been finalized, so watch your local listings.

She sings. She dances. Of course, she's an accomplished actress and performer, truly an all-around entertainer. But Florence Henderson also skypes, and e-mails messages and photographs to family and friends, and surfs the net. Florence is very much a testament to the wisdom of remaining engaged and active—mentally and physically—for she too is “one of us”.

Florence Henderson's Broadway debut was, similar to anyone starting out, a small part. But her abilities and talent quickly caught the eye of the likes of Rogers and Hammerstein and Joshua Logan. Thus two years later in 1954, at the ripe old age of 20, Florence was cast as the star, originating the role of Fanny on Broadway in the musical *Fanny*. Nearly 1,000 performances later (and remember in those days you really had to “project” vocally as there were no individual microphones amplifying each cast member), it is understating things just a bit to observe Florence Henderson's career was “well launched”.

On Broadway and as part of touring companies she's be Maria in *The Sound of Music*, Anna opposite Ricardo Montalban in *The King and I*, Nellie Forbush in *South Pacific*, Annie in *Annie Get Your Gun* and so many more. In 1969 television came calling in what would turn out to be another “biggie” in Florence's professional career. She was cast as Carol Brady, aka “mom”, in *The Brady Bunch*. The series ran for five seasons but even though it technically ended in 1974, it has never been off the air right up to today as it currently is syndicated and on the air in 122 countries around the world plus the US.

There's more to the lady than just her work on stage and screens (big and little). Although her first marriage in 1956 to Broadway producer Ira Bernstein ended in divorce in 1985, they had had two sons and two daughters. Florence openly says that events of the mid-80s left her shaken and she battled depression. Seeking help to cope with her depression led to Florence meeting Dr John Kappas. They subsequently were wed in 1987. Renowned hypnotherapist Kappas is credited with not only defining the profession but establishing the first training program, the Hypnosis Motivation Institute, the first-ever in its field to be nationally accredited by the US Department of Education.

With Kappas Florence shared love, but he also helped her gain a new level of awareness and skills. Today Florence herself is a certified hypnotherapist. Together they coped with and battled the cancer that ultimately claimed Kappas in September 2002. Since then, Florence has been an advocate and motivational speaker for women's health issues and is, among her other humanitarian activities, a spokeswoman for City of Hope Cancer Research Center.

This indomitable lady has no plans to retire—and she walks the talk. She has a new venture and a new show, and with both she bears witness to her belief in the importance of exercise and trying to have and attain a personal harmony between that mind, body and spirit triad.

Entertaining on stage, however, came to her more easily than her adeptness with computers. Although Florence Henderson embraced

the new technology, learning to master it in fact took “a little help from a friend”. As Florence told one interviewer, she was having difficulties doing anything more on her cell phone than place a phone call. Within minutes her friend had explained and shown her how to operate its features like an old hand. Same thing with her personal computer.

This experience became the inspiration behind the FloH brand which is dedicated to the concept of Better Living for Seniors and is centered around feeling better through exercise and healthy eating, as well as thinking better through new experiences and tools for living. The first service—fitting into that tools for living category—was launched just last October. In association with a technology partner, it is called the FloH Club; and is a membership, telephone-based, technical support service for older adults.

FloHClub matches member-callers with technicians who work remotely from their own homes. Several membership levels are available depending upon a member's needs. Each membership is matched or paired to one individual computer (pc's only please, not currently available for Mac or Apple users) and includes a monthly newsletter about technology for older adults from Henderson. Services include anything from simple e-mailing and making online purchases safely, to step-by-step guides on video conferencing, instant messaging, or troubleshooting support for slow or poor computer system performance, error messages, virus/spyware removal and data backup. Additionally, FloH club members can learn how to set up and use wireless networks, printers, digital cameras and more.

Because entertaining others does come easily to Florence and because she's reached that time of life when she has experiences and a message to share—she's embarked on a one-woman show that is a very personal retrospective. This writer has not had the pleasure of attending a performance of Florence Henderson's one-woman show that she calls *All the Lives of Me . . . A Musical Journey*, but reactions from those who have are telling.

Like a true Hoosier (yes, Florence was born in Indiana, and since the mid-90s has returned each year to warble *God Bless America* prior to the start of the Indianapolis 500) she opted to preview her new show on home-state audiences in Indianapolis, backed by no less than the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. Critic Philip Potempa concluded his review with, “Henderson can still hit all the high notes and her larger-than-life persona and zest for entertaining is easy to embrace as it keeps audiences enthralled with her song and story.”

Lest you discount reaction from a home-town audience and

reviewer, January 2010 Florence took her show to the Razz Room in San Francisco. More glowing reviews were forthcoming from David Wiegand writing in the *San Francisco Chronicle*: “In truth, Henderson, svelte and terminally perky, sings only about a dozen numbers over the course of her 90-minute show, and a couple of those songs are novelty numbers cleverly meant to concede the fact that she may not be a spring chicken, she may or may not have had work done, she really, really likes men, regardless of her squeaky-clean TV image, and so what? She deceives the audience as only a superb performer can: Within minutes, you'll think she's in your living room, chatting over cocktails. And by the end of the show, the only question you'll want to ask is, do you really have to go?”

And while the curtain will fall, signaling the end of each performance of *All The Lives of . . .* (of course, only after Florence has been called back for an encore), America's museum, The Smithsonian in Washington, DC, has ensured that Florence Henderson's place in the entertainment cosmos is preserved for all time as part of the National Museum of American History's entertainment collections. As shown in photo below Florence Henderson has been honored, along with some of her contemporaries, as one of the Legendary Leading Ladies of Stage and Screen. A fitting tribute indeed to a lady who continues to give of her time, her energy and her talents to entertain and delight us all.



The Smithsonian National Museum of American History's Legendary Leading Ladies of Stage and Screen on stage at the presentation ceremony.



Inset, left to right, Olympic swim champ turned actress Esther Williams, comedienne Rose Marie, *Hello Dolly!* Carol Channing, catwoman in television's *Batman* Julie Newmar, star of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* and *Marnie* Tippi Hedren, our cover star Florence Henderson and star of *Lassie* and *Lost in Space* June Lockhart.