
Entertainment

The nine lives of Kathleen Turner

By Loren King / Banner Correspondent

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When Kathleen Turner took on one of the American theater's iconic roles, Maggie in Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," in a 1990 Broadway revival, her biggest obstacle wasn't the demands of the role but the naysayers.

"Michael Douglas, Jack Nicholson, they all said, 'Don't do it! They're gonna shoot you down. You have a target on your back just walking into New York.' And I said, 'No, guys, you don't get it. I'm better onstage. The hardest thing was fighting the assumption that because I was a 'movie star,' I wasn't theatrically trained. [But] I'd never gone more than two-and-a-half years without being onstage, even through the height of the '80s. It's always been my home," Turner says, talking by phone in her famously husky voice and her just-as-famously forthright manner.

And, of course, she went on to earn accolades and a Tony nomination for her Maggie the Cat.

"I went to see Scarlett Johansson [in the 2013 Broadway production]. She is a good little actress — I shouldn't say that; it makes me sound so old! But of course I am. I could be her mother. She was terribly, terribly nervous when she heard I was in the house, because [she said] my Maggie was defining. But so much of that was [due] to the late British director Howard Davies. He had a lot to do with the quality of that production."

Turner will be the guest of honor at the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival's annual Performance Gala on Saturday at Town Hall. She'll also attend a Sunday brunch for the festival the following day at Mistralino. It will be Turner's second visit to Provincetown. She was feted at the 2011 Provincetown International Film Festival, and recalls biking down busy Commercial Street as fans kept crowding around and stopping her. "At one point, I finally had to go into a store and call the festival and say, 'Come get me.' But it was great. John

Waters and I spent time together; he took me to his favorite beach. We're going to have dinner this time, too," she says, adding that she and Waters have remained friends ever since he directed her in "Serial Mom."

Turner earned acclaim and another Tony nod for her performance as Martha in the 2005 Broadway revival of Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Like Maggie the Cat, it's another role made famous by Elizabeth Taylor in the movie version. "I've always said I've spent half my career correcting her appalling performances," Turner says.

Many other stage roles have followed, but Turner hasn't tackled Williams again — at least not yet. "The problem with a lot of his women is that they're rather victimized, you know? I've thought about certainly Amanda [in "The Glass Menagerie"], but, quite frankly, I saw Cherry Jones do it, and I thought, it cannot be done; I better walk away from that one. I told her that. She was absolutely gorgeous. I still play around with thoughts of "Night of the Iguana," but the role that I love is the one Deborah Kerr played [in the movie]; not Maxine. That one, to me, is much more challenging and interesting, so maybe that one is still on the books."

Not that Turner, an Oscar nominee for "Peggy Sue Got Married," is in need of work. "I'm doing stage all the time, and I've developed a cabaret show — I thought, that's another thing I haven't done yet, so why not? I took it to the West End in London and the Carlyle in New York, but it's a theatrical show, not a club thing. Clubs are too small for me. I did the Metropolitan Opera, for God's sake," she says, referring to her role earlier this year as Duchess of Krakenthorp in Donizetti's "La Fille du Régiment."

Turner debuted her cabaret show "Finding My Voice" last year at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., where she also starred in "Mother Courage and Her Children" and Joan Didion's "The Year of Magical Thinking."

"I've got a great character coming out, this old hillbilly, for 'Dolly Parton's Heartstrings,'" says Turner of the upcoming Netflix series, easily slipping into a gravelly drawl. "There I am with five layers of makeup on, and padding and a white wig. I loved her. I'm also playing Michael Douglas's ex-wife on [the Netflix series] 'The Kominsky Method.' That's what I love — pop in as a recurring role,

share some insults with Michael, and go away. We care very much for one another; we're good friends," she says of her co-star in "Romancing the Stone" and "The War of the Roses."

Turner, who turns 65 on June 19 — and has always been unabashed about her age — prides herself as much on the diversity of her career as its longevity. Even as she ignited screens as a femme fatale in the neo-noir "Body Heat," her 1981 screen debut, she didn't repeat herself. "After 'Body Heat,' I did a comedy, then an action film," Turner says. "I was never going to allow myself to be boxed in like that. Teaching and activism are also huge parts of my life. My life is not whether I'm [working] a job. That's when I'm happiest: creating. But that's not the only way I create."