'Shirley Valentine' explores life beyond kitchen walls



Provided

Cady McClain, who plays Shirley Valentine in the play of the same name, prepares 'egg and chips' for her husband's supper. It is a meal that launches her on a life-changing journey.



By LYNN MARTENSTEIN Special to the Star and Wave

resonate deeply today.

"I always said I'd leave

him (her husband) when the

kids grew up but by the time

they'd grown, there was no-

where to go," Shirley says in the play. "Well, you don't start again at 42, do y'?"

won't she?" hangs over much

of the play. In searching for

answers, Valentine often turns to her go-to wall.

ley Valentine, wall? She used

to laugh. A lot. Didn't she? Did somethin' happen, or

was it just that nothin' hap-

A door opens to the pos-

sibility of a new life when a

good friend — a real friend.

not a wall — invites Shirley

to join her on a two-week trip

to Greece. She even buys a

ticket for her. The question

for Valentine now is whether

her dream is dead and, if

not, whether the dreamer is

ful in her portrayal not only

of Valentine, but also of her

distant husband, friend and

a half-dozen other charac-

ters that she introduces the

Cady McClain is master-

still alive inside her.

pened?'

"Do you remember Shir-

The question "Will she or

CAPE MAY - "Y' know I like a glass of wine while I'm doin' the cookin'," Shir-ley Valentine says to her kitchen wall while she pours herself a glass of wine as the poignant one-woman show, Shirley Valentine," opens.

Shirley has reason to talk to the wall. She's a married, middle-aged, working-class woman in Liverpool whose duties as a wife and mother swept away the exciting life of travel and adventure she'd envisioned as a child.

"Shirley Valentine" is an uplifting story about second chances. Running through July 2 at Cape May Stage, th comedy will make spectators laugh and may even make them shed a tear.

Written by British playwright Willy Russell in 1986, the play premiered at London's West End two years afterward and played on Broadway a year later. It was also made into a movie. The show returned to London in a revival this spring.

Despite the show being set in the 1980s, it deals with issues such as loneliness,



courage and the need for audience to in this not-to-be-personal fulfillment that still missed play. missed play.

McClain was only 16 when Russell wrote "Shirley Valentine," but she'd been working in television since she was 9. Her first job was for a Band-Aid commercial in which she sang the "I'm stuck on Band-Aids" song. Future roles included work on "Cheers" and "St. Elsewhere" as a pre-teen, and longer runs on "Days of Our Lives," "All My Children" and "As the World Turns" as a young adult.

She is the only actor to win three Daytime Emmy awards from all three networks. She has also worked in numerous films, including "My Favorite Year" and "Pennies from Heaven."

Having spent several months studying Shirley Valentine's character closely, McClain picked up a few life lessons.

"Shirley has this great attitude about life and an amazing sense of humor," she said. "I think the journey she goes on has been a really important one for me as well. The play prioritizes what's important in life. It's really emphasized for me how essential it is to do the things that make me happy, and theater is definitely one of those things." The California-born actor

had a steep learning curve. Hired in March, she had only two months to memorize a 41-page script whose running time is just under two hours. She also had to deliver her lines in a passable Liverpool accent.

She researched the accent by watching YouTube videos on Liverpool's history and tutorials on proper pronunciation. She also watched old interviews with legendary Liverpudlians Paul McCartney and George Harrison.

Roy Steinberg, producing artistic director at Cape May Stage, thinks Russell's play has aged well.

"Even though 'Shirley Valentine' was written 40 years ago, it's even more relevant today with new sensibilities about identity and gender roles," he said. "Over the course of the play, Shirley learns to eschew the societal roles of wife and mother to start living a larger life.'

"Cady McClain is the perfect artist to play this role," he added. "She is also a writer, visual artist, director and producer, and has smashed any preconceptions about juggling multiple roles. We are honored to bring her to Cape May Stage."

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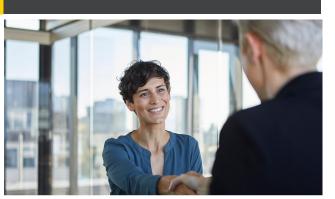
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