

The Great Life

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Before we delve into her latest accomplishment, let's acknowledge the splendid acting of Karen Kondazian: we were privileged to catch in the starring role of Serafina Delle Rose in Tennessee Williams' "The Rose Tattoo." Williams was so taken with the performance and her production that he gave Karen an "open end" to produce any of his works during his lifetime. Early on, Karen embraced the limelight as an 8-year-old appearing as one of the children on Art Linkletter's "Kids Say the Darndest Things." She loved missing school for the tapings, and her overnight fame convinced her to detour from being a CIA spy to pursue a career in the theater. She studied with the best coaches here and abroad and at the best institutes, appeared in Michael Cacoyannis' "The Trojan Women" at Manhattan's Circle in the Square, along with innumerable productions of Tennessee Williams' plays, plus other major playwrights. Movies and TV beckoned, and she also writes "The Actor's Way" column in Backstage West/Drama Logue, where her interviews are collected in "The Actors Encyclopedia of Casting Directors," co-authored with actor-writer Eddie Shapiro. Published by Lone Eagle, the \$19.95 guide features conversations on how to get a job with more than 100 casting directors, from John Aiello to Gary Zuckerbrod, along with chats with coaches Jeff Corey and Milton Katselas, directors John Cameron and John Woo. In his foreword, Richard Dreyfuss recollects overseeing a mid-'70s class, "How to Be an Unemployed Actor

in Los Angeles," teaching students "how to schmooze people, what the relationships are ... that on an interview, your job is two-fold: to either get the job or to be remembered. I never brought a picture or a resume because I figured that if I couldn't get casting directors to remember me from my presence in the room, nothing that I wrote on a piece of paper was going to make a bit of difference ... My father once said, 'Don't you ever apologize for who you are. Ever.' I never walked in saying, 'Oh God, you're so great for seeing me.'" He adds, "Kids these days seem to think that the moments when they're working are all there is ... then where is the rest of your life? You've gotta learn patience, you gotta learn enjoyment. Try to parse your ambition so that it doesn't swallow up the rest of your life."

James Cameron never acted, but being a member of the founding group of the Theatre Arts program at his high school in Niagara Falls, he went "straight into writing, directing, art direction," he confesses in his interview. "I was petrified to be on stage. I hated it." About casting "Titanic" with its 92 speaking roles, he maintains that casting and writing are critical. "And if you've done those two things properly, you only have to go the last 20% of the way and get the best performance possible from

the person saying those words ... On "Titanic," it was particularly interesting to try doing the scenes in a contemporary idiom. That was really helpful for Leonardo DiCaprio, who hadn't done any period work. It was a little tricky for him to make the dialogue real. He had to think it in 1996 street-speak first, and then play it." His films, Jim explains, "celebrate positive aspects of human nature within an environment where there is either a natural adversity or the negative aspects of human nature are threatening to overwhelm. I'm criticized for being sappy, maudlin or melodramatic on every film I've made for that reason. But it's easy to be hip. Much easier to be hip than it is to be earnest and emotionally honest in a film." With "Titanic," he recalls, "Every day I'd be driving up to this giant ship and say, 'It's not about the ship.' We made it our goal to make the emotions first, the performances first, and everything else was second. On top of this massive technical mountain were the people, their emotions — the simplest things."

Like Jim Cameron, director John Woo isn't much on rehearsing. "I like happenings, surprises and instincts," he says in his interview. "Great actors have great instincts. But there are actors, especially American actors, who care too much about acting. They work

too hard. You can work too much, and then it's not natural. That's why I don't like to do too many takes. Some actors like to do 20 or 30 takes and try so many different things. I only want one or two. John Travolta, Nic Cage and Joan Allen all wanted to do more ... I don't like perfect ... Sometimes, a little flaw may be a good thing. When they do something wrong, I think they're more interesting. I've got a nickname in the business. They call me 'One-shot John.' No matter how many times the actors do it, I always like the first few takes. If you do it more, it's no longer coming from instinct. It becomes methodical ... Acting is an insecure business. Most of the people feel insecure. You have to make them comfortable and to believe in themselves and in their own charm. Every human being has charm. Maybe they just don't know how to show it. So my duty is to find the charm. The charm of acting, of the face, of philosophy ... A director is not a dictator. He gives direction, is there to guide. And the actors also teach me about life. People are built in a different way, but deep inside, basically everyone's more or less the same. I still like to think that mankind has a heart."

(1) Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid starred in Michael Curtiz's "Casablanca" (1942), among films being screened through Jan. 29 during "Here's Looking at You, Bogie" Retrospective at Los Angeles County Museum of Art; (2) With Audrey Hepburn and William Holden in Billy Wilder's "Sabrina" (1954)



(3) With Gloria Graham in Nicholas Ray's "In a Lonely Place" (1950); (4) With Ida Lupino in John Huston's "High Sierra" (1941); (5) With Lauren Bacall in Howard Hawks' "The Big Sleep" (1946)

(6) With Lauren Bacall in Howard Hawks' "To Have and Have Not" (1944); (7) With Tim Holt in John Huston's "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" (1948)