

Judy LaRose has few limits in her range as a musical, acting performer

By Nancy Koeneman
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Judy LaRose is a singer who performs classical music and opera, operetta, oratorio, contemporary, musical comedy and theater, and sacred music. She's a voice-over talent and an actress, she does commercials and educational and industrial films. She can and does dance. What hasn't she done?

"Well, I never ran away and joined the circus. I never had that compulsion," she said.

LaRose, a multitalented resident of Darien, has been on the Chicago and regional entertainment scene since she was a baby. Her earliest memory is being in an uncomfortable, overly starched outfit under hot lights. She was on a photo shoot and younger than 2 years old, LaRose said. She began dance lessons at age 4 and was performing in stage shows at the Eighth Street Theater in downtown Chicago.

LaRose has a ready laugh and quick sense of humor with a serene attitude toward her career. Things are on an upswing for her now, and while pleasantly surprised, she maintains a calm veneer about it.

"I feel as though you have to deal with what is on your plate," she said. "If the other is supposed to happen, it will."

The past 2 1/2 years in "the business" have been pretty tough. "You do go through valleys," she said. "In any business today ... it's been difficult, and it permeates everything."

Some of LaRose's work is for corporations, and that's where the business climate is most evident.

"A portion of what I do is for corporate special events for employees or special interest groups," she said. "With the cutbacks they make, they aren't having company events. If they don't have the money to keep employees on the payroll, they are not going to have these programs."

However, her career is looking up with three projects on the horizon. She is working on arrangements for a compact disc and has been asked to appear in a film. She's also been asked to perform as a guest artist for a new musical.

And it all sounds like fun to her.

"I enjoy performing in any genre. I enjoy the experience — whether I'm never seen and just heard as a voice, or I'm on stage in opera and theater and being able to communicate to a listen-



Judy LaRose

Judy LaRose of Darien has been a performer in the Chicago area since she was a toddler.

ing audience in person."

Her performances stay fresh because each time she sings a song, or plays a character, she is a little different from the previous performance, she said.

Life isn't just a stage

LaRose might be a performer in a variety of venues, but she's also involved in the business end of her career and the careers of others.

Earlier this year, she was elected second vice president of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists in Chicago and serves as governor and treasurer of the National Recording Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences/The Grammys — Chicago Chapter.

AFTRA is the labor union that negotiates and administers collective bargaining agreements with the industry and shares jurisdiction with the Screen Actors Guild.

Being involved in and aware of the business end is vital to a performer's career, LaRose said. But it's not easy.

"It's difficult to straddle both arenas, but you have to have the business acumen to deal with the business decisions that come up," she said. Some performers can have agents and business managers, but the primary responsibility for a performer's career rests at the feet of the performer, she said.

As an officer in AFTRA, LaRose will have a hand in setting the policies that are administered by AFTRA's paid staff. The union will be dealing with issues such as wages and working conditions, increasing employment opportunities, improving tax laws

for performers, healthcare and retirement.

LaRose will also be heavily involved as The National Recording Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences/The Grammys evolves into its new organization.

Instead of a mishmash of free-standing chapters, The Grammys will form a corporation, she said. The chapters will still exist, she said, but will be less independent.

The television presentation of The Grammys does involve local chapters, and Chicago technicians were part of this year's production, she said.

Also, each member receives a ballot and votes for the winners that take the stage that night. But the national program, broadcast from New York or Los Angeles, is not the only focus of the organization. It also subsidizes master classes and seminars for its members, she said.

Que sera, sera

LaRose looks to her future with optimism, tempered with her unique form of spirituality and a clear vision of her abilities and limitations.

For example the rejection a performer faces on a regular basis should not be taken personally, she said.

"It's not you as a person," LaRose said. The producer or director is looking for a specific type to fit a role and to work with the other members of the cast on what can be a grueling 15- to 20-hour day.

LaRose explains she accepts the fact and is aware she's just not the person for any role, labeling herself a character actress.

For herself, her career will do what it will do. She will just work at it and see what happens.

Her spirituality and tranquil attitude show when she is asked where she goes from here.

"Wherever I'm directed," LaRose said. "My plans don't count, when you look at the big picture."