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THE MORNING LINE

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FROM: Emily Meagher, Michelle Farabaugh

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The New York Times

February 13, 2014

ArtsBeat
The Culture at Large



Sting's Musical 'The Last Ship' Finds a Home and a Cast

By Erik Piepenburg

Casting and a Broadway theater were announced on Wednesday for “The Last Ship,” the new show with music and lyrics by the Grammy Award-winning singer Sting and a book by the Tony Award-winning author John Logan (“Red”) and the Pulitzer Prize winner Brian Yorkey (“Next to Normal”).

The producers Jeffrey Seller and Kathryn Schenker announced that the show, a tale of love and labor strife in an English shipbuilding town, will begin previews on Sept. 30 at the Neil Simon Theater, with opening night set for Oct. 26. (The musical “Big Fish” closed there in December.) The cast will include Michael Esper, Rachel Tucker, Jimmy Nail, Aaron Lazar, Sally Ann Triplett, Collin Kelly-Sordelet and Fred Applegate. Additional casting is to be announced. Also announced was the design team of David Zinn (sets and costumes), Christopher Akerlind (lighting) and Brian Ronan (sound). As previously announced, Joe Mantello (“Wicked”) will direct, and Steven Hoggett (“Once”) will be the choreographer.

Before opening on Broadway “The Last Ship” will have a Chicago tryout from June 10 to July 13. A concert staging of the musical that was performed at the Public Theater last year will be broadcast on the PBS series “Great Performances” on Feb. 21.

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ENCOUNTERS
SAMUEL BARNETT

Sacrificing His Fries for a Starring Role

By JACOB BERNSTEIN

SAMUEL BARNETT ORDERED a salad. It wasn't exactly what he wanted at Cafe Luxembourg, especially with its noted French fries on the menu, but as he noted wryly, "I have to get into a corset."

That he does.

Five times a week, Mr. Barnett stars on Broadway in the much-lauded new production of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," in which he plays the female lead, Viola.

Three other times a week, the company performs "Richard III," and Mr. Barnett plays Queen Elizabeth, donning an enormous gown that takes 40 minutes just to pin him into. (Both productions will close Sunday after a near-sold-out run.)

Mr. Barnett discovered Cafe Luxembourg in 2006, when he came to New York from London to do the Broadway production of "The History Boys," which was written by Alan Bennett and won the Tony for best play.

Mr. Barnett happens to be a part owner in the restaurant, and he gave the actor a card that entitled him to a "massive discount."

At first, Mr. Barnett didn't go there very much. He was staying in Midtown, near where the show was playing, and that was more or less that: too far.

But then, the neighborhood noise began to get to him, and he requested a move.

"I just knew that Midtown would make me want to throw myself off a building, so I asked if I could find my own and they said yes," said Mr. Barnett, who soon found a "a walk-up in a gorgeous old brownstone" off Central Park West.

It was perfect for a country boy from Yorkshire seeking out a little peace and quiet.

He loved Central Park and the fact that the No. 1 train took him to the theater in less than 10 minutes. And he adored Cafe Luxembourg, on West 70th Street, with its "very European" décor and its perfect burger and fries.

And so, when he returned to New York this fall for his sophomore Broadway run, this was the neighborhood he chose.

Overwhelmingly, he has loved being in New York and has relished the opportunity to meet people here, particularly the celebrities who have come backstage and done meet-and-greets.

"It's been really great," he said of interactions with people like Bono, Denzel Washington, Cameron Diaz, Stella McCartney, Steven Spielberg, Mike Nichols and "what's his name from 'The West Wing'?" Bradley Whitford."

"They're all kind and gracious and happy to have their picture taken with you," he said. "They're not fazed. They know they're famous and that we're going to love them, and they've been so complimentary about the show as well."

Steve Martin came to the show and even invited him and his co-star Stephen Fry "round" for dinner.

Of late, Mr. Barnett has also been enjoying another perk that comes with good notices in a hit show: free clothes. "There's always a little bit of me that feels a little guilty about it, but not guilty enough to say no," said Mr. Barnett, who was wearing a simple pair of pants ("I can't remember where I got them") with a Thom Grey blazer, a shirt and cardigan by Rag & Bone, a scarf by Paul Smith and shoes from Fiorentini & Baker.

Mr. Barnett has been somewhat less giddy about some of his interactions with journalists.

"I did an interview either for Broadway.com or Playbill.com a few weeks ago," he said. "And the reporter said to me, 'You've never talked about your private life.' And I was like, 'I haven't?' And she went: 'No. You talk about your work. You never talk about your private life.' And I was like, 'Well, no one's ever asked.' She said, 'Do you want to make a statement?' I said, 'No, I don't want to make a statement.'"

And, yes, he is gay. His boyfriend is the theater director Adam Penford, who is heading up the revival of "A Small Family Business" at the National Theater in London.

Mr. Barnett's sexuality is not a topic of conversation he seems eager to pursue. He worries a bit that being open about it will hinder his acting career in the United States, where there are more and more gay actors who have come out, but still no real gay movie stars and a mere handful of gay men on the major networks playing heterosexual leads.

"When you say there's more work for openly gay actors," Mr. Barnett said, "what you're really saying is that there are more gay roles than those gay actors could

get. I don't go into an audition back home thinking, 'This is a straight role, so I might not get it.' Here I do. And that's just a truth for me."

Still, he said, he does not feel like a victim.

When Mr. Barnett was doing "The History Boys," a friend told him that that kind of stroke of luck generally strikes an actor only once every 10 years. "And I feel like with 'Twelfth Night,' I've now had two of those jobs," he said. "I feel like I've gotten more than a lot of people will ever get. I feel very fortunate."

Mr. Barnett is not sure what he's going to do next.

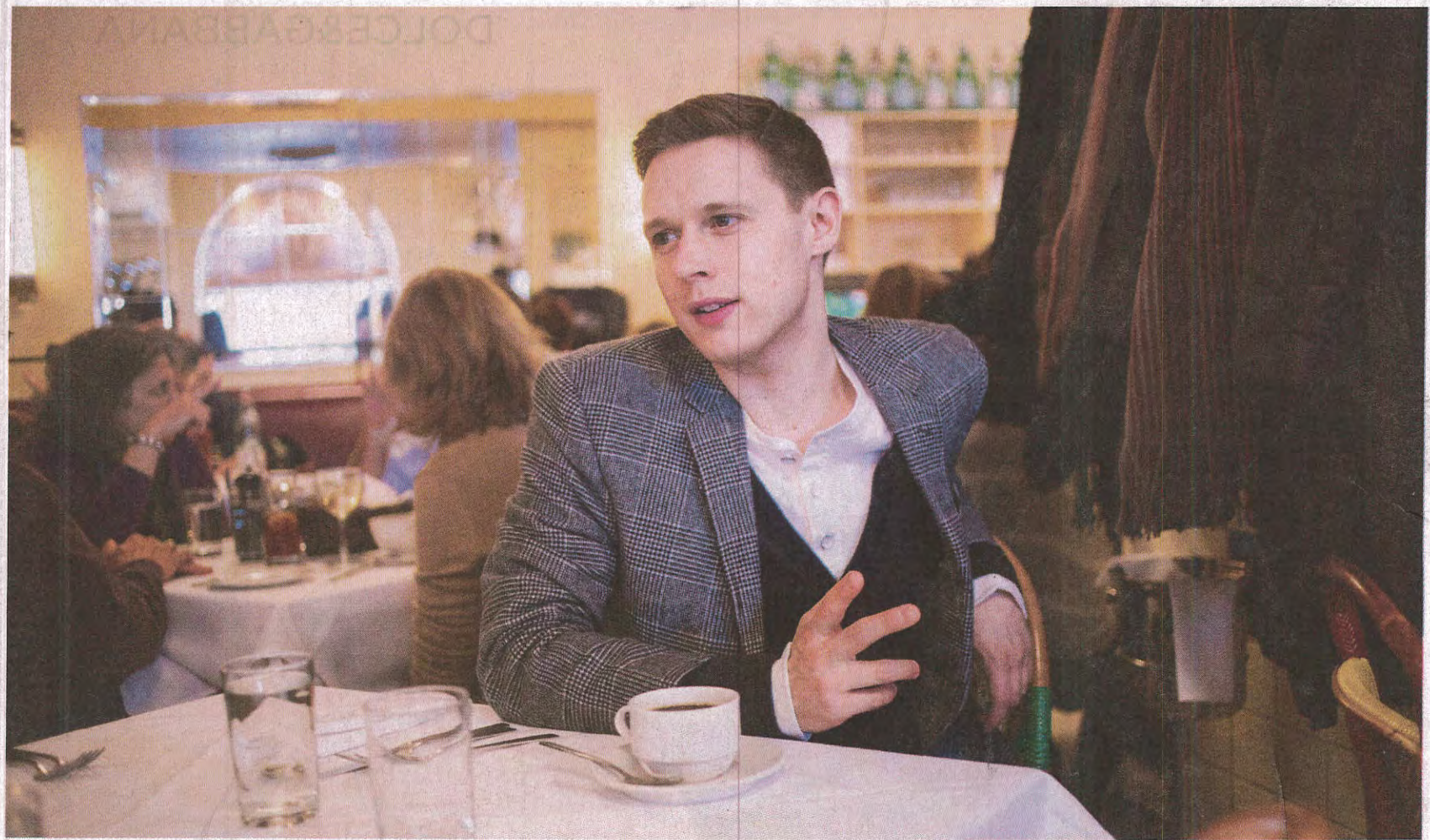
Over the last few weeks, he has been auditioning for pilots, but nothing has come of it yet.

Right now, Mr. Barnett's plan is to return to London when the show wraps up its run this weekend. And he said that he was looking forward to going home to his boyfriend but that he would miss New York considerably.

"The people are much friendlier here," Mr. Barnett said. "There's more of an anonymity in London. Everyone's just getting on with their own thing. Here, people want to connect."

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DANNY GHITIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

'When you say there's more work for openly gay actors, what you're really saying is that there are more gay roles that those gay actors could get.'

SAMUEL BARNETT
ACTOR

Samuel Barnett at Cafe Luxembourg on the Upper West Side. He is starring in "Richard III" and "Twelfth Night," Shakespearean plays in which men play female roles.

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The New York Times

February 13, 2014

Mob Princess Wages War On Concept Of Inevitable

In ‘Philosophy for Gangsters,’ Ideas Are Deadly

By Daniel M. Gold

In “Philosophy for Gangsters,” a fitfully amusing dark comedy, Callie Rizzoli, a college-educated Mafia princess being groomed to lead the family business, is particularly aggrieved by the way her parents and brothers have departed — in a firefight with the police, shrugging that they were always meant to die that way.

What killed her people, Callie (Courtney Romano) insists, was their determinism: the belief that nothing occurs at random, that every decision and action is the inevitable outcome of previous events. Never mind the mob; those damn philosophers are the true menace to society.

She and her crew are offended that no one suffers the consequences for promoting such dangerous ideas; in the rough code of their work, they grouse, accepting responsibility is essential, even if occasionally lethal. So they kidnap Wilfred May (Tom White), a young philosophy professor at a nearby college, to make an example of him. After resisting — and losing a finger in the process — Wilfred does a Patty Hearst and joins them as they try to manipulate the media and redefine their crimes as a manifesto of free will.

Written and directed by Barry and Liz Peak, a father-and-daughter team from Australia, this satire may not aspire to the lunacy of Monty Python, but it fails to reach even the quirkiness of the Coen Brothers. Wallowing in mob stereotypes while hoping to play off them, the script is influenced heavily by “The Godfather” and “The Sopranos.” The Jersey is strong in this one: There’s even a quick nod to Gov. Chris Christie’s bridge issues.

The stage design by Julia Noulin-Mérat nicely splits the space into two settings to help move the story along, as do videos that run news reports on the gang’s doings. Bruno Iannone as a Brando-channeling don and Tally Sessions as a well-spoken gunman generate some laughs. And yet, most of the scenes feel pointless and unneeded. At two hours, “Philosophy” is at least 30 minutes too long. If it were shorter, it might seem funnier.

“Philosophy for Gangsters” continues through March 1 at the Beckett Theater, 410 West 42nd Street, Clinton; 212-239-6200, philosophyforgangsters.com.

The New York Times

February 13, 2014

Highlights From the Owner's Manual

'Sex Tips for Straight Women From a Gay Man' With Practice

By Anita Gates

Every theater in New York should hire Stefan to make the precurtain announcements. With his baby face, bedroom eyes and alluring if indeterminate European accent, he can order us to turn off our cellphones and unwrap our hard candies any time.

Unfortunately, at the one show that Stefan is introducing these days, things go way downhill fast. Matt Murphy's "Sex Tips for Straight Women From a Gay Man" could have been zingy and smart and actually helpful, like Bravo's erstwhile reality series "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy." But apparently, that was not the goal here. This show, directed by Tim Drucker, feels like a blend of a bachelorette party at Chippendales and the embarrassing midnight act at a Pigalle tourist trap.

To be fair, this is a polished production, with a personable, attractive, endearing, talented cast. Jason Michael Snow plays Dan, an author and sex adviser. ("Sex Tips" is based on the book of the same name.) Lindsay Nicole Chambers is Robyn, a community college professor who has been assigned to moderate a book discussion with Dan but clearly needs his guidance herself. Andrew Brewer is Stefan, supposedly the college program's sound and lighting technician but mostly an object of desire. He closes the show with a striptease, starting in an astronaut suit.

But what can you say about a show whose *pièce de résistance* is having audience members, *en masse*, practice their technique for a certain sexual favor? The playwright's idea of audience participation is a game called Name That Penis. Humor about ejaculation and dildos abounds. The most sophisticated gag is a visual reference to a certain "Saturday Night Live" sketch that involves gift-wrapped genitalia and, unlike most of "Sex Tips," is actually funny.

It would probably be nice to be young enough (or something enough) to be shocked.

"Sex Tips for Straight Women From a Gay Man" is at the 777 Theater, 777 Eighth Avenue, at 47th Street, Manhattan; 866-811-4111, sextipsplay.com.

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Sid Caesar, Comedian of Comedians From TV's Early Days, Dies at 91

By Mervyn Rothstein & Peter Keepnews

Sid Caesar, a comedic force of nature who became one of television's first stars in the early 1950s and influenced generations of comedians and comedy writers, died on Wednesday at his home in Beverly Hills, Calif. He was 91.

His death was announced by Eddy Friedfeld, a family spokesman.

Mr. Caesar largely faded from the public eye in his middle years as he struggled with crippling self-doubt and addiction to alcohol and pills. But from 1950 to 1954, he and his co-stars on the live 90-minute comedy-variety extravaganza "Your Show of Shows" dominated the Saturday night viewing habits of millions of Americans. In New York, a group of Broadway theater owners tried to persuade NBC to switch the show to the middle of the week because, they said, it was ruining their Saturday business.

Albert Einstein was a Caesar fan. Alfred Hitchcock called Mr. Caesar the funniest performer since Charlie Chaplin.

Television comedy in its early days was dominated by boisterous veterans of vaudeville and radio who specialized in broad slapstick and snappy one-liners. Mr. Caesar introduced a different kind of humor to the small screen, at once more intimate and more absurd, based less on jokes or pratfalls than on characters and situations. It left an indelible mark on American comedy.

"If you want to find the ur-texts of 'The Producers' and 'Blazing Saddles,' of 'Sleeper' and 'Annie Hall,' of 'All in the Family' and 'M*A*S*H' and 'Saturday Night Live,' " Frank Rich wrote in The New York Times when he was its chief theater critic, "check out the old kinescopes of Sid Caesar."

A list of Mr. Caesar's writers over the years reads like a comedy all-star team. Mel Brooks (who in 1982 called him "the funniest man America has produced to date") did some of his earliest writing for him, as did Woody Allen. So did the most successful playwright in the history of the American stage, Neil Simon. Carl Reiner created one landmark sitcom, "The Dick Van Dyke Show"; Larry Gelbart was the principal creative force behind another, "M*A*S*H." Mel Tolkin wrote numerous scripts for "All in the Family." The authors of the two longest-running Broadway musicals of the 1960s, Joseph Stein ("Fiddler on the Roof") and Michael Stewart ("Hello, Dolly!"), were Caesar alumni as well.

Sketches on "Your Show of Shows" and its successor, "Caesar's Hour" (1954-57), were as likely to skewer the minutiae of domestic life as to lampoon classic Hollywood movies, arty foreign films and even operas. Mr. Caesar won Emmys for both those shows.

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With a rubbery face and the body of a linebacker, Mr. Caesar could get laughs without saying a word, as he did in a pantomime routine in which he and his co-stars, Imogene Coca, Howard Morris and Mr. Reiner, played mechanical figures on a town clock that goes dangerously out of whack.

Fluent in Fake Languages

Mr. Caesar was a master of improvisation: In a classic moment during a parody of the opera “Pagliacci,” as he was drawing tears on his face in front of a dressing-room mirror, the makeup pencil broke. Suddenly unable to draw anything but straight lines, he made the split-second decision to play tick-tack-toe on his cheek.

He was also deft at handling whatever wordplay his writers gave him. In one guise, as the extremely far-out jazz saxophonist Progress Hornsby, he explained that his new record was in a special kind of hi-fi: “This is the highest they’ve ever fied. If they fi any higher than this, they’re gonna foo!”

He could seem eloquent even when his words were total gibberish: Among his gifts was the ability to mimic the sounds and cadences of foreign languages he didn’t actually speak.

He was equally convincing as a suburban husband slowly figuring out that his wife, played by Ms. Coca, had wrecked the car (a comic conceit that had not yet become a cliché); as an absurdly enthusiastic member of a bouffant-coiffed rock ‘n’ roll trio called the Haircuts; or as a pompous German professor in a battered top hat and moth-eaten frock coat who claimed, despite abundant evidence to the contrary, to be an expert on pretty much everything. One week, the professor was an archaeologist who claimed to have discovered “the secret of Titten-Totten’s tomb.” Asked what the secret was, he became indignant: “You think I’m gonna tell you? You got another guess coming. You take that trip.”

Two decades after “Your Show of Shows” ruled the Saturday-night airwaves, another live 90-minute show, similarly built around a stock company’s wild and often irreverent sketch comedy, helped change the face of television. But there might not have been a “Saturday Night Live” if Sid Caesar and company hadn’t paved the way.

“It was fun, but hard,” Mr. Caesar said in 1984, looking back on his glory years. “I worked six days a week, putting the script together, working with the writers. The show had to be written by Wednesday night because Thursday we had to put it on its feet. Friday we showed it to the technicians, and Saturday was the show. Sunday was our only day off, and I used to stand under the shower and shake.”

He did more than shake. By the age of 30, Mr. Caesar was not just the king of television, earning \$1 million a year; he was also an alcoholic and a pill addict. Under his manic exterior, he recalled in “Where Have I Been?,” his 1982 autobiography, he was distraught and filled with self-hatred, tormented by guilt because he did not think he deserved the acclaim he was receiving.

He was also given to explosive rages. Mr. Caesar once dangled a terrified Mr. Brooks from an 18th-story window until colleagues restrained him. With one punch, he knocked out a horse that had thrown his wife off its back, a scene that Mr. Brooks replayed in his movie “Blazing Saddles.”

By the late 1950s, he was off the air, a victim of changing tastes as well as personal problems. He made a triumphant comeback on Broadway in 1962, playing seven characters in “Little Me,” a musical created by Cy

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Coleman, Carolyn Leigh and Mr. Simon. (A concert revival of “Little Me” was part of the Encores! series at City Center this month.) A year later, Mr. Caesar held his own among comedy heavyweights like Milton Berle, Mickey Rooney and Jonathan Winters in the hit movie “It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World.” But his problems soon got the better of him, and his comeback was short-lived.

Most of the 1960s and ’70s were a struggle. They were also a blur: In writing “Where Have I Been?” Mr. Caesar relied on reporting by his collaborator, Bill Davidson, and the recollections of his family, because there was so much he could not remember. (Twenty-one years later, Mr. Caesar and Mr. Friedfeld wrote a second autobiography, “Caesar’s Hours.” This one was more upbeat, mostly because the focus was Mr. Caesar’s comedy career rather than his personal struggles.)

Mr. Caesar was not entirely out of the public eye, even in his dark days. He showed up on television now and then; he appeared in a handful of movies, some memorable (Mr. Brooks’s “Silent Movie”) and some less so (the silly horror comedy “The Spirit Is Willing”); he returned to Broadway in 1971, albeit briefly, in “Four on a Garden,” an ill-fated evening of one-act comedies that also starred Carol Channing. And the release in 1973 of “Ten From Your Show of Shows,” a feature-film compilation of sketches, helped keep his reputation alive. But he continued to flounder.

Back Up From Rock Bottom

The low point came in 1978. He was in two movies that year, “Grease” and “The Cheap Detective,” but by the time they hit theaters, he had hit bottom.

Fostering a new style of comedy on American TV: Mr. Caesar, far right, working with the writers Mel Brooks, far left, Woody Allen and Mel Tolkin. via Photofest

Incapacitated by his addictions and neuroses, barely able to get out of bed, he underwent intensive psychotherapy and medical treatment. He found salvation and sanity, he later said, in a form of Jungian self-therapy: recording improvised dialogues each day between himself as Sid, a wise father, and Sidney, his wayward son, whom the father teaches to become a restrained, confident adult. In the 1980s, Mr. Caesar acquired a new addiction: healthful living. He developed a lean, youthful physique by avoiding fat, salt and sugar and by strenuously working out at least one hour each morning.

“Now, instead of knocking life down, tearing it apart, I graciously accept life,” he said.

Sidney Caesar was born on Sept. 8, 1922, in Yonkers, the youngest of three sons of Jewish immigrants, Max Caesar and the former Ida Rafael. Max, who emigrated from Poland, owned and operated a luncheonette with his wife, who had come from Russia; young Sid Caesar developed his foreign-sounding double talk by listening closely to the luncheonette’s multinational clientele. The family lived over the restaurant and rented rooms to transients.

As a child, Sid was moody, shy, quiet and — although he would later grow to 6 foot 2 — short. He once said he felt “like a midget in the world of giants.” He kept to himself much of the time. He was 3 before he began to talk, and even then, his brothers recalled, he did not say a great deal.

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His teachers, interviewed at the time of his early television success, remembered a completely unexceptional child. “Sid Caesar was one of the dumbest pupils I ever had,” one teacher said.

He took up weight lifting. “I developed tremendous muscles, which everyone had to respect,” he said. “The biceps I built were disguises for my fear.”

He also learned how to play the saxophone, which he later said saved his life: “It helped me blow off some steam and get rid of some of the anger.”

Equally important, the saxophone gave him an entree into show business. At 14, he was hired to play at a Catskills hotel on summer vacation. While there, he also began performing in comedy sketches; he still thought of himself primarily as a saxophonist and would go on to work with the bands of Shep Fields, Claude Thornhill and others, but comedy soon became his primary focus.

After graduating from Yonkers High School, he worked as an usher and then a doorman at the Capitol Theater in Manhattan, auditing courses at the Juilliard School because he could not afford to attend. He met Florence Levy in the Catskills and married her in 1943.

In World War II, he enlisted in the Coast Guard and did duty on Brooklyn piers. In his free time, he wrote comic material that helped win him a role in “Tars and Spars,” a Coast Guard revue that toured the country and was made into a movie, in which he also appeared, in 1946. A monologue in which he played multiple characters and provided all the sound effects of a World War I aerial dogfight made a strong impression on audiences — and on the show’s director, Max Liebman.

In 1948, Mr. Liebman directed Mr. Caesar in the hit Broadway revue “Make Mine Manhattan.” The next year, when Mr. Liebman brought him to television on the weekly “The Admiral Broadway Revue,” Mr. Caesar was hailed as the small-screen discovery of the year. His star rose even higher with the debut of “Your Show of Shows,” also overseen by Mr. Liebman, in February 1950.

Although the chemistry between Mr. Caesar and Ms. Coca was a large part of the show’s success, NBC decided to split them up and give Ms. Coca her own show after four years. With Mr. Reiner and Mr. Morris still by his side, Mr. Caesar carried on with “Caesar’s Hour,” but after a strong start, the ratings declined, and the show was canceled in 1957. He returned the next year with “Sid Caesar Invites You,” a half-hour ABC show, which reunited him with Ms. Coca. But the old magic was gone, and the show lasted only a few months.

“I had no experience in failure,” Mr. Caesar later recalled of the years that followed. “And then, when failure comes, oh, boy, it comes in lumps.”

After 20 up-and-down years, Mr. Caesar found himself in 1978 spending four months almost entirely in bed, secretly ordering in beer whenever his wife turned her back. Offered a job in Canada in Mr. Simon’s comedy “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” he was in such a fog of alcohol and pills that he couldn’t remember his lines. Finally, he sought treatment.

“I had to come to terms with myself,” he recalled. “Do you want to live or die? Make up your mind. And I did. I said, ‘I want to live.’ And that was it: the first step on a long journey.”

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A Career Rejuvenated

His return to health and sobriety led to a career revival, aided by two events in 1982: the publication of “Where Have I Been?” and the release of the movie “My Favorite Year,” a fictionalized account of life behind the scenes at “Your Show of Shows” produced by Mr. Brooks, with Joseph Bologna as the show’s Caesar-like star.

Through the 1980s and ’90s, until health problems slowed him down, Mr. Caesar worked regularly: on television (he hosted “Saturday Night Live” in 1983), in films (he worked for Mr. Brooks again in “History of the World: Part I”), in nightclubs (with Ms. Coca), on Broadway (although his show “Sid Caesar and Company: Does Anybody Know What I’m Talking About?” closed quickly in 1989) and at the Metropolitan Opera, where he appeared as Frosch, the drunken jailer, in a 1987 production of “Die Fledermaus.”

Mr. Caesar was inducted into the Television Academy Hall of Fame in 1985.

Mr. Caesar’s wife, Florence, died in 2010. His survivors include a son, Richard; two daughters, Michele and Karen Caesar; and two grandsons.

In a 1987 interview with The New York Times, Mr. Caesar looked back on his early success and subsequent failures, both of which he admitted he had been unprepared to handle, and reflected on the perspective he said he had finally achieved.

“Everybody wants to have a goal: I gotta get to that goal, I gotta get to that goal, I gotta get to that goal,” he said. “Then you get to that goal, and then you gotta get to another goal. But in between goals is a thing called life that has to be lived and enjoyed — and if you don’t, you’re a fool.”

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TAKE 5

THEATER

3 'PAGEANT'

The musical comedy where female contestants are played by men is coming back to NYC for the first time in more than 20 years. Tony nominee Brad Oscar ("The Producers") will host the show to benefit Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. Performances are Feb. 17 and 24 at Red Lacquer Club.



Backstage

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UPDATE |

THE TONY-WINNING "MATILDA THE MUSICAL" will embark upon a national tour in May 2015, starting at L.A.'s Ahmanson Theatre. The cast—and the young actors who rotate in the title role—have yet to be announced. Keep checking Backstage.com for casting info!







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February 22, 2014

Cast Albums

Own Weeks	Last Week	This Week	Title, Artist Imprint Label	Peak Position	Weeks on Chart
1	1	1	 Wicked Original Broadway Cast Recording Decca Broadway Decca		1 424
2	2	2	The Book Of Mormon Original Broadway Cast Recording Ghostlight SHK-Boom		1 143
New		3	Big Fish Original Broadway Cast Recording Broadway Records		3 1
4	3	4	Kinky Boots Original Broadway Cast Recording Masterworks Broadway Sony Masterworks		1 37
3	4	5	Once: A New Musical Original Broadway Cast Recording Masterworks Broadway Sony Masterworks		1 100
5	7	6	The Phantom Of The Opera Original London Cast Recording Really Useful Decca Classics		3 295
7	8	7	The Lion King Original Broadway Cast Recording Walt Disney	 	3 407
6	5	8	Shrek: The Musical Original Broadway Cast Recording Decca Broadway Decca		1 57
11	6	9	Roald Dahl's Matilda: The Musical Original Broadway Cast Recording Yellow Sound Label Broadway Records		3 20
8	9	10	Jersey Boys Original Broadway Cast Recording Rhino		1 422