

By Joan McKenna
Scottsdale Life Editor

Howard Borden did for flying what Gilligan and Skipper did for sailing: gave people afraid to travel a good reason to stay at home.

But Howard also gave audiences of *The Bob Newhart Show* many a chuckle over its six year run. And Bill Daily, who played the role, gave new meaning to the phrase "Hi, Bob."

Daily says he loved the character — "a navigator with permanent jetlag" — and calls those years "great, just great."

So why would a 64-year-old actor of such background say he's "very grateful" for the opportunity to play the lead in Musical Theatre of Arizona's production of *Scrooge & Co*?

"This is the most important thing I've ever wanted to do," Daily says. "This is the role."

Apparently life after Howard was not exactly a smooth ride.

"I kept getting Howard rôles, bad Howard rôles," Daily says. "After Howard was a nightmare."

He did six or seven pilots — none of which sold — and guest parts in other shows, such as *The Love Boat*. Then he was doing a play in Florida when Aaron Spelling offered him a "fortune" to star in a *Love Boat*-type series called *Aloha Paradise* with Debbie Reynolds.

"The show was just awful," Daily says. "I was getting sicker every week, getting bitter. My kids were noticing it. I finally just quit."

He said good-bye not only to Spelling's production but to Los Angeles and television as well. He moved to Albuquerque and took over as director of Albuquerque Little Theatre.

The stage was not new to Daily. He had been singing and playing jazz since he was 16 when he joined a band as a bass player.

A Des Moines native, he was raised in Chicago and says that during World War II if you could hold up an instrument you could get a job.

He and two friends formed "Jack and the Beanstalks" — Jack being the diminutive lead player and Daily and the third musician being 6-foot-plus. They moved up the success ladder as they added sophisticated comedy to their act and were hired for several posh New York clubs and Broadway shows.

"We were just really getting popular in New York when we were drafted," Daily says.

He spent a year and a half in Korea with the U.S. Army I-Corps in charge of a five-piece band. The group often performed right on the front lines, but Daily seems to carry few battle scars.

"It was the greatest time of my life," he says. "I'll never have that kind of comraderie again. Everybody worked really hard. The musicians were great. We



Bill Daily plays the lead in Musical Theatre of Arizona's *Scrooge & Co*.

Playing Ebenezer Scrooge a dream-come-true for actor

had a brilliant group. Everybody wanted us. Of course, you don't remember the bad parts."

When he returned to America, he turned to television, having seen Sid Caesar's *Show of Shows* and thinking that's where he should be.

He got a scholarship to Goodman Theatre, Chicago's version of the Juilliard School in New York, and majored in directing.

But after graduation in the late 50s, he knocked on the doors of several small stations in the area only to be turned away.

Meanwhile, he and his wife were trying to adopt children, and ran into anti-musician sentiments.

To present a more stable

image, Daily took a steady job at Gingiss Brothers tuxedo rental (now called Gingiss Formalwear), which in those days was just one store.

The greatest moment in his life: the day the adoption agency called to tell him "Yes." He now has two "wonderful" kids, a son, 32, and daughter, 30.

As far as TV, a friend finally suggested he try getting employment with the big network affiliates. He did and was offered two jobs the next day.

He became associate director at NBC for \$190 a week, working in what then amounted to 96 percent local live television. But a few years down the road, programming had been reduced to 6 percent live and Daily's role was reduced to

directing the news, which he disliked.

He started helping a former co-worker write *The Mike Douglas Show* for Westinghouse. Then Steve Allen came in for a guest appearance and thought so much of Daily's material he stole him for his own show in Los Angeles to write and perform.

"I'll never forget that," Daily says, adding that Allen had been his hero. He went home, went to sleep, woke up at about 3 in the morning and screamed at the top of his lungs, he says. He'd finally made it.

Allen's show was canceled after 13 weeks, but Daily wound up getting a bit part on *Bewitched*. Sidney Sheldon saw that performance and wanted him to play Maj. Healey on *I*

SCROOGE & CO.

written by Ron Newcomer

By: Musical Theater of Arizona

When: 7:30 p.m. tonight and Friday, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Sundome; continues Monday through Dec. 29 at Gammage Auditorium.
Tickets: \$20, \$18, half price for kids 12 and under

Reservations: 678-2222

Dream of Jeannie.

It was another stretch of five "great" years, in which Daily and Larry Hagman had the kind of freedom to make up a lot of the scripts. But behind the scenes politics eventually killed the show.

Over the years, Daily also has written several commercials, including the "Reach out and touch someone" ads for AT&T. One radio spot in which he starred was named Commercial of the Year.

In 1972, Grant Tinker offered Daily the role of Howard Borden. Then Tinker took it away, asking him instead to be the lead star in a spinoff of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, called *The Councilman*.

Daily wanted the Howard role. In the end, Tinker came back and said network officials didn't like *The Councilman* but they liked him and he was playing Howard. Issue settled.

Outside of Tinker, few have thought of Daily as lead material, which is why he pursued the role of Ebenezer Scrooge in MTA's musical. Scrooge sings and dances and has a non-traditional sense of humor in MTA's version. Backing Daily are "a marvelous cast" and "brilliant new music," he says.

"It's practically all underscored. It's not just another Christmas Carol. It's something special."

The musical was written by MTA artistic director Ron Newcomer, with music and lyrics by Craig Bohmler and Marion Adler. Newcomer said he had wanted to do the project for 10 years when he met Bohmler in Houston two and a half years ago. They did a different version at the Herberger Theater using several standard Christmas songs, but they decided to write an entirely new score this year.

Newcomer, who has directed and produced more than 300 events in the Valley, co-founded MTA in 1984 with his wife. Bohmler is a composer, conductor and pianist whose works have been performed in Carnegie Hall. They all hope to bring the production back next year and possibly get it taped for television or cable.

"There's nothing like it," Daily says. "I'm very grateful." □