

A WEEKLY GUIDE TO ST. LOUIS EVENTS

CALENDAR

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Once More, With Channing

Carol Channing returns in 'Hello, Dolly!'
See Centerfold.

On The Cover

By Joan McKenna

SAY the name St. Louis, and Carol Channing Stakes a sentimental journey through four decades of performing at one of her favorite stops.

She recalls the time the Cardinals won the 1982 World Series when she was in the midst of a performance of "Hello, Dolly!" at the Fox Theatre. Earlier, she had sung "Hello, Redbirds" at Busch Stadium. That night, news circulated at the Fox that St. Louis had beaten Milwaukee for the championship.

"I got up and said, 'This is reason to celebrate.' And they played 'Hello, Redbirds,' and everybody danced and sang, and then we went on with the show."

Channing was speaking by telephone from Dallas, where her current production of "Hello, Dolly!" was playing. The show will come to the Fox for a six-night run beginning Tuesday. (See ON STAGE listings.)

Channing also recalled the time she was to perform in Kiel Auditorium in 1952 and was feeling overwhelmed by the size of the venue.

"I was thinking, 'How am I going to reach all these people?' when somebody said, 'Do you realize your father's feet were standing right where you are now?' It was a wonderful thing."

Channing's father was a reknowned Christian Science lecturer, and the editor-in-chief of many Christian Science publications. She talks of him as if he were the real star of the family, and he definitely was the earliest supporter of his daughter's acting career.

As a fourth-grader in San Francisco, Channing read the minutes of the student council meetings to the other students every Friday.

"The first time on the school auditorium stage, I realized that what I laughed about everyone else laughed at too. I suddenly no longer was an only child. I told my daddy, 'This is it.'"

Acting still is "it" for Channing. She never takes a vacation because she never feels she needs one.

But she says that she's reviving her Tony Award-winning role of Dolly Gallagher Levi once again, 31 years after she opened on Broadway, for only one reason: demand.

"Theater owners asked for it. They really wanted it," she said.

Channing insists she never gets tired of the role. If anything's changed, she says, it's making the production even bigger and better to keep up with people's imaginations.

"That red stairway seemed like it went up to the Pearly Gates, so we had to *make* it go up to the Pearly Gates [this time]," she said.

The current production eventually will go to Broadway and then on a world tour. Meanwhile, Channing has a TV deal in the works, which she won't talk much about, other than to say that it could be anything from a miniseries to a special.

She and her husband/manager, Charles Lowe, see little of their home in Beverly Hills — not that Channing minds.

"I've done this all my life," she said. "I think the trick is good help. We're like a circus — every man to his own job, and the final man takes down the center of the tent."

During all those years of "Hello, Dolly," Channing never has missed one of her scheduled 4,000-plus performances.

"It's very true. I've played it with an arm in a sling or a cast on a foot. Lying in bed, you get much sicker thinking of all those people [who bought tickets]."