

Simi Horwitz

To Honor Helen and Be Her Knight!

"It was the happiest time of my life. It was innocent, completely wholesome, completely magical. Also, a hell of a lot of fun."

Simi saw Muriel's The Pocket Players production of *Emil and the Detectives* at the Gramercy Arts Theater in New York City and it was that experience that led her to join the Tuesday children's acting class and the Wednesday Production Workshop at the 92nd Street Y under Muriel's tutelage.

In the Tuesday acting class, Simi recalled the time that Muriel had the students improvise around the Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventures of the Speckled Band*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, where a snake descends from the ceiling onto a prone Sherlock Holmes. Muriel had a tile in the ceiling above the stage opened and had a student crawl into the ceiling. The student then lowered a belt on to Simi, who as Holmes, was lying on a bed. Terrified and completely discombobulated by what wasn't in the script, she gave a totally spontaneous response!

Simi performed in the following plays as part of The Production Workshop at The 92nd Street YM-YWHA:

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare. Year: 1962. Simi played Hippolyta, "an Amazon Queen, a very small part and justifiably so. The costumes were remarkable." Muriel edited the play for the purposes of this production. Simi has a hilarious memory of Jeffrey Friedman as Lysander, proclaiming, 'To honor Helen and be her knight,' and after withdrawing his sword and holding it high up in the air, charging off the stage in what was supposed to be a great military gesture. "But," as Simi pointed out, "the sword was crooked and bent out of shape. Needless to say, the audience cracked up."

The Prince Who Learned Everything Out of Books, by Jacinto Benavente. Music composed by Irma Jurist. Year 1963. Simi played the Tutor, "an old, decrepit, comic, male character, a pedantic figure." The Tutor travels with the Prince through a deep forest, showing him what life is like outside of the fairy tale kingdom he inhabits with his royal parents. (Editor's note: Muriel made brilliant use of "props" in her productions and the map that the Tutor used to guide the Prince over hill and dale was hilarious in and of itself). Made by Simi, "it was a rolled out brown paper map, could easily have been 20 feet long, perhaps a foot wide, depicting trees, mountains, pathwaysand consisted of two scrolls at either end and each capped, (top and bottom) with little crowns to suggest something royal and ancient."

The Servant of Two Masters, by Carlo Goldoni. Year 1964. Simi played Pantalone, a stock Commedia dell'Arte character, "a comic, bombastic, buffoon of a father figure."

Additionally, Simi performed in Muriel's production of *The Servant of Two Masters* at the New York State Pavilion of the 1964 World's Fair and on the children's program of PBS, Channel 13, consisting of excerpts from the play. As Simi remembers it, "The program was hosted by a young, brunette woman." She vividly remembers Muriel's question to her students in the Tuesday class at the 92nd Street Y following the performance: 'What would you say was this woman's intention?' Muriel's answer to her own question was, 'In letting the world know that she was extremely beautiful.'

Simi also remembers Muriel's understated sense of humor. Muriel rented rehearsal space at The Ansonia Hotel on Broadway for *The Servant of Two Masters* and in the middle of a rehearsal, a guy came in and said that he had the space. "That's curious," Muriel said, "because we have the space."

Turandot by Carlo Gozzi. Year 1965. Simi played one of the two Priests, which she has no memory of. "No memory ... nothing."

Simi performed in *The Marvelous Adventures of Tyl Eulenspiegel* by Jonathan Levy and directed by Muriel Sharon at The Triangle Theater in New York City. Year 1970. Simi played a lamb. Her line was 'ba-ba-ba'. "I bleated very well," she said.

"Although we were very young, she never spoke down to us. At the same time, she remembered that we were very young. She worked with whatever abilities we brought to the table without making any judgments--at least not obvious to us--about our respective talents or future prospects. She was everything a great acting teacher should be.

"Muriel was one in a million. There is no comparison."