

From ingenue to â??old lady,â?? veteran Bay Area actress â??Verry McVerryâ?? says the roles keep on coming

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Her father joked that Maureen McVerry came out of the womb and took a bow. The third girl born to the family in three years seemed destined to be in the spotlight.



McVerry was head cheerleader in high school. (Photos courtesy of Maureen McVerry)

â??At five, I sang â??St. Louis Womanâ?? in a show and nailed it,â?• McVerry said, â??and I wasnâ??t nervous at all.â?• From her paternal grandmother, McVerry inherited an ear for accents and voices. She imitated everyone â?? funny people in the store and famous people. She was also highly sensitive, weeping at the drop of a hat. A dramatic child.

So, when she dropped out of college after two years, her father suggested she audition for â??Man of La Manchaâ?• at the local junior college. With no experience, except having sung in choirs, she got one of the three female roles. â??From the audience, my father noticed my comfort level and confidence performing, so when I re-entered college three years later, he encouraged me to study acting,â?• she said.



At 65, sheâ??s had a full and successful career as an actor, musical theater and cabaret performer.

Irish poets, singers and storytellers

Born into the Irish tradition of poets, singers and storytellers, she grew up in a family that spent time singing and making each other laugh . â??My father sang all the time â?? in the house, in the car â?? I didnâ??t know that was unusual,â?• said McVerry, who lives in her family home on Potrero Hill.

Right after graduation from the University of California-Berkeley, she began performing in musicals, cabaret, commercials, TV and film. Sheâ??s been involved with more than 50 theater companies. Her

major roles have been in the theater, but sheâ??s had small parts in a score of feature films including â??In Nine Months,â?• â??Peggy Sue Got Married,â?• â??The Dead Pool,â?• â??True Believerâ?• and â??High Crimes.â?•



In the 1990s, she began performing her own solo cabaret show, â??Verry McVerry,â?• at clubs from San Francisco to New York. She stages them about every two years, she said, when â??my opinions well up and I have to let them out.â?• In her last show, in May 2019 at the OASIS nightclub, she talked about when she got cast as the old lady in â??Sunday in the Park.â?•

â??OLD LADY??? Whaaaaaat?â?• she wailed. â??I didnâ??t want to be the old lady.â?• And as hard as it is to accept aging, she said, she didnâ??t want to be like the old lady in the show, constantly complaining about everything changing. â??I believe that as we age, we need to embrace change, say â??Yesâ?? to new things, and be excited about what change brings.â?•

Musical camp for middle schoolers

Throughout her whirlwind career, she managed to marry and have two children, Flannery and Jack. When her daughter was in grade school, McVerry was asked to revive their middle-school musical â?? the work sheâ??s most proud of, she said. From those productions grew the idea for Maureen McVerryâ??s Musical Camp for Children and Teens on the Peninsula, for which the Peninsula Arts Council named her â??Arts Educator of the Yearâ?• in 2013.



McVerry acts up with students in her musical camp.

But this year has been tough: sheâ??s lost 20 weeks-worth of work since the pandemic. â??I miss theater, singing with people and live tap dance class.â?• The pandemic also put the theater, camp and middle school musicals on hold.

To fill that space, sheâ??s been taking virtual classes, tap and body positive movement. She boogie-boards, and reads tomes like â??War and Peace.â?• And sheâ??s still singing. She formed a cabaret-like pod in her home with well-known Bay Area musical director Dave Dobrusky accompanying her on piano. â??Singing is like riding a bike; you donâ??t forget, but you have to work out and stay nimble.â?•

Born in Arizona and raised in Southern California, McVerry graduated with a degree in history from UC-Berkeley after taking time off for a few years to travel to Europe.

McVerry made her mark with her first play out of college in 1981 â?? â??Fire Escape,â?• about life in the tougher parts of New York City, at The One Act Theatre. â??I got good reviews, and in those days, the newspaper reviewers had a lot of clout,â?• she said. She went on to perform in a number of area theaters, including The Marin Theater Company, The Marines Memorial and Theater on the Square. Good reviews kept the parts coming.

A fortuitous meeting

â??Fire Escapeâ?• also boosted her star rating with a guy named Rick in The Right Spot Cafe at Folsom and 17th streets. â??I was talking to Rick, who I was attracted to, and someone came up to me and said, â??I really liked you in that show at the One-Act.â?? It was perfect timing.â?•

Rick Alber was indeed impressed, even more so when he found out about the perks of her day job: free tickets as a booker of movie theaters throughout Northern California. They met again at the Julian Theater inside the Potrero Neighborhood House. Alber, an attorney, was stage managing the show and McVerry went to see it. â??That was it. We married in 1987,â?• McVerry said, â??and when we had a son, we gave him the middle name, Julian.â?•

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Luckily for McVerry, Rick wasnâ??t in showbusiness. â??His employment gave me the opportunity to have two children and own a house in San Francisco â?? really tough for a theater actor,â?• she said. â??Rick loved the theater and was my opening night date for 32 wonderful years,â?• said McVerry, â??as well as being my special advisor with tips to help polish my performances.â?• Alber died of an unsuccessful heart operation in 2014 at age 62. â??His death was so devastating I lost my singing voice for a while.â?•

Following â??Fire Escape,â?• McVerry landed in another hit show, â??Noises Off,â?• which ran for one year at the Marines Memorial Theater. McVerry played Brooke, a young inexperienced actress performing with a chaotic theatre company. Brooke is rather clueless, always losing her contact lenses and gets mixed up in a love triangle.

McVerry went on to act in â??Noises Offâ?• in four subsequent productions, the first two at the Marin Theater Company, in which she played Brooke, and the last two at the Marines Memorial Theater and the South Bay Civic Light Opera, in which she played the middle-aged, Belinda.



McVerry as Eliza Doolittle in Pygmalion at the ACT Theatre.

In between those four productions, McVerry rounded off her early hits with â??Curse of the Werewolfâ?• at Theater on the Square. â??My greatest acting job was pretending to be an ingenue while I was pregnant for its six-month run.â?•

Pontiac commercial and pre-teen fans

McVerry landed so many local commercials in the 1980s that her friends wanted her to pick up the meal tabs. She had to explain that, aside from four national commercials she did over the years that did pay well, most local jobs didnâ??t. One of the national jobs was introducing the remote control for the side

door of Pontiacâ??s mini-van.

It was during this time McVerry was able to join both major acting unions, Equity and SAG. Due to her longevity in the business, she can count on a pension from both. â??Fight for the union!â?• she said.

In 1991, after the birth of their daughter, McVerry and family moved to the Los Angeles area so she could try her hand at TV and film. She appeared in the final season of â??Full Houseâ?• in an episode called â??Dateless in San Francisco.â?• She plays the Olsen twinsâ?? third-grade teacher who has a crush on a character named Joey. â??For the big climax, I ask him out on a date, and he says â??Yes.'â?•

That episode was filmed in the late â??90s when her children were young, so she had no idea of the showâ??s popularity. When it finally aired, she said girls would surround her and ask questions about the show and its cast members. â??To a pre-teen girl, I was glowing.â?•

That would have been in San Carlos, where they moved in 1999, three years after their son was born. McVerryâ??s husband was offered a job he wanted, so they left Santa Monica. â??It was the city of good living â?? I loved it,â?• McVerry said, â??I could send the kids off to the public school by themselves and not worry.â?•

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When her daughter was in fourth grade in the Clifford School, she was asked to revive its middle school musical. McVerry picked shows like â??Anything Goes,â?• â??Fiddler on the Roofâ?• and â??Guy and Dollsâ?• with big production numbers. â??The great thing about school musicals, unlike sports, not one has to go home defeated,â?• she said. â??Everyone has a part in the show, so they go home elated.â?•



Clifford Middle School students in â??Anything Goesâ?• in March. It was McVerryâ??s last production before the pandemic.

Within a few years, McVerry was doing four shows a year, three in schools in Redwood City and one in Los Altos. She loved seeing the exponential growth of the kids. â??As an actor, I love making people laugh and cry, but when a bunch of middle-schoolers nail a perfect harmony, I weep with joy,â?• she said. After her husband died, McVerry cut back to one show a year. But eight years later, a couple of the mothers whose kids had been in those shows, asked her to start a summer musical theater camp.


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Maureen with her theater camp group.

During all this time, she was also acting. She has won seven San Francisco Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Awards and two Drama-Logue awards. She has been in too many plays to list, but her favorite â??is the one Iâ??m in at the time.â?• She was also producing and performing â??Verry McVerry.â?•

Over the past 26 years, her showâ??s name has remained the same, while the banter and songs have changed to reflect her current life. â??Back in the â??90s I was involved with maintaining a family and raising children, so I sang songs that reflected that time in my life,â?• she said. â??Now, Iâ??m the crone.â?•

â??I played the ingenue as long as I could,â?• McVerry said. â??Now, Iâ??m offered the crazy mother, the old showgirl, the wacky aunt.â?•

And sheâ??s OK with that â?? since the roles keep coming.

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