

Carradine to try hand at marshal role

By Wilbur Swann
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Tennessee's annual Christmas parade may have the most dramatic grand marshal in its history when former character actor John Carradine steps in that role.

Carradine, who will ride down State Street in a new 1951 blue and black Chevrolet Pontiac, is the actor John Carradine whose long, villainous face is familiar to filmgoers through his many roles as characters wild, drunk, deranged or doped. Movie buffs will also remember Carradine as Sheriff the panderer in "Hugobusch," as Gene the no-goodnik in "The Grapes of Wrath," and as Long Jack in "Cape Fear."

Carradine has lived in Santa Barbara for the past three years, and his migration here has been a gradual one as he moved from the Los Angeles area — first from North Hollywood to Calabasas, then to Ojai, and finally to Santa Barbara.

He resides off a busy street in a quiet, unassuming house in Montecito that gives no clue that such a celebrated person lives there. But, spectators get their first glimpse of the sight of the grand Marshal-to-be in the garage with the license plate: 28C 84M.

Well, that's because John Carradine is, by one indication his is, "considered to come in the most intelligent line actors and by others as one of the greatest contemporary performers of the film era."

His repertoire springs from his roles, which over 35 years have included a crooked, before later, stealer of Jesse James, gambler, unscrupulous politician, bitter revolution, drug-addicted, playboy, pirate, greasy roller, gangster, victim of insanity, deranged white knight, twisted preacher, mad scientist, Egyptian pharaoh, chief dog, traveling salesman, alien, technique professor, and that's only a fraction of the list.

Oh, and Dracula. That's a part he has played more than once or twice, a role many people remember Carradine by.

In a recent interview with Carradine and his wife, Lorraine, who, with Emily (who is a contemporary Santa Barbara, daughter of the Evans family), the 19-year-old actor reminded about his long and colorful career. He began with Shakespeare.

"Shakespeare and the stage are my first love," he said. "If you're going to work, why not use the best material you can get your hands on? Shakespeare is the best."

But behind his being from such an excellent, inspiring person accepted nearly an entire wall. It was Carradine as Hamlet.

Although he has been billed for his portrayals of Othello and Iago, Hamlet, he said, was the

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JOHN CARRADINE, grand marshal of Santa Barbara's annual Christmas parade, reminisces about a long and colorful film career that has spanned 35 years and included roles from an ex-preacher to Dracula.

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Special role.
"That Hamlet was Shakespeare's greatest creation," said Carradine. "So John Barrymore once said, 'Hamlet' had such marvelous things to say. The role of Hamlet is a great challenge, a part that is a traditional testing ground for Shakespeare actors."

Carradine met John Barrymore because of Shakespeare.

"I'd been working on Richard III," said Carradine, "and this is one of Shakespeare's plays that just won't work as well as Shakespeare of that long opening speech. The play didn't get performed for nearly 20 years because the audience usually just sat around in the beginning of it. Every actor playing Richard III had to make their own arrangements, construct their own program, to give the play a chance to get going before that big speech."

Carradine said he worked on his own arrangement of the play for years and decided he wanted some advice — from Barrymore.

With no preliminary introduction, he went to the Barrymore home and rang the doorbell.

"He came out in a blue jacket and smoking pipe," Carradine remembered. "He looked at my lambskin, my smoking trousers, and it was like Sunday morning Livingston."

Carradine announced: "Mr. Barrymore, I'm going to play Richard the Third."

Barrymore replied: "Oh, really? I think we need a drink."

With that, Barrymore's Japanese butler appeared, and Barrymore ordered a tall (the emphasis on tall) Tom Collins for each of them.

Barrymore spent 20 minutes of so hour going over Carradine's program in "Richard III" and pronounced:

"Good job."

Carradine's strong love of Shakespeare intensive took his deep appreciation for all the arts. Literature has always been particularly important to him, and the only part he has given his children is in this area. The fact that three of his five sons (David, Keith, Robert, John, and Christopher) are actors, said Carradine, is due to the direct influence from him, although he admits that they could not help but be influenced by what he was doing.

"Their careers have been their own responsibility," said Carradine. "I only encouraged them to take a liberal arts program in college — mainly literature. David went four years, studying literature, and they all worked with me on stage."

In 1961 David, at 21, played in "Hamlet" with his father in New York, and Keith and Robert both played in "Takeaway Road" with him.

Carradine said he preferred theater to film.

"By and large you have better material for stage," said Carradine. "Because the shooting of a film is done out of sequence, I find myself doing the most important scenes before I know anything about the character. In the early days of film we used to be beginning to end, but of course that became unromantic."

He said that in film the actor had to depend entirely on the director to preserve mood, character and tempo, and that this could sometimes prove disastrous. His favorite directors were Cecil B. DeMille, Richard Brodwin, and John Ford.

Carradine's migration to a young man from Philadelphia to Hollywood was plain, in part, as a means of escape. After working as an actor in the great writer David Chester French in Philadelphia, he migrated and joined his way to New Orleans, where he worked as a stage and actor.

In 1927 he got a job on the Texas train, and from El Paso, Texas, in California, he delivered supplies

"SHAKESPEARE is my first love," says Carradine.

and adjusted themselves at each stop. In Los Angeles he got off the train, made his way to Sunset Boulevard, and knocked on the door of the Double motion. He was hired as a scenic designer. At about this time he was hired by Max Factor to illustrate a series of booklets on Shakespeare, and he also got a part in a production of the comic opera "Candide."

Carradine's stage talent has been in other long.

"I was a ham, although I thought I was a serious," he said. "I was neither one, but some where in between."

By the time he was 21, Carradine had his own Shakespeare company, based in San Francisco. With the encouragement of actors he traveled up and down the West Coast, and before long he was set to take the company across the country. He had engaged the theater, accepted the advance.

"Then the war hit, and everything closed up," Carradine reflected.

It was the first world's job. In the 20 years he had worked before the camera, Carradine has played in some 40 films — and most of his roles have been the type that have earned him the reputation of being the world's greatest ham.

How does he feel about always being cast as the "heavy"?

Carradine is quick to point out the fine points of such characterization.

"I was the sympathetic heavy," he said. "I was the one who starts out as the bad guy and ends up as the best."

What about Dracula?

"Dracula's not a heavy. He's a demon, yes, but not a heavy. He is an afflicted man, and your sympathy has to go to Dracula as an afflicted person."

What about Carradine's personal life in relation to the roles he has played — all of drama, the type of stuff one sees in Long Jack, Sheriff the gambler or Casey the no-goodnik?

"This is a job, that's all. I liked Long Jack because he worked for 20 weeks straight."

But, there are people who wouldn't be heavy enough to do the things Carradine did. Instead of riding the famous train to Los Angeles to work a corner in film, most people would stay home and work for an insurance company.

"I did that, too," said Carradine. "My first job in Philadelphia was for an insurance company."

What about the RKO movie game?

Mrs. Carradine — Emily, as she likes to be called — interrupted.

"I want my former place as my MRS. BARR," Emily said.

"But honey, I can't do anything about that," said Carradine. "There is a bond on it."

Emily wondered why that made any difference, and this reminded her that where they could find a doll house for their granddaughter, Barbara, for Christmas.

Barbara, age 4, and David, age 1, will ride with Carradine in tomorrow's Christmas parade.