

Interviews: 1960s Celebrities of TV, Film at 'The Hollywood Show'

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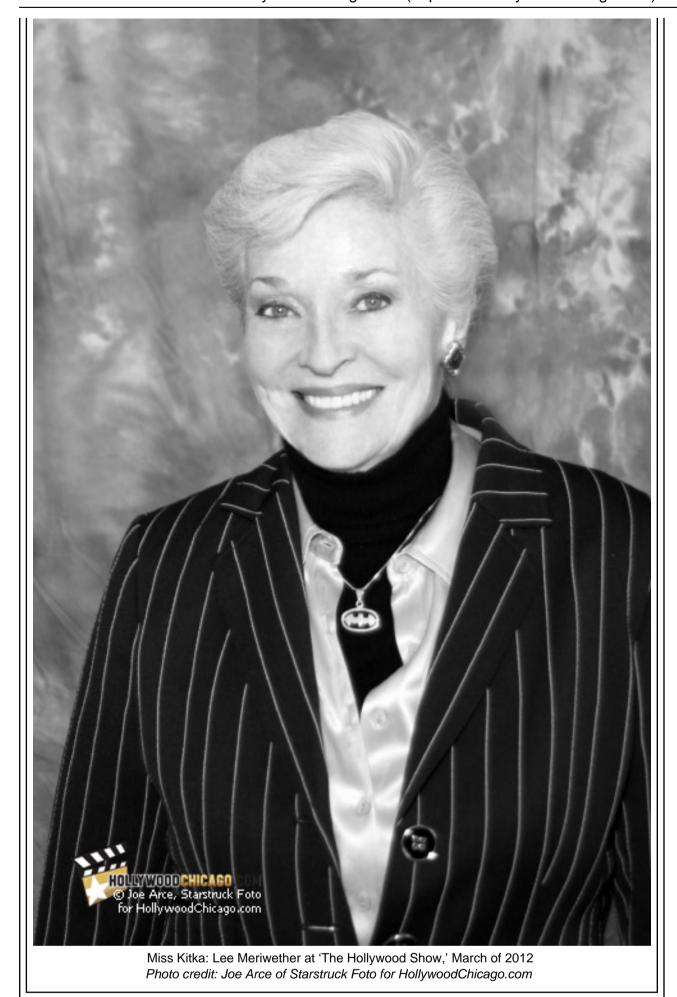
CHICAGO – In the 1960s, network television became the 'cool fire' that families gathered around, and the array of trends and shows in that era had an odd but flavorful variety. Lee Meriwether (Catwoman from the 1966 'Batman movie), Kathy Garver (Cissy in the sitcom 'Family Affair') and Robert Colbert (ensemble player on the TV drama 'The Time Tunnel') represented those shows.

They appeared last March at 'The Hollywood Show,' a twice-a-year event in which fans can mingle, take photographs and get autographs from the celebrities – like the 1960s TV and film actors – who appear there. There is also a great opportunity to purchase memorabilia from a host of showbiz vendors, all in one room. The fall session of The Hollywood Show will take place at the Hilton Rosemont Hotel on River Road in Rosemont, III, on September 7th, 8th and 9th, 2012. For complete details click here. [17]

HollywoodChicago.com was at the event to interview all three of the Swingin' '60s television and film players. Photographer Joe Arce was on hand to get portraits of the hall-of-famers today.

Lee Meriwether, Catwoman from 1966 'Batman' movie			





Lee Meriwether was in the exclusive club of movie Catwomen, having played the role in the 1966 "Batman" movie, made during the series run with Adam West and Burt Ward as the Dynamic Duo. She also was a regular in the '60s cult TV show, 'The Time Tunnel' and spent eight years in the 1970s on "Barnaby Jones." She continues to work, recently guest starring on "Desperate Housewives."

HollywoodChicago.com: The Miss America Pageant has kind of run it's course as a pop cultural touchstone. Since you are a former winner [1954], what is your opinion regarding the falling out of favor that has happened to this once institution, do you think it's evolved past its time?

Lee Meriwether: I don't think so at all, it depends on what you think the institution is – I think it's the world largest scholarship organization for women. A lot of people forget that, they think it's a bathing beauty competition.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the story regarding you and Joe DiMaggio. Did you date him, or was it just about the gossip of the day?

Meriwether: Yes, we went out on two dates, in fact. Our date in New York was to see Judy Garland at the palace. Joe knew my family in San Francisco and his brother Dom worked with my father for awhile.

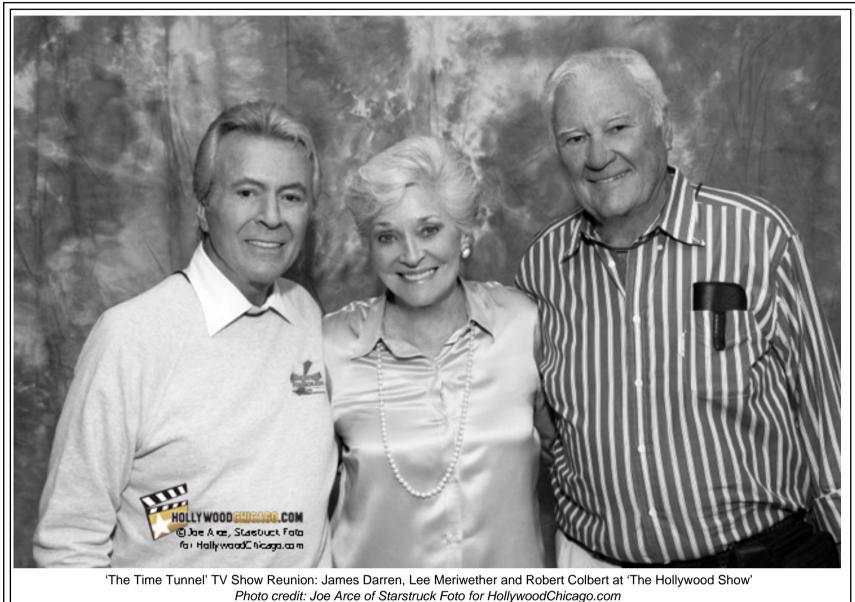
HollywoodChicago.com: With the Batman phenomenon, both in the nostalgia of the series and film in which you participated, and of course the importance today, what is the story behind you stepping in as Catwoman for that quickie '66 film version of the TV show?

Meriwether: It's fun that the Batman thing is still going on, people fell in love with those characters and fell in love with that movie I was in, and thank goodness I got to participate in it. The story is Julie Newmar [the TV series Catwoman] couldn't do the movie, and I auditioned with 200 other actresses, and was awarded the part. They took advantage of the surge of the TV series, but as been proven people still love that film. It's a great movie for kids and parents, because kids enjoy it for obvious reasons and the parents love the camp.



HollywoodChicago.com: With guest shots on iconic TV series like 'Dragnet,' 'Sgt. Bilko,' 'Leave it to Beaver,' 'Dr. Kildare,' 'Perry Mason,' 'F Troop,' 'Star Trek,' 'Mannix,' 'Family Affair,' 'The FBI,' 'Love American Style,' 'Fantasy Island' and 'The Love Boat,' do you see those appearances as home movies?

Meriwether: It's really amazing just to be able to see them, because at the time there were only reruns and no way of recording them. I didn't see many of them at the time, because I was also doing theater. I'm catching up now, because friends of mine find these clips on the internet and I can now see them.



HollywoodChicago.com: Television used to squeeze up to 30 episodes a season, 24 when you were doing Barnaby Jones. How difficult a strain can that be, especially with the long Barnaby run?

Meriwether: It was a grind, and I don't know how Buddy Ebsen did it. What was interesting about the 'Barnaby Jones' run is that we aired on every night during the week, because CBS would use the show as an audience builder for other series. The audience would follow Buddy everywhere.

HollywoodChicago.com: You have a remarkable track record for continuing to work. What type of circumstance, for example, got you into video game voiceover work?

Meriwether: That is through my voiceover agent. I do a lot of auditions, and I haven't done that many, probably because my voice isn't that distinctive. But I've worked for a particular gal on two video game projects, she told me I bring an actor's distinction to a role, not just the voice.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, what can you tell us about Buddy Ebsen that the rest of the world doesn't know?

Meriwether: Most people that knew Buddy knew that he would do anything for anybody, or in getting the job done. No star I ever worked with would climb on top of a garbage heap in Long Beach at two in the morning, and just say 'we can get this shot.' Even the director was amazed.

Kathy Garver, Cissy on "Far	nily Affair"	





One of the high concept fish-out-of-water shows of the 1960s was "Family Affair." The gruff Brian Keith portrayed "Uncle Bill," a wealthy consulting engineer in New York City, who had a butler named Mr. French (Sebastian Cabot). His life is turned around when he has to adopt his two nieces and a nephew when his brother dies in an accident. For six seasons beginning in 1966, the adventures of Buffy (Anissa Jones), Jody (Johnny Whitaker) and the oldest niece – Cissy, portrayed by Kathy Garver – graced the small screen on CBS-TV.

Garver has been a working actress since childhood, appearing in bit parts in films and TV shows, until becoming a series regular on "Family Affair." She continues to appear in film and TV, including "The Princess Diaries" in 2001.

HollywoodChicago.com: You stayed close to Brian Keith until his passing. Were you surprised about the way he chose to go [Keith died of a self-inflicted gunshot], or did that gibe with his personalilty?

Kathy Garver: It was very much Brian's personality, he was in charge of his own life, so he was going to be in charge of his own demise. He was a self made man, a very strong personality, so I think that decision was exactly the way he wanted to go.

HollywoodChicago.com: You had an association with Brian Keith even before you worked on 'Family Affair,' is that right?

Garver: When I was a child, Brian had a wonderful series called 'The Crusaders.' I appeared on it in 19-mumble, mumble. [laughs] I played this waif and met him back then. It's always interesting to me in life how things intertwine and come together.

HollywoodChicago.com: And in that sense, in retrospect did you notice any troubling aspects of Anissa Jones [Jones also committed suicide] during the filming of the series, or do you think it was just the fates afterward?



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Garver: There were troubling signs, even though she was the sweetest child you'd ever meet – intelligent, warm and darling. Unfortunately her family situation was not the best. She lived with her divorced mother and there was a lot of strife between her mother and father.

Anissa was 8 years old when the series began, and 13 years old by the time it ended, and the producers forced her to still play the little girl carrying a doll. At the older ages, she started to resent it. She wanted to develop her own personality. She was offered the part in 'The Exorcist,' but turned it down, she just wanted to be a normal teenager after the show ended. She just ran into the wrong crowd after that, and it led to her demise.

HollywoodChicago.com: You were portraying a fairly pure teenage and young adult character during the teeth of the swinging 1960s. What was the most un-Cissy-like experience that you had during that time, that you can tell us right now?



Garver: I demanded in some of the episodes that I wanted to wear a mini-skirt, and the producers didn't want to do it. I demanded it because everyone else was wearing them. I finally got a two inch hem compromise. But I eventually saw what they were thinking later. The show is successful in reruns because of its timelessness, and the stories and styles reflected that.

HollywoodChicago.com: Well, what about your personal life, what 1960s stuff did you do that was un-Cissy-like?

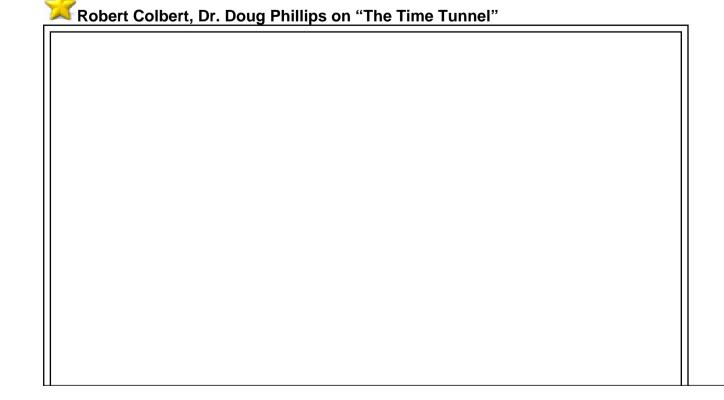
Garver: Everything. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: When did you first remember being on a film or TV set, and which role from the early days, when you see it now, gives you the most thrill?

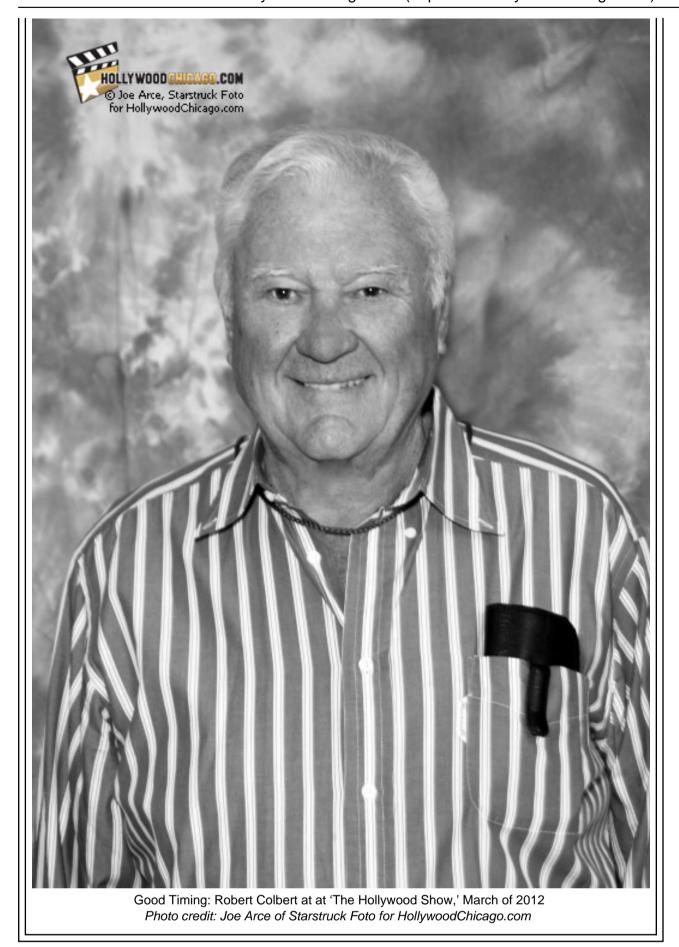
Garver: 'The Ten Commandments' [1956]. I was on the movie for about seven weeks, I was there when they filmed the Red Sea parting scene, I was there when the immortal line, 'Ready when you are, C.B' was intoned and it was so thrilling. Even as a small child I could feel the wonder and amazement of what was going on.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've worked fairly steadily since the 1960s, what is the secret to having longevity in a business that is probably one of the most difficult?

Garver: You have to have a good education – I graduated from UCLA with an undergraduate degree in Speech, and a Masters in Theater Arts. And you have to take a business class or two. Because as my neighbor said, when I bought my first house in Sherman Oaks when I was 24 years old, 'well, you know actors, chicken one day, feathers the next.' I took that advice to heart, so I pursued a financial sense. I made good investments, and that's why I have longevity. Also, I never took drugs.







"The Time Tunnel" was a two season series in the 1960s, that afterward developed a cultish, second-life popularity in reruns. Robert Colbert was a journeyman TV series actor who landed his first regular part on the sci-fi program. He worked until the mid-1990s, making his final appearance on "Baywatch."

HollywoodChicago.com: According to your bio, you were "discovered" while in the army. What is the background of that story?

Robert Colbert: I wasn't discovered in the army, while I was in the army I was assigned to Military Police in Okinawa. Due to the fact that I was making a fast \$35 a month, I needed some extra income. There was an opening at a local radio station for an announcer, disc jockey and news reader. So four hours a night I would go off the base to the station, and I made \$2 an hour. That was \$8 a night when I made \$35 all month. So I started in radio.

There was a lady from South Dakota who heard my voice, and she was from special services and they were putting on a play on the island, 'The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial,' and wanted me to audition. I went reluctantly, because I didn't want to lose my job, but when I read the part of Greenwald it was so stimulating that I really wanted to do it. So I started acting there on Okinawa. When I was discharged, I had the bug, and started studying and being in repertory theater in Portland. [Character actor] Mickey Shaughnessy saw me, and brought me down to Hollywood. I signed with his agent, and worked for the next 50 years.

HollywoodChicago.com: You co-starred with The Three Stooges in the late 1950s in 'Have Rocket-Will Travel' – called their best feature film. Were you a fan of their short films as a kid, and what do you remember from your first meeting with them?

Colbert: I was a fan, but I would call myself a confused fan – I didn't know how to quite react to their comedy, but I was hypnotized by their nuttiness. I did do that film, and let me give you a story on how it lives on. Recently a fellow from Barcelona called me because they were having a big show there having to do with The Three Stooges. He made a request to me via email, and I went to my beach house because I had a poster from The Three Stooges. I held it up and a picture was taken, and two minutes later he had the picture in Spain. He emailed me back thanking me profusely.



HollywoodChicago.com: You ran into a controversy on the TV show 'Maverick' in the early 1960s. Once the decision was made to use you as a James Garner replacement, how do you remember the feeling on the set during those episodes?



Colbert: Once I was on the set it didn't bother me at all, I was working. But I didn't want to do it. When wardrobe started putting me in Jim's clothes [Garner was in a contract stalemate with Warner Bros.] I said, '...don't do this, put me in a dress and call me Brenda.' [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Was it something that they threw at you because you were under contract?

Colbert: Well, I thought I was going to wardrobe for a movie I was doing called 'Black Gold.' Then they started putting me in Maverick's familiar cowboy outfit, and it didn't take long for me to figure it out. I started walking on the Warner's lot, and everybody was hanging out the window because they thought Jim was back. It's just part of my life story.

HollywoodChicago.com: Which director, either film or television, made the most impact on you in working with them and why?

Colbert: Richard Donner, because he was very creative and imaginative in the way he would structure his scenes. I did a TV pilot for him called 'The Mayor,' and he had one scene that encompassed five different rooms filled with people, all in one dolly shot. He always did creative things that were really interesting. I won't say he was the most interesting director I ever worked with, I will just say he was the best.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, which famous star, either in working with them or encountering them, did you most want to meet when you worked in show business, and what do you remember when you finally did meet them?

Colbert: Probably Rita Hayworth. I belonged to Riviera Country Club, I'm a golfer. One day I was scheduled to play, and they asked me if I minded joining a foursome, and I said no. Walking toward me was Rita Hayworth, and the Italian singer Vic Damone. So Vic Damone, Rita Hayworth and I played Riviera together. I just was happy I was with her, even though it was later. She was starting to suffer from Alzheimer's at the time. It was an on and off kind of day for her, but I sure did love that afternoon.

"The Hollywood Show" comes to Chicagoland on September 7th, 8th and 9th, 2012 (Saturday 9/8 and Sunday 9/9 are celebrity appearance days), at The Hilton Rosemont, 5500 N. River Road, Rosemont, Ill. For complete details, click here. [17]



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