

THINGS TO DO

Katharine Luckinbill acts in long shadow of showbiz legend

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At first glance, Katharine Luckinbill looks and sounds like any other well-trained 23-year-old actress just beginning her career.

Fresh-faced, frank and intelligent, Luckinbill has thoroughly researched her role in "Alexandros," a commissioned world premiere by Melinda Lopez ("Sonia Flew") that's opening Saturday at the Laguna Playhouse.

Luckinbill is playing a teenage girl, Marty, who's just beginning to discover the spirit of rebellion in the summer of 1974. As the play begins, Marty has just been dragged from her Texas home to Florida to celebrate the 75th birthday of her Cuban-born grandmother, whom she hasn't seen in years.

"I've been wearing these all week," Luckinbill says, pointing to her peace-symbol earrings. Saundra Santiago (the actress who plays Marty's mother, Maritza) gave them to me." She laughed and arched her eyebrows. "They're my little note of rebellion for what's to come."

It's the laugh and the arched brows that get your attention. It reminds you of the fame locked in this young performer's genes: Luckinbill is the granddaughter of showbiz legends Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz and the daughter of two well-known actors, Lucie Arnaz and Laurence Luckinbill.

Her grandparents' huge legacy is both a boon and a bane, Luckinbill said.

"As my mom always says, 'For a cross to bear, it certainly isn't a difficult thing to have riding on my shoulder.' Yes, having this is what gets my foot in the door, but once I get in the door, I have a big red wig running back and forth in front of me during the audition, and the auditioners can get very distracted.

"They're going, 'What is this thing flying around you?' It's like there are four other people in the room, standing next to me juggling when I'm auditioning."

These days, Luckinbill has learned to ignore the expectations that others might have when she walks through the door for an audition. But she knows that others don't.

"I try not to think about it too much, honestly, when I go into an audition. Sometimes I have auditioners who bring it up and talk to me about it. It is what it is."

Everything made sense suddenly

Luckinbill, not surprisingly, has been immersed in show business for as long as she can remember. She recalls falling asleep as an 8-year-old in her mother's dressing room at the Richard Rogers Theatre when Lucie Arnaz was appearing in "Lost in Yonkers" on Broadway.

"I also remember all the cruise ship and nightclub gigs she did all around the world, and spending Christmases in Chicago and other towns when she was playing these big amphitheaters," Luckinbill said. "My dad would pay me \$5 an hour to cue him on his lines when he was doing his one-man shows."

To Luckinbill, her parents' business seemed anything but glamorous.

"I grew up in the showbiz world in a very different way than kid actors do. I saw what went on behind the scenes. My parents have been very honest about what this business is like – the great things and the terrible things."

Given that upbringing, it's not surprising that Luckinbill showed no desire at first to go into the family business. But she changed her mind at 16.

"There was a time in my life where I was starting to get involved in my high school productions and I was getting lead (roles). I began to think, 'Hey, maybe I can do this.'"

At that point, her parents sat down and gave her *The Talk*.

"My mom said, 'If you really want to do this, you've got to take it seriously. I'm going to send you to this theater intensive. It's not fun and games.'"

"It was a place called Stage Door up in the Catskills – a theater camp. It's one of those real intensive theater training experiences that you do in the summer. A lot of kids go there to decide whether or not they're going to do this for life."

Luckinbill loved the experience, especially when she landed the role of Fräulein Kost in "Cabaret": "Everything made sense suddenly. After that it was just a matter of deciding where to go to college."

Luckinbill eschewed Juilliard, Yale and the other obvious choices in favor of the University of Miami. "It turned out to be the right scene for me. It was a little more relaxed."

Halfway through her training, she changed from musical performance to drama: Shakespeare, scene study, script analysis. "I feel like I got very solid training there," she said.

Luckinbill was also close to the many members of the extended Arnaz family who still live in South Florida. The Cuban-American community of "Alexandros" "seems very familiar to me. I spent a lot of time with my relatives."

Now based in Manhattan and auditioning regularly for stage roles, Luckinbill still calls her Connecticut-based parents, sometimes several times a day. She looks to them for both personal and professional inspiration.

"I come from this incredibly grounded family. My parents have made these wonderful careers for themselves. They never had tawdry things happen to them. They have a 28-year marriage and they're still so close, I say, 'You guys are gross! You're like a high school couple.'"

As for her career goals, Luckinbill doesn't dream of superstardom – just steady employment.

"I just want to be a working actor, which is a very hard thing to do in this business. I don't really need anybody to care or know who my parents or grandparents are. I want people to see me (onstage) and say, 'Who is that? She's good!'"

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Paul D. Hodgins is a freelancer who previously worked at the Orange County Register since 1993. He spent more than two decades as the Register's theater critic, and for eight years he wrote about dance as well. Hodgins has also written for *American Theatre*, *Variety*, *The Sondheim Review* and *Backstage West*. Hodgins has also been active as an educator and scholar. He was the music director of the dance department at The University of California, Irvine from 1985-92 and served in similar positions at Eastern Michigan University, Vancouver's Simon Fraser University and the Banff Centre for the Arts. His book about relationships between music and choreography, 'Music, Movement and Metaphor,' was published in 1992. Since 2001, Hodgins has taught arts and entertainment journalism at California State University, Fullerton. Hodgins holds a doctorate in musical composition and theory from the University of Southern California. He lives in Huntington Beach.

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