



PHOTO BY NICOLE HARNISHFEGER

SUSAN MCGINNIS is one of Nantucket's veteran actresses of stage and screen, with a recent role in Jay Craven's film "Peter and John." She is currently appearing on stage as The Witch in the Theater Workshop's production of "Into the Woods," at Bennett Hall. We caught up with her before the play opened and in between rehearsals and her waitressing gig to talk about her work and theater on Nantucket.

How did you end up on Nantucket? What's your story?

In 1995 I was looking for a break from pounding the pavement in New York City. I sublet my apartment knowing only that I wanted to be somewhere by the ocean. All signs started pointing toward Nantucket, so I set off sight unseen, arrived in a torrential rainstorm, and knew I had stumbled upon a very special place. In 2003 I moved here year-round to establish Seaside Shakespeare.

When did you begin acting? Tell us your career path.

As long as I can remember I've wanted to act and sing on-stage. I was 9 and had no idea what was happening to me. Then I saw Sally Field totally disappear into the character "Sybil" on TV, and I thought, "that's what I want to do."

What are some of your favorite roles?

I especially love Beatrice from "Much Ado About Nothing." Really I love all of Shakespeare's women because they are smart and relatable, but she's my favorite. I also had a great time with Bianca in "Dead Man's Cell Phone" and Dottie in "Noises Off" and Dromio of Syracuse in "A Comedy of Errors," because it really is fun to do comedy. I am very much looking forward to playing The Witch. She's powerful and no-nonsense and funny and mean, but like most bullies, she has plenty of her own wounds that she's covering up.

How do you schedule plays and work?

As a professional actor, the show is always my first priority. But when the show is over, I still have to pay my bills.

I have been fortunate enough to work with very kind business owners and theater directors – and landlords – who have been flexible with me and my crazy scheduling.

What is the state of theater on the island?

It must have been very cool in the old days of the Straight Wharf Theatre when people came right off the boat and saw the theater. Theatre Workshop now has the long-term lease with Bennett Hall and is constantly raising its production standards, and White Heron is establishing itself here and getting its building raised. And Dreamland has great options for kids, so those changes are positive.

Which plays would you like to see on Nantucket?

I would love to see some plays on Nantucket that reflect the more diverse population which exists here, and throughout the rest of the country. But to answer your question, "Clybourne Park," "Detroit," "August: Osage County," and "Outside Mullingar," to name a few.

Do you have any favorite playwrights?

Well of course, there's Shakespeare. But I also love John Patrick Shanley. He's Irish and funny. Theresa Rebeck and Douglas Carter Beane have a great way with dialogue. David Ives is a verbal genius. Rebecca Gilman asks deep questions. Neil Simon, while of course funny, can be profound. Eve Ensler for what she's done to advance the presence and stories of women. Sarah Ruhl, Thornton Wilder.

What's the last good theater you saw off-island?

In late April I got off-island and saw my friend Adrianne Krstansky play the lead in "Come Back Little Sheba," directed by David Cromer at the Huntington in Boston. I also was lucky enough to see "Fun Home" in New York before it won the Tony for Best Musical. It was an intimate and beautifully-executed and acted production which is breaking new ground in musical theater.

If you could invite any six people to dinner, from the past or present, who would you invite and why?

My dad, who died three years ago, because I miss him; my old Scottish friend Sean Mearns, because his stories were so good and funny it didn't matter whether they were true or not; President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, because I want to talk to them personally where there are no cameras around and they can be honest to find out what it's been like and who they really are; and Tina Fey and Amy Poehler because, well I think it's obvious we'd all have a pretty great time.

What's the best thing about living on Nantucket?

The ocean, my friends, the natural beauty, the lack of stress and commute, the excitement when the circus comes to town.

What do you do to relax and recharge?

Sleep. Oh, and I've started getting really into plants and flowers.