

The Renaissance

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starring Sally Struthers
at the Renaissance Theatre, October 23, 2008, 7:00 PM

Nunsense begins when the Little Sisters of Hoboken discover that their cook, Sister Julia, Child of God, has accidentally poisoned 52 of the sisters, and they are in dire need of funds for the burials. The sisters decide that the best way to raise the money is to put on a variety show, so they take over the school auditorium, which is currently set up for the eighth grade production of "Grease." Here we meet Reverend Mother Regina, a former circus performer; Sister Mary Hubert, the Mistress of Novices; a streetwise nun from Brooklyn named Sister Robert Anne; Sister Mary Leo, a novice who is a wannabe ballerina; and the delightfully wacky Sister Mary Amnesia, the nun who lost her memory when a crucifix fell on her head. Featuring star turns, tap and ballet dancing, an audience quiz, and comic surprises, this show has become an international phenomenon. With more than 5000 productions worldwide, it has been translated into 21 languages.

Nunsense, which started its life as a series of humorous greeting cards, premiered in New York City at the Baldwin Theatre in 1986, where it won four Outer Critics' Circle Awards, including "Best Off-Broadway Musical." It transferred to the John Barrymore Theatre on 42nd Street, where it ran for over 10 years, becoming the second longest-running off-Broadway musical of all time. The vaudeville-style musical comedy was first produced by the Willows Theatre Company (then known as "CitiArts Theatre") in November 1990, where it played in an abandoned roller rink for over eight months, winning the local "Shellie" award for artistic director Richard Elliott. The production was transferred to five different theaters over the next three years, becoming the longest-running production in East Bay history. It had been seen by over 33,000 people when it closed on December 5, 1993.

There have also been 6 "sequel" productions developed: *Nunsense 2: The Second Coming*, *Sister Amnesia's Country Western Nunsense Jambore*, *Nuncrackers: The Nunsense Christmas Musical*, *Meshuggah-Nuns!*, *Nunsensations: The Nunsense Vegas Revue*, and *Nunsense A-Men*.



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Sally Struthers

Cute as a button and with a petite, porcelain prettiness and vulnerability that endeared her to the American public, Sally Struthers nabbed a series role in the early 1970s and became a solid part of TV history as a member of a dysfunctional family quartet in the milestone sitcom "All in the Family" (1971). She was born Sally Ann Struthers on July 28, 1948, in Portland, Oregon and raised there, pursuing an acting career following high school. Relocating to Los Angeles, she trained at the Pasadena Playhouse College of Theatre Arts and earned a scholarship as its "most promising student". She performed briefly in regional stock plays until finding her break as both a commercial actress and dancer on TV. She appeared as a regular on such variety shows as "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour" (1967) and "The Tim Conway Comedy Hour" (1970) and showed starlet promise in films as well offering ditsy support in the Jack Nicholson starrer "Five Easy Pieces" (1970) and the chase film "The Getaway" (1972) top-lining Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw. And then came "All in the Family" (1971). Also starring Carroll O'Connor, Jean Stapleton and Rob Reiner, Struthers went on to win two supporting Emmy Awards as Kewpie-doll "Gloria Bunker Stivic". She and Rob Reiner left the show after seven seasons, both eager to grow. While Rob Reiner became a noted director, Sally made her Broadway debut in "Wally's Cafe" in 1981, and returned four years later with a gender-bending version of "The Odd Couple" as neat-freak "Florence" opposite Rita Moreno's slovenly "Olive". In addition she found work in topical television mini-series drama with "Aloha Means Goodbye" (1974), "Hey, I'm Alive!" (1975), "My Husband Is Missing" (1978), "And Your Name Is Jonah" (1979), "A Gun in the House" (1981), to name a few. But without a hit show as collateral, offers started drying up. Sally returned to the TV series fold in the early 1980s spinning off her "All in the Family" character with the self-titled sitcom "Gloria" (1982), but the ensemble formula that worked so well for her before was missing here and the show died in its freshman year. To compensate, however, Sally's baby-doll voice worked extremely well for her in cartoons. She remained active off-camera providing little girl voices for Saturday morning entertainment, notably her teenage "Pebbles Flintstone" character. Other voice-over work included "TaleSpin" (1990), as "Rebecca 'Becky' Cunningham", and puppeteer Jim Henson's creative prehistoric sitcom "Dinosaurs" (1991) playing dino-daughter "Charlene Sinclair". Struthers' significant weight gain in later years moved her quickly into broad character shtick. She showed that she had lost none of the fun for which she was known by providing broad and hearty comedy relief on both daytime soaps and prime-time episodics including "General Hospital" (1963) and "Gilmore Girls" (2000). She also filled her time with frequent roles on the musical stage. Over the years she has practically put a patent on the by-the-book principal "Miss Lynch" with her many "Grease" tours, and as the hissable orphanage operator Miss Hannigan in a number of road productions of "Annie". Most recently she copped a 2002 Los Angeles "Ovation" award for her delightfully over-the-top "Agnes Gooch" in "Mame" starring Carol Lawrence. Divorced, Sally is the mother of one daughter who has made a career for herself as a clinical psychologist. For years Sally was a prime spokesperson for the Christian Children's Fund on TV, fervently (and often tearfully) appealing for viewer's monetary assistance in finding an end to starvation in under-developed countries.