

Laurie Franks

Laura Rachel Bumgarner, known on stage as Laurie Franks, was born on August 14, 1929, in Lucasville, Ohio. She was the only child of Guy and Nellie (Yeager) Bumgarner.

Laurie attended Valley High and, at the age of 16, she graduated with the class of 1946. After graduation, Laurie went on to receive both a BFA and a MFA from the Cincinnati College of Music. As an undergraduate, she, for the first time, experienced musical theater while performing during the summers at the Louisville Amphitheater. Also, during her years as a graduate student, she was hired to teach voice and organ at nearby Wilmington College.

Understanding that she was being trained for a career as a professor, upon graduation, Laurie accepted a faculty position at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. At Hendrix she became a popular teacher of voice and music appreciation. It was there she met and taught Dobbs Franks, who would later establish himself as an internationally recognized conductor.

When Mr. Franks was accepted for graduate studies at the Juilliard School, Laurie - now Mrs. Franks - moved with him to New York City. Shortly after arriving, she became a singer with The Master Singers; a non-paying, classical, a cappella group. Because the director of The Master Singers recommended she audition for Radio City Music Hall, things would very soon change.

Acting on his advice, Laurie auditioned and was hired to sing in the chorus. Yet, she soon received a call letting her know the hit Broadway musical, *Fanny*, was looking for a lyric soprano to replace an actress, who was leaving the show. Joining the cast of *Fanny* was the beginning of decades of busy and satisfying work in many musicals both on and off Broadway.

Laurie accumulated 14 Broadway shows to her credit including, *Voices*, *Bad Habits*, *Bells Are Ringing* starring Judy Holiday, the Joel Gray revival of *Cabaret*, *Applause* starring Lauren Bacall, *The Utter Glory Of Morrissey Hall*, *Copper and Brass*, *Anya*, *Pleasures and Palaces*, *Happy Town*, *Something More*, *The Human Comedy*, and Truman's Capote's *The Grass Harp* (the latter two, she was privileged to be the understudy for Broadway legend, Barbara Cook.). Soon her career would include many leading roles in various national and regional companies and would grow to include non-musical plays.

It was while performing in venues throughout the country, Laurie had the pleasure to be the lead actress in most of them, among these were her favorites, *The Lion In Winter* and *Driving Miss Daisy*.

While back on Broadway, she also had the privilege to be the understudy for leading actresses Doris Roberts in *Bad Habits* and Julie Harris in *Voices*.

Yet, her fondest experience was being in the original Broadway cast of *Mame* starring Angela Lansbury and Bea Arthur. Here, she was able to display her ability to play a range of characters. Originally cast in the chorus, she quickly moved from there to playing the roles of Gloria Upson, Cousin Fan, Mrs. Upson and, most significantly, the supporting star character, Agnes Gooch.

From playing Agnes Gooch, Laurie had the pleasure of seeing her name in lights on the marquee at the Winter Garden Theater. Other Broadway shows at other theaters would give Laurie the same honor). It was in the role of Gooch that she received critical acclaim for her ability to play such a

comedic character with remarkable timing and skill as well as singing the hilarious, belting show-stopping number, "What Do I Do Now?"

Prior to Mame and at the height of the popularity of *The Music Man*, Laurie again followed in Barbara Cook's footsteps, leading the cast of the Australian national tour playing Marian the Librarian. Other musical roles in regional theaters include *Big River* (widow Douglas) starring John Goodman, *The Robber Bridegroom* (Salome), *The King and I* (Tuptim), starring Betty White as Anna, *A Little Night Music* (Desiree) and Rogers and Hart's, *The Boys from Syracuse* (Adriana) as well as the musical adaptation of Gaston Leroux's 1910 novel *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Richard Rodgers was so impressed with Laurie's vocal and acting abilities; he added her to his prestigious short list of automatic approval. This allowed her to be cast in any Rodgers and Hammerstein musical without going through the additional step of auditioning for Mr. Rodgers himself. Because of his admiration for Laurie's talent, she had the distinction of starring in the smash hit, *Oklahoma* (Laurey) opposite both John Raitt's and Robert Horton's, Curly.

Around 1990, Laurie moved from New York City to Los Angeles, California, in time for the "pilot season", with plans to transition from stage to television & movie work. Within days of arriving, she auditioned for – and received – the role of "Lucy's maid" in Francis Ford Coppola's production of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* starring Anthony Hopkins and Winona Ryder. She appeared in many movies, including *Dave*, *Johnny Bago*, and *Ed and His Dead Mother*. Laurie was also a frequent guest star on television productions including *In the Heat of the Night*, *Tales from the Crypt*, and *Saved by the Bell*. And she appeared in commercials for Depends, *True Blood*, and Pepsi (this ad aired during the Super Bowl). Her last appearance was in the documentary, *Boulevard! A Hollywood Story* in 2021.

Laurie felt blessed for having had so many wonderful opportunities to learn and develop her craft as a singer as well as an actress. For more on Laurie's extraordinary journey, there is a documentary of her life produced and directed by Joseph Armillas titled *Laurie Franks: A Life in Theater And Film*, which can be seen on YouTube.

Laurie was always proud of her hometown and made frequent trips to Lucasville and Scioto County. In 1993, she had the honor of being given a star on Portsmouth's floodwall "Mural of Stars." She was also given a key to the city of Portsmouth by the then Mayor Frank Gerlach. Laurie performed a one-woman show, "Broadway and Beyond", at the Vern Riffe Center grand opening festival of the arts in 1996. And in 1999, she made her final trip to Lucasville, where she participated in the 150th celebration of Emanuel United Methodist Church and was presented an honorary doctorate of music from the church.

Laurie was predeceased by her husband, noted character actor, Phil Bruns. She passed away at age 92 on June 24, 2022, at her home on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles. Her body was brought back to Lucasville Cemetery for burial.

Laurie is truly a Lucasville Legend.