

You love to hate her

By Tom Jory

NEW YORK (AP) — If you see Harriet Oleson as the meanest, crabbiest, most bigoted character on NBC's "Little House on the Prairie," it's because you're supposed to. If you like her all the same . . . well, you're supposed to feel that way, too.

"When I took the part, I realized she would be a running character, not a one-shot, black hat role," says Katherine MacGregor, who plays the storekeeper's witch-like wife on NBC's most popular series. "That meant the people who watch the show couldn't dislike her. They would have to love to hate her."

"And I think that's truly happened," says MacGregor, who's not at all cantankerous in real life. "The people who see the show look for her to be foolish. They can say, 'Oh, gee, look at her. She got what was coming to her.'"

Uncomfortable experience

Talk about character development — for Katherine MacGregor, honing Harriet Oleson was not always a comfortable experience.

"Sometime in the second season," she recalls, "we were on a camping trip with the Ingalls. We were crossing a stream, and the script called for the camera on my husband. As I crossed, there was this scream and a splash."

"I suggested to the director that the scene be shot with the camera on me. I hopped over the stream, landed on both feet, then lost my balance and fell into the water."

"Oh, the indignity of it all," MacGregor says. "It was very funny, and I got stacks of letters about it. I like to be mean and bigoted and crabby, and I love that instance when the tables are turned on Mrs. Oleson."

"Little House on the Prairie," based on the series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, recently completed its fifth season on NBC, one of the few bright spots in the network's generally disastrous lineup.

Combs through script

The series, broadcast Mondays at 7 p.m. CDT, stars Michael Landon as Charles Ingalls and Melissa Gilbert as Laura. "Little House on the Prairie" is as much Landon's show as anyone's — he's executive producer and directs and writes various episodes, though other members of the cast are no less dedicated.

"Every time I get a new script," says MacGregor, "I go through it with a fine-tooth comb to see where I can give it a twist, add a bit to the character."

"Many actors fall into the trap of just learning the lines. They use only a little of their personality. They're locked into a very narrow range of creativity."



Katherine MacGregor plays Harriet Oleson, the storekeeper's witch-like wife on NBC's "Little House on the Prairie."

Hermitage treasures highlight TV special

MOSCOW (AP) — Natalie Wood and Peter Ustinov are in Leningrad filming the first documentary film to be made for Western television inside the city's Hermitage Museum, a spokeswoman for the production said.

The 90-minute program, "Treasures of the Hermitage," during which Miss Wood and Ustinov act as guides, will be filmed during a four-week period ending in late May.

Both Miss Wood and Ustinov have Russian backgrounds and speak the language fluently. Miss Wood's real name is Natasha Gurdin, and both her parents were born in Russia.

Peter Ustinov's cultural ties to Russia, and in particular, Leningrad, are extensive. His great-grandmother's brother, Albert, an architect, designed the Kirov Theater. And Ustinov's great-uncle, Alexander Nicolai Benois, was curator of the Hermitage in the early 1920s.

The original Hermitage was founded by Catherine the Great in the 18th century.

Today, it has more than 350 rooms, the original structure plus the old Winter Palace. More than 2.5 million art objects are on display or in storage, and 20,000 people a day visit the museum.

NBC plans to air the special, also to be broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corp. and other European networks, in the fall.

ON THIS DATE in 1588, the 130 ships of the Spanish Armada sailed from Lisbon, Portugal, to attack England. The voyage ended in defeat by the British navy.

SHOWBIZ

by Flash



"It needs a picture tube transplant, Doctor."

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