

Friday, September 11, 2009

## Actress/comedienne Rue McClanahan to appear in Dallas as part of *A Sordid Affair* tour

BY DAVID TAFFET OF *DALLAS VOICE*

[Email](#)

[Print](#)

[Tell us your story](#)

[Comment](#)

“I was always compassionate toward strays,” Rue McClanahan says, before adding, “it’s why I got married so many times.”

We laugh at the same time; both of us know it will be the opening line of the article about her.

It’s not just a joke for her, though. The Emmy Award-winning actress and animal rights activist begins a conversation discussing her passion for animals; her passion for men comes later.

“I’m a big supporter of PETA,” she says. “They do things in a legal way: so brave, so courageous. I just appeared on their behalf.”

McClanahan has done public service announcements for the organization and counts People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals senior vice president Dan Mathews as one of her greatest heroes.

But of her husbands, McClanahan says that Nos. 3 and 4 “might make you want to rush to gargle.” She even wondered at times “will I ever get it right?” (Maybe: She is currently happily married to husband No. 6.)



Rue McClanahan

But while McClanahan has had her issues with straight men, she has long championed LGBT rights through her association with gay-friendly television shows.

*Sordid Lives*, which wrapped up its first (and possibly last) season on Logo last year — and which inspired *A Sordid Affair*, a touring production of stars from the series featuring songs, monologues and stand-up (at the **Majestic Theatre** in Dallas for two shows on Saturday, Sept. 19) — is merely the latest example of her ties to the gay community.

In the 1980s and '90s, she played TV's most notorious cougar (before there was even a term for it): the flamboyant Blanche Devereaux on *The Golden Girls*, who has been described as a gay man in a woman's body. And she first gained fame in the 1970s as the sweet-natured Vivian Harmon on *Maude*, one of the earliest TV series to tackle gay issues.

But she insists she had nothing to do with *Golden Girls*' gay sensibility. "The show was written by a multitude of gay writers," she says. Still, her personal support for gay rights occasionally made her uncomfortable playing a slightly homophobic steel magnolia.

In one of her favorite *Golden Girls* episodes, Dorothy's friend, who is a lesbian, visits and falls in love with Rose. McClanahan laughs as she recites the lines and describes the scene.

Blanche goes from ignorant (Her classic line: "Lesbian? What's wrong with that? Danny Thomas is one, isn't he?") to outraged ("I don't believe it! I do not believe it! To think Jean would prefer Rose over me?! That's ridiculous!")

While McClanahan takes no credit for the gay-positive spin her work has always taken, she calls her association with these shows good luck on her part — and says she worked hard to win every role she has had.

Except, perhaps, *A Sordid Affair*, the brainchild of *Sordid Lives* creator Del Shores.

Series regulars McClanahan, Caroline Rhea, Leslie Jordan and others will each perform a half-hour of stand up comedy ... although in McClanahan's case, it's more like sit-down comedy.

“I tell stories about what can go wrong and then go better than planned,” she says, although she refuses to spill the beans on any of her act.

Instead, she switches back to favorite scenes from her acclaimed past. One episode of *Maude*, she recalls, got the longest laugh ever recorded on television (“The Man from Glad,” where Maude, played by Beatrice Arthur, walked in on Vivian wrapped in plastic playing a game with her husband).

“Working with Bea, we never had to rehearse, unless it was physical,” McClanahan says of her late co-star, with who she worked on *Maude* and *Golden Girls*.

McClanahan, an Oklahoma native, had tried her hand at countless enterprises. Her memoir *My Five Husbands — And the Ones Who Got Away* details her many relationships. (She's working with her son, Mark — who lives in Austin — on a stage adaptation with music.) Several years ago, she wrote and starred in *Oedipus, Shmedipus, As Long As You Love Your Mother*, which had a sold-out run in Los Angeles.

Following her Dallas show, McClanahan will visit Mark in Austin and plans to speak to the Breast Cancer Resource Center. McClanahan is herself a survivor who went through five months of chemotherapy followed by six weeks of radiation. For the first time in our conversation, she becomes very serious with advice for anyone confronting the disease.

“Determine to get over it. Make up your mind you’re a survivor,” she says. While the treatment was “very debilitating ... it poisons your body and makes you very weak,” she never let it stop her. “Between the first and second chemotherapies, I went to Charlotte and played Aunt Eller in Oklahoma. Between the seventh and eighth [treatments], I got married in New York and had a big splashy wedding.”

After another treatment, “I took a week off and played the victim on *Columbo*. I had lost all my hair so I was wearing wigs.”

McClanahan is hoping for another season of *Sordid Lives*. The actors agreed to work for very low salaries with the expectation money from residuals would eventually pour in. The producers haven’t paid those fees and the actors and other creative team unions are taking them to court. She’s especially hopeful Shores can re-acquire the rights to his characters and make another movie or continue the series.

In the mean time, she has only this advice to seeing the live show: “Come if you want to laugh.”

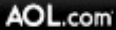
# Dallas VOICE

---

The Community Newspaper For Gay & Lesbian Dallas

Pegasus News content partner - **Dallas Voice**

The community newspaper for gay & lesbian Dallas.


ON NOW 1:32 pm

Gender Test...

Missing Bride-to-Be's Writings

Accused Child Killer May Face Death

Guest's Sex Talk...



## Post a comment

(Requires free [PegasusNews.com](#) account.)

Username:

Password:  ([Forgotten your password?](#))

Comment:

