

OUR TOWNS; To Hear Stars, Pay \$50 or Take Their Bus

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THE gentleman on the bus could be seriously disturbed. Warped, maybe. To be sure, he looks familiar enough, with his curly gray locks and moustache. It's a big, friendly face: avuncular, lovable. But he is muttering to himself. Gesticulating wildly, alone by the window. He's sitting toward the back of a half-full No. 66 bus that is booming through Clifton on its way toward Route 3, the concrete alley to the Lincoln Tunnel and the Big Apple.

Wait now. Isn't that a script in the man's hand? That face -- isn't it Louis Zorich, the actor, who starred as Jules Berger, the grandpa in "Brooklyn Bridge," the television series?

"People see me rehearsing," Mr. Zorich responded to a query, "and they think they're looking at a maniac." His voice was calm, buttery. "And they are. They're looking at an actor."

On any other form of public transportation just about anywhere, a muttering, gesticulating citizen in a secluded rear seat would be categorized as yet another inhabitant of the great American transit outpatient system. An object of pity. Or fear.

Not on the 66. On this DeCamp Bus Company line that travels 14 miles from West Orange to Manhattan, a mutterer is more likely to be asked for an autograph. Statistical science is sure to calculate soon that the 66 route has more actor patronage per paid passenger mile than any other suburban bus line in America. (The M104 in Manhattan, the Broadway line, surely must top the urban list.)

"Some riders pass me pieces of paper to sign, and there goes my concentration," said Olympia Dukakis, who was reached at home. Ms. Dukakis, who won an Oscar for playing the mother in "Moonstruck," has been Mr. Zorich's wife for 31 years and has lived in Montclair for 21 of them.

"I got so practiced through the years that I'd use the bus to have breakfast, put on my makeup *and* study my script," she said. "After 'Moonstruck,' people couldn't believe I still took the 66."

Anthony Heald, another player who uses the 66 as a rehearsal room, feels that actors are "the in-bus entertainment on the DeCamp lines." Mr. Heald (who starred in the play "Lips Together, Teeth Apart" and appeared in the film "The Silence of the Lambs" as the digestible doctor) was encountered recently in Montclair between jaunts to California for work.

"What I hate about L.A.," he said, "is that when you have to drive to an audition, you don't have as much chance to prepare. You can't focus, as you can on the 66."

Montclair has the 66 bus route's most sizable acting community, although a cry of players live in Clifton, West Orange and Glen Ridge. Among the others who have ridden the 66 to auditions in Manhattan are Tonya Pinkins (who won a Tony Award for her role in "Jelly's Last Jam"), Frederick Rolf, Frankie Faison, Elaine Bromka, W. B. Brydon, W. T. Martin, Ed Blake and Gordon Jacoby, the dialect coach.

There are professional hazards, to be sure. "You might be all ready to rehearse, and then you'll meet another actor," said Mr. Zorich. "Then you have too much fun gossiping, and you forget your lines."

And passengers are not always entertained. "Once I was rehearsing a script on the 66 with a good deal of profanity in it, and I kind of forgot where I was," said Tom Brennan, who recently appeared in "Salome" with Al Pacino at the Circle in the Square. "In the middle of a string of curses I suddenly realized that everyone on the bus was looking at me. Appalled."

Once in a while, "groups of actors in the back of the bus will rehearse pretty loudly, but no one ever complains about them," said Sal Siano, a DeCamp bus driver for 23 years who ought to have an Actors Equity card himself. He has been known to announce "Welcome to beautiful Cancun!" upon arrival at the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

Actors being actors, they can't help but think about the show-business capability of the 66. Mr. Heald wondered wistfully whether the bus company might be interested in compensating out-of-work actors for entertaining passengers. "And it would be nice if DeCamp would install a

soundproof booth in the back of the 66," he said, deadpan, "so actors could *really* emote, and see how it sounds."

Louis Nigro, DeCamp's general manager, commented carefully, "It would be very interesting to try to justify that particular expense to my boss." Mr. Nigro has fielded quite enough furious calls lately from cost-conscious bus patrons who are incensed that DeCamp has raised its rates (yet again!) in a time of low inflation and stable gas prices.

So, before DeCamp gets the idea to impose an entertainment surcharge on the actors' bus line, just one more 66 story: The time the bus broke down on Route 3. Five actors -- all of whom had been so absorbed by their scripts they hadn't been aware of one another's presence -- found themselves stranded out on the shoulder of the highway, waiting to board a rescue 66.

Mr. Zorich, who was there, remembers a long silence. Then someone said: "Well, DeCamp has just managed to shut down Broadway."

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