

Comic turns booze-and-kids scandal into stage fodder

By PAUL BROWNFIELD

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. — Paula Poundstone went back to work over the weekend, performing Friday night at a place called the Rio Theatre, an old movie house that looked more likely to offer a Hitchcock double bill than a comic re-emerging from crisis. The theatre, used now for live concerts in this liberal town, seats about 700 and was nearly full. Poundstone, performing for the first time since she pleaded no contest to felony child endangerment and a misdemeanor charge of inflicting injury upon a child, wore a trademark suit-and-tie ensemble and downed several Diet Cokes during a two-hour show.

"This is my first night performing since I've been a criminal," was one of the first things she said. The audience roared. Then she talked about being incarcerated. "Jail is just like the cop shows," she said. "I got one phone call, and I called Dick Van Dyke." As she explained, she has always been a big fan of his work. Comedians have an advantage when it comes to lightening the dark tones of scandal — who better to turn pain into the well-timed zinger?

Although Poundstone had been an accomplished comic for many years before her arrest in June, her image as an unfit celebrity mother, albeit of the B-list variety, became burnished in people's minds on that day. Poundstone did the "perk walk" on national TV, and the shorthand of that moment told viewers that Poundstone must be guilty of something, although at the same time she seemed an overwhelmed victim herself.

As it unfolded, Poundstone initially lost her career and her kids, successfully completed alcohol rehabilitation at Promises, a live-in drug and alcohol rehab facility in Tony Malibu, and was sentenced to five years' probation. Her no-contest plea, on Sept. 12, barely registered a blip on the media radar. By then, show business stories like hers were not supposed to matter. In exchange for her plea, prosecutors dropped three counts of lewd acts upon a child.

Under the conditions of her probation, Poundstone, 41, cannot be a foster mother, but she can, and does, see her three adopted children every day, although the visits are supervised for now, her attorney, Steven Cron, said. She also must notify her probation officer of out-of-town performances. On Friday, Poundstone's wit immediately put the audience at ease. "It's kind of strange to see this many seats not in a circle," she said, a reference to her stay in rehab.

To see Poundstone onstage is to understand why she might relate well to kids, and vice versa — she has a child's petulant attitude toward authority figures and a kid's fascination with food items including Butterfingers and Pop Tarts. There is also a vulnerability. The most memorable anecdote during her concert Friday was this one: At Santa Monica Jail, when police asked her to empty her pockets, out came pingpong balls.

Onstage, she was morbidly amused at her fate, able to hit the right notes as she lampooned herself; under court order not to leave Promises, Poundstone nevertheless ran into her judge at the gym, where the rehab centre has memberships for those in recovery, she said.

Poundstone's arrest shattered the relatively quiet life she had built for herself — one in which she earned in the six figures annually on the road, and at home, in Santa Monica, took in a growing number of hard-luck children (one with cerebral palsy, another born addicted to crack) as both an adoptive and foster parent. At the time of her arrest, Poundstone had three adopted children and two foster children, ages 2 to 12. A restraining order prohibits the principles from discussing the facts of the case, onstage or off. Cron said last week, but the attorney previously said that the child endangerment charge stemmed from an incident June 6 when Poundstone drove her children to get ice cream while she was drunk.

"I drank little cheap white wines and went for an ice cream on the wrong day," was how Poundstone



Paula Poundstone is back in business.

cut it during her act. The future of Poundstone's career remains entangled in her legal woes. Will they turn off potential buyers or stake renewed interest? Friday night, she did about 20 minutes on her public nightmare, then returned to existing material and what has been her trademark — banter with the audience, wherein she asks someone where they're from or what they do and plays around with them for 10 or 15 minutes.

Poundstone's team — her manager, Bonnie Burns, and her publicist, David Snyder, are trying to put together what they hope is a full lineup of 2002 dates, or at least a return to the steady business Poundstone did before her arrest. There are performances scheduled for February, and a few more in March.

Poundstone no longer performs in the comedy clubs that gave her her start in the 1980s, places that tend to give comics exposure but no pay. Rather, Poundstone, who performs for two hours, is used to filling 1,000-seat performing arts centre halls, such as to a loyal following and appearances on TV (*To Tell the Truth*, *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* and *HBO specials*).

The need to booking appearances is not to be taken lightly, given that Poundstone, after a failed variety show on ABC in 1993, called *The Paula Poundstone Show*, isn't likely to achieve TV stardom. And post-Sept. 11, corporate dates, an important source of income for many comics, has dried up, as businesses cut back on such fringe expenses amid a downturn in the economy. "It's going to be fine," Snyder says of Poundstone's ability to earn money. "The question is, how soon is it going to be fine?"

Good news came Friday night: People waited in the cold to see her perform, and a long line formed outside the theatre. Some people were fans of her old HBO specials, folks willing to give Poundstone the benefit of the doubt. "Rehab happens to a lot of people," said Kip Nead, 45, of Santa Cruz, who described himself only as self-employed. Of Poundstone choosing Santa Cruz for her first show, Nead said, "This is a notoriously welcoming crowd for anyone."

Perhaps more important, *Dateline NBC* needed fresh footage of her performing for a profile piece scheduled to air Jan. 22. Poundstone has sat down with *Dateline*'s Maria Shriver. Poundstone planned to do one of these high-impact network confessionals, but, meanwhile, the rest of her public relations strategy seems to be a work in progress. This is in keeping with a person described by many as shy, and hardly equipped to give one-roaming Clintonian performance to put her image problems to rest.

Los Angeles Times

SPOTLIGHT

HONOURS

Dynamic trio listed in revised encyclopedia
CHICAGO — Madonna, J.K. Rowling and Tiger Woods are making their first appearances in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in the 2002 printing. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has published the first revised version of its 32-volume set since 1998, which was delayed after the Sept. 11 attacks to editors could incorporate the events into articles. The printed set carries a suggested retail price of about \$1,943.

MUSIC

Winslet tops Irish album sales charts
Actress Kate Winslet, who rode *The Titanic* wave to fame, tops the Irish album sales charts with her debut *What If*, which she recorded for *A Christmas Carol*, an animated remake of the Charles Dickens holiday classic.

Ex-Beatle bumps

Nobel concert into black Oslo
An annual concert marking the award of the Nobel Peace Prize could make money for the first time in eight years thanks to stars led by ex-Beatle Paul McCartney, the Norwegian Nobel Institute said Tuesday. Geir Lundestad, director of the Institute, said possible proceeds from last Tuesday's Oslo concert halling 2001 winners the United Nations and its chief Kofi Annan would go to a planned Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo. Musicians play for free at the concert, but organizers are covering the costs, Lundestad said. Some in the audience pay for tickets while many are guests.

FILM

Rings director hopes for Tolkien museum
WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Peter Jackson, director of *The Lord of the Rings*, said Tuesday he hopes the estate of the trilogy's late author, J.R.R. Tolkien, won't block his plan for a museum to showcase the movies' props. The first film of the much-anticipated trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, premieres today. Jackson told the *Evening Post* newspaper he'd like to set up a museum to display some of the costumes, special effects and models used in the trilogy and made by his special effects group, Weta Workshop. He said the museum depends on ownership of material and is in the hands of lawyers. New Line Cinema, the U.S. distributor releasing the trilogy, owns the film rights. But the Tolkien Estate, run by the Tolkien family, claims there can be no display of props when the films are not on screen.

Multimillionaire actor

denies Internet theft
SINGAPORE — People who download movies off the Internet are "thieves" who threaten the



LEE CELANO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pamela Anderson Lee ponds a reporter's question outside a Los Angeles courthouse following an appearance in the custody battle with former husband Tommy Lee on Tuesday. The judge in the case denied Anderson's request that a joint custody agreement be nullified and Tommy Lee's future visits with five-year-old Brandon and three-year-old Dylan be monitored.

potential of the film industry. Tom Cruise said Tuesday while promoting his new movie *Vanilla Sky*. "We want to make movies, and in order to do that they (the films) have to be able to pay for themselves," the multimillionaire actor told a news conference, which his girlfriend and costar, Penelope Cruz, and director Cameron Crowe also attended. Crowe said technology is also helping people break into the film industry, particularly into directing. Cruise heads to Sydney, Australia, home to ex-wife Nicole Kidman, with his Latin lover on his arm for the last leg of the promotional tour. He is due to meet up with his two children there. "I'm looking forward to it. It's a place where my children live. My children are half Australian," said Cruise.

Jonni Mitchell works grace Vanilla Sky

Two nights past in the apartment of Cruise's *Vanilla Sky* character David Ames were pointed by Canadian-born singer-songwriter Jonni Mitchell. "The borrowed" paintings are called *Ice Offering* and *Edmonton*.

CELEBRITY

Cartland's pink finery pulls in top prices

LONDON — Best-selling romance novelist Barbara Cartland's array of pink feathered hats, costume jewelry and sequined shocking pink gowns sold for \$29,400 with some items fetching three or four times the

estimated price when auctioned by Sotheby's Tuesday. One beaded-encrusted pink Hartnell gown sold for \$17,000, more than double its estimate. Ten hats adorned with silk flowers, tulle, feathers, white milk and white fox, estimated at \$660, sold for \$2,880. Cartland died in May 2000.

BROADCASTING

Chretien's CBC interview cancelled by strike

Prime Minister Jean Chretien will not be having his usual end-of-year televised chat with CBC anchor Peter Mansbridge until the broadcaster solves its labour dispute with 1,600 technicians. The CBC says the decision to postpone the interview was mutual. "Given the current labour disruptions," said CBC spokesman Chuck Thompson, "it was decided to delay the conversation between the prime minister and Peter until the strike is over." CTV is scheduled to broadcast a Lloyd Robertson interview with the prime minister on Dec. 29. And Global TV is set to air an interview with Chretien by anchor Kevin Newman on Christmas Day at 6:30 p.m. and 11:30 p.m., and on Boxing Day at 7:30 a.m. It's unlikely that CBC viewers will see a Chretien-Mansbridge interview until the new year, if at all. There are still no talks scheduled between CBC management and the technicians who walked off the job earlier this month after contract negotiations broke down.

Strange World comes out of nowhere and lands on Sci Fi channel

From D1

The movie was based out of a little surfers paradise on the country's Caribbean coast, consisting of 20 or so shacks, restaurants and reggae bars.

When the two arrived a few weeks into filming, cast and crew were shooting scenes where the engineers have been marched through the steamy, muddy jungle at a running pace for almost 100 days. Because dawn arrives at 5:30 a.m., actors were up

a few hours earlier for makeup — including sunken eyes and various injuries, being heading off for a day of slugging in the mud — dusk hits at 5:20 p.m.

aring their time off. Gunnarsson led cast and crew in bodysurfing. "There were great waves and great beaches — the only ones in the water were the Canadians," Mulligan says with a laugh.

Vancouver actor **Adrian Dorval** was impressive on the shoot, says Mully. "He was the heart and soul of these guys, he just kept them going. At one point

he was dehydrated, so medics (there were two on set, both with their arms in slings) had him on an IV bag and he continued shooting. They dressed the IV bag behind trees and ferns so you couldn't see it."

Howler monkeys threw things from their treetop perches at cast and crew, who were also busy dodging venomous bullet ants and boa constrictors.

But in spite of it all, shooting 10 to 11 hours a day — the only camera shooting behind-the-scenes footage — Mulligan admits, "It's the best shoot I've been on ever. We had unlimited access, we were part of the experience. You felt like you were helping tell their story."

STRANGE BUT TRUE

The Sci Fi Channel has picked up off-network rights to *Strange World*, a 20th Century Fox show for ABC shot here a couple of years ago. ABC aired only three episodes of the series — the other 10 have been sitting on the shelf since spring 1999. The Sci Fi Channel will now air all 13 episodes beginning in February, according to the network's Web site. *Strange World* stars Tim Guinee as Paul Turner, an ex-geological scientist who was exposed to chemical warfare in Iraq in the early '90s but survives thanks to a saline made by a mysterious Asian woman.

GO, CANUCKS!

Vancouver film-makers **Justin Adam** and **Mike Hawley** are proud to punch these days and they should be. They're the only Canadians in competition at Slamdance 2002, North America's most popular indie film festival, where they'll screen their 10-minute comedy short, *The Man with a DV Cam*.

The two produced and co-directed the film, which pokes fun at the cliché stereotypes of the tortured artist, for about \$100.

In the flick, shot with a mini DV camera, Vancouver actor James O'Sullivan plays Lindsay Farnsworth, a director and one-man crew on a quest to share his artistic vision with the world. The film was shot "guerrilla-style" — with all shots improvised on location, without a traditional film script or shot list. No on-location dialogue was recorded — all sound was added in post-production. "Every phase of the post-production process took place in the comforts of the directors' bedrooms," jokes Adam, a digital film instructor at the Center for Digital Imaging and Sound (CDIS), a Vancouver-based entertainment technology college. He was able to use the school's equipment in the making of the film — a Sony VX1000 (NTSC DV) camera and post-production facilities.

In case you're visiting Park City, Utah Jan. 13, The Man with a DV Cam plays at 3 p.m. and will be the festival's closing film on the 16th at 8 p.m.

The Backlist appears in Entertainment on Wednesday and Saturday.

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