

Alison Arngrim, who played nasty Nellie Oleson on "Little House on the Prairie," takes "pride in the fact that so many people enjoyed hating her as a girl and is more than happy to give them an opportunity to do so in the future," according to her bio. To borrow a quote from a famous friend of her family's, Arngrim lets fans relive their animosity to her "all the way to the bank."

But she can't feel much real hate these days. Arngrim's show, "Confessions of a Prairie Bitch," attracted sold-out crowds in July when she was at St. Paul's Cabaret theater at Camp Bar. She's back there for another lively stand that ends today with a 5 p.m. show.

Making the most of being a bitchy little prairie girl has paid off for Arngrim. But when it comes to her husband of 19 years, musician Bob Schoonover, she limits his exposure to her inner, residual Nellie -- a character the French totally understand.

Q Even though you were a child, did you notice how beautiful Michael Landon was?

A Oh, heavens yes! You couldn't miss him if you tried. That mane of hair, those big white teeth, all those tan, rippling muscles. You'd have to be blind not to notice how gorgeous he was.

Q Did you see women being drawn to him?

A Oh yeah -- even my saintly, oh-so-proper Auntie Marion who took me to the set wasn't immune. He'd flash those teeth and twinkle those eyes and say "Mornin' babe!" and she'd giggle like she was 16! Of course, I always liked him because he was funny. He had a totally juvenile, warped sense of humor that seemed to have never quite made it out of junior high school. So, of course, all we 12-year-olds thought he was a riot.

Q Your daddy, the late Thor Arngrim, was Liberace's manager. Do you suppose Liberace is turning over in his grave about this upcoming Michael Douglas-Matt Damon bio-pic?

A Ha! Liberace was never concerned with what "the industry" or "critics" thought of him -- only his fans. He just wanted them to love him -- and they did. I think he would be concerned if he thought he was being portrayed in a way that would make his fans think less of him. But then, poor Liberace never lived to see a world where people like Ellen DeGeneres and Neal Patrick Harris could be openly gay and still adored by their fans. But remember, this is the man who, when critics panned his show -- his sold-out show, that is -- said, "When I read those reviews I cried ... all the way to the bank!" So considering this film will only add to his unending fame and no doubt increase sales of his old albums on iTunes, I suspect old Uncle Lee is laughing all the way to the big bank in the sky.

Q Your late mom, Norma MacMillan, was the voice of Casper the Friendly Ghost.

A Indeed! And Gumby, and Sweet Polly Purebred -- Underdog's girlfriend -- and Davey of "Davey & Goliath." And she was the voice of Caroline Kennedy and baby John-John on the famous comedy album, "The First Family."

Q In France, Nellie's never been thought of as being mean, right?

A It's a cultural difference. They don't think Nellie Oleson is mean. They think she's French. The first time I went to France 10 years ago, my friends [asked], Were they rude or mean? Not to me! It really is crazy. The ["Little House on the Prairie"] show's in 140 countries, and when I went to France, I found out they loved it. They really loved it.

Q Do they still recognize you?

A Oh, my God, it's huge. I tour France. I ended up doing a movie there, and then I have an adaptation of my

American show. Then I have a new show, "Nellie Oleson's Trunk of Treasures," an interactive show. So [I did] a tour of France in September and October.

Q How often do you go to France?

A I'm tri-coastal: L.A., New York, Paris. I'm there all the time.

Q What is the most aggressive move someone who detested Nellie has directed at you?

A That would be my ill-fated first personal appearance. I made the stupid mistake of going in costume -- me and Katherine MacGregor, who's Mrs. Oleson. It was a children's fair, a charity. Nobody wanted our autographs. They were terrified of us. And then two little girls came running up from behind me and kicked me right in the butt and knocked me to the pavement. Yeah, that was pretty brutal.

Q In what ways are you like Nellie?

A I always say Nellie Oleson lives for 10 minutes every morning before that first cup of coffee. And I like the bon-bons -- I like the candy like Nellie -- peppermint sticks.

Q So, you've continued to make a pretty good living?

A I have! It's the darnedest thing. Now I am touring all year. A good third or more of the year I'm on the road. I'm doing really well. It's shocking.

Interviews are edited. C.J. can be reached at [cj@startribune.com](mailto:cj@startribune.com) and seen on Fox 9.

**WATCH VIDEO** of C.J.'s terrific interview with Alison Arngrim

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