

Melissa Sue Anderson: avoids personal questions

By Andee Beck
New York Times Service

Melissa Sue Anderson receives more fan mail than any of her "Little House on the Prairie" co-stars. She's an object of curiosity to her peers when she attends parochial school during series hiatus. And on occasion is linked romantically with such actors as her 42-year-old married co-star-director, Michael Landon.

Which could have some rather adverse effects upon 15-year-old Melissa.

But the attractive NBC actress seems to be handling the attention with a maturity that frequently isn't achieved by even the eldest and most experienced performers.

Clad in a period costume of calf-length flowered dress, black ankle boots and bonnet, the performer who plays Mary Ingalls admits that off-screen she's shy with strangers. Indeed, questions about her personality bring uncomfortable replies. Discussion of the tastes of a teenager evoke excited, yet minimal, comments on fast cars and dating.

But mention money and the self-consciousness slips away. "A lot of kids at school are curious and ask inappropriate questions, like, 'How much do you make?' That's embarrassing. I'll just give them a look that lets them know what I think of the question or tell them it's none of their business."

"Everybody thinks actors make a lot of money," she continues, marble-clear blue eyes staring intently, "but we don't. At least, not by the time we pay certain costs."

Fan club expenses

"Twenty-five percent of my pay goes into a trust fund," she volun-



teers, "10 percent to my agent and I spend a lot — too much — on my fan club which has 1,500 members. The initial cost people pay for belonging to the club is one thing, but we spend extra to send out letters, bulletins, Christmas cards. It's publicity and everything, but it's costing a lot. Plus, I pay my mom for coming to the set every day, because I'd hire someone to take me here and home anyway."

Missy (a nickname which avoids confusion with co-star Melissa Gilbert) lives with her divorced mother, Marion, in Burbank, where Melissa charges neighbors 75 cents an hour for baby-sitting to supplement her weekly allowance. "If there's clothes I want that my mother doesn't think I need, I'll spend my money on that, but I don't go into my savings much."

She does spend money going out with friends, and says she goes on dates like any typical 15-year-old. "But though I go out in public, I can't linger anywhere. I do what I'm doing, then go on, else it looks like I'm wanting to be noticed."

When Melissa returns to the set to repeat a scene for a different camera angle, to an observer the slow, methodical production pace makes it seem like the 100th time she's recit-

ed the same dialogue, performed identical motions. But there is no boredom in her off-camera expression and her performance each take seems flawless.

"This business is so funny," comments her mother, Marion, whose pleasant personality belies all "stage mother" clichés. "When kids are working, they're expected to behave as adults, off screen they're catered to by everybody. I'm here every day to remind Missy that she's no more special than anyone else. Plus, I like to be with her because she's getting to the age where boys are interested in her..."

Not that Marion has much to worry about. "The crew is very protective of my daughter. When she started the show four years ago, Missy was a child, but she's growing into a young woman. The crew just doesn't want to see her grow up, though, and whenever a boy shows interest in her, they are very critical of him."

"Yeah, they really are protective,"

Melissa later agrees. "I think it's great, but I make it a point of not getting interested in boys in the business. I just decided I don't want people knowing about me all the time. I know I'm goin' OK, but too many people say too many things. A lot of magazines say all sorts of things that aren't true, and I don't want to give them extra cause."

Different lifestyle

"Like one time I was asked how I like Michael Landon and I said, 'Oh, I love him. He's the nicest man, the greatest director.' Because he really is. But the story came out, 'Melissa Sue Anderson is in love with her married co-star.'"

"If anyone's dumb enough to believe it, that's too bad. There's nothing I could do about it. Even if I sued, they'd give me a retraction that doesn't amount to more than a small paragraph, which most people aren't going to see."

A bit player several years Melis-

sa's junior interrupts to request her autograph. She obliges politely, routinely, then goes on to say that her lifestyle of working and studying half the year on a TV set and the other half in private school doesn't make growing up hard. "It's different, but not strange. Acting is something I want to do, it's my life, and it's completely natural to me. Someday I plan to direct, but no, I can't guess when that'll be. In this business you can't set goals of doing something by a certain age."

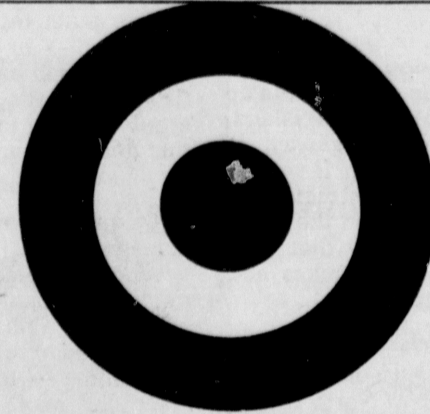
Missy, a straight-A student, whose previous acting experience has been ten commercials and a featured spot on "The Brady Bunch," reports her sole source of career motivation comes from herself. And though her mother is beside her every day, "It's my responsibility to do my job. If I want to continue acting, I have to work at it myself. I'm lucky to have a steady job and the good experience of a series. But it's my own thing."



Melissa Sue Anderson

One must admit Melissa comes off level-headed. But with that observation, her shyness returns. When asked to describe her personality, she will only say, with much hesitation, "Oh, I don't know. That would be vain. I've seen too many people talk about themselves like that. That's something I don't want to do myself."

Rita, Shaun, Natalie, Boz...



the top 30 LP's & tapes on sale!

Television Listings

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 2 — WMT, Cedar Rapids | 4 — WHBF, Rock Island | 5 — WOI, Ames |
| 6 — WOC, Davenport | 7 — KWVL, Waterloo | 8 — WKBT, LaCrosse |
| 8a — KCCI, Des Moines | 8b — WQAD, Moline | 9 — KCRG, Cedar Rapids |
| 10 — KTTC, Rochester | 12 — KIHN, Iowa City | 13 — WHO, Des Moines |
| 32 — KRIN, Waterloo | | 40 — KQJB, Dubuque |

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Sunday Morning | Sunday Afternoon | Sunday Night |
| 6:15
8b-Sacred Heart | 12:00
2-Movie (cont.) | 5:00
9-Star Trek |
| 6:30
8b-A Better Way | 7-Blood, Sweat and Cheers | 12-32-Forsythe Saga |
| 6:45
8a-Sunrise Semester | 9-Issues, Answers | 5-Maverick |
| 7:00
2-Christophers | 12-32-Wall Street Week | 40-Hee Haw |
| 4-A Better Way | 4-8-TBA | 7-NBC News |
| 5-Robert Schuller | 5-Music & Spoken Word | 6-10-13-NBC News |
| 8b-Conservationist | 6-Bold Ones (cont.) | |
| 7:15
2-Answer Is Love | 8a-1977 Space Highlights | |
| 8a-Children's Gospel | 8b-Pro Wrestling | |
| 7:30
2-This Is Life | 10-13-TBA | |
| 7-Mass Shut-Ins | 40-Forum (cont.) | |
| 9-Swaggart | | |
| 4-Rex Humbard | | |
| 5-Swaggart | | |
| 8-10-This Is Life | | |
| 8b-Good News | | |
| 7:45
8a-Consolation | | |
| 8:00
2-Ghostbusters | | |
| 7-Rex Humbard | | |
| 9-Jerry Falwell | | |
| 5-Oral Roberts | | |
| 6-Kaleidoscope | | |
| 8-Robert Schuller | | |
| 8a-Ghostbusters | | |
| 8b-Police & Community | | |
| 10-Day of Discovery | | |
| 13-Spotlight on Faith | | |
| 8:30
2-Wacko | | |
| 4-Revival Fires | | |
| 5-40-Day of Discovery | | |
| 6-Sunday Worship | | |
| 8a-11-2-3 | | |
| 8b-Project Eight | | |
| 10-Jerry Falwell | | |
| 13-Come Together | | |

Program Listings

Program listings are those supplied by the stations and networks at press time. They are subject to change without prior notice.

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 12:15
8a-Hollywood Sqs. | 12:30
7-NFL '77 | 12:32-Farm Digest | 12:32-Movie "Neeka" | 5-Public Forum | 6-10-13-AFC Champ. | 8b-Neighbor to Neighbor | 40-World of Survival | 1:10
2-Movie "After the Fox" | 1:30
8b-Issues, Answers | 40-Mammoth Ski Adventure | 2:00
9-Mad Squad | 5-Voyage to Bottom of Sea | 8b-Movie "Key Largo" | 40-Animal World | 2:30
12-32-French Chef | 8a-TBA | 40-Journey to Adventure | 3:00
2-NBA '78 Preview | 9-Movie "Pickwick Papers" | 12-32-Through Death to Life | 4-8-8a-NBA '78 Preview | 5-Land of Giants | 40-Stump the Stars | 3:30
7-Big Battles | 40-Miss America Teenage Beauty | 4:00
2-NFC Pregame | 12-32-Book Beat | 4-8-8a-NFC Pregame | 5-Lost in Space | 6-Movie "The Challenge" | 8b-Movie "Casablanca" | 10-13-TBA | 4:30
2-NFC Championship | 7-Voyage to Bottom of Sea | 12-32-Victory Garden | 4-8-8a-NFC Champ. |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|

BOZ SCAGGS DOWN TWO THEN LEFT including Hard Times, Whatcha Gonna Tell Your Man Gimme The Goods A Cue 1993	CROSBY-NASH LIVE	EARTH, WIND & FIRE ALL 'N ALL including Serpentine Fire, Jupiter Runnin' Love's Holiday Fantasy	4.44 Series 698 LPs Series 795 tapes, sale 5.55 High Inergy-Turnin' On Bob Welch-French Kiss	THE GARRETT
Chicago XI including Mississippi Delta City Blues Baby, What A Big Surprise Take Me Back To Chicago With Me, Little One	SHAUN CASSIDY Born Late Includes the Single Hey De... Also includes Teen Dream, A Little Like You Do You Believe in Magic	Queen NEWS OF THE WORLD	5.55 Series 798 LPs or Series 795 tapes Rita Coolidge-Anytime, Anywhere Shaun Cassidy-Born Late Natalie Cole-Thankful Box Scaggs-Down Two, Then Left Bay City Rollers-Greatest Hits Soundtrack-You Light Up My Life Alan Parson's I Robot Kansas-Point of Know Return Crosby & Nash-Live Chicago XI Captain & Tennille-Greatest Hits Styx-Grand Illusion Peter Frampton-I'm In You Jackson Browne-Running on Empty Emerson, Lake & Palmer- Works, Vol. II Rod Stewart-Foot Loose & Fancy Free Queen-News of the World Leif Garrett-Leif Garrett Paul Simon-Greatest Hits, Etc. Neil Diamond-Glad You're Here With Me Tonight Earth, Wind, Fire-All 'N All Alice Cooper-Live Aladdin Theatre Crystal Gayle-Believe in Magic	NATALIE COLE Thankful
ALICE COOPER	THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT I ROBOT	Paul Simon Greatest Hits, Etc. including Slip Slidin' Away Kodachrome 50 Ways To Leave Your Lover Loves Me Like A Rock Still Crazy After All These Years	7.99 Series 998 LPs or Series 995 tapes Commodores-Live	KANSAS Point of Know Return including Sparks Of The Sunburst/Hopalonga/Homer Lightning's Hand/Paradox/Dust In The Wind
EMERSON LAKE & PALMER WORKS EP TIGER IN A SPOTLIGHT SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME	BAD DY MATION LIVE Includes LOOKS LIKE WE MADE IT I WRITE THE SONGS MANDY	PETER FRAMPTON I'M IN YOU	9.99 Series 1198 LPs or Series 1195 tapes E.L.O.-Out of the Blue Beatles-Love Songs Barry Manilow-Live	CRYSTAL GAYLE We Must Believe In Magic including: Don't Make My Brown Eyes Blue All I Wanna Do In Life, Going Down Slow River Road, Make A Dream Come True
HIGH ENERGY Tumin' On	BOB WELCH FRENCH KISS	BAY CITY ROLLERS GREATEST HITS	10.99 Series 1298 LPs or Series 1295 tapes Joni Mitchell-Don Juan's Reckless Daughter	THE BEATLES LOVE SONGS
		"LIVE"		ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA Out Of The Blue including Turn to Stone, Steppin' Out Spotlight, Big Wheels, Birmingham Blue



Hours: Monday through Friday 9:30 AM to 10 PM, Saturday 9 AM to 10 PM, Sunday 10 AM to 6 PM
4501 First Avenue S.E. Across from Lindale Plaza