



## CATWOMAN

*Julie Newmar set the standard as the slinky seductress of Gotham City.*

By Bob Garcia

Julie Newmar was the perfect villainess; the woman who would rather drop to her death with her stolen jewels, than be rescued by Batman and give up her prize. Using the skills she perfected on stage in *L'IL ABNER* and on screen in *SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS*, she slinked, pranced, and danced her way through the first two seasons of *BATMAN* as Catwoman. Even though Lee Meriwether and Eartha Kitt would create their own distinct visions of Catwoman for the show, Julie Newmar remains the most memorable Catwoman of all.



Newmar as Catwoman, the first and best of three actresses to take the role in the series, took a hand in designing her own makeup.

Her involvement with the show came out of the blue. "I'd never even heard of it," said Newmar, who took the part on the recommendation of her college-age brother, who told her that *BATMAN* was the number one show at Harvard. Newmar got her first script the day before filming began at Culver City, during costume fittings. She told how she helped create that Catwoman style.

"I used to make my own costumes and know how to create that extraordinary curvy look," said Newmar, "secrets that you learn to do. I changed the belt line. I put this flashy gold belt around my hips instead of my waist because I thought it accented the curviness.

"We never had time for the makeup, to do anything wonderful or extraordinary. If they spent some money on it, we

could have come up with something really incredible."

Newmar came up with a way to accentuate her eyebrows. "She had a concept of what this character was supposed to look like," recalled makeup supervisor Bruce Hutchinson. "So I said, 'I want to see what you do, and if it works, it's all yours.' She did these eyebrow things which were all her creation, and she did eyelashes, and she drew in eyelashes all around her eyes with a very sharp pencil. She created a wonderful look. A very soft yet vulnerable look, that played into the evilness of that character. Julie's a very strange lady. She's ethereal."

Newmar was delighted to play the villain, "It was a great role," she said. "Catwoman was so spontaneous and creative and

maddening and sexy and insouciant." She credited Stanley Ralph Ross (who wrote every Catwoman episode but one) for the character's success. "He added a love interest to it," she said.

Newmar, a student of Lee Strasberg's Method, bought a couple of cats to get a feel for her role. She remembered the filming as "always rushed." After they blocked out the character's movements for the camera, the directors would say they were going to shoot the rehearsal. Chuckled Newmar, "That means, 'Hurry up, we're saving money. Do it right.'"

"You had to be like Robin Williams, completely spontaneous!" she continued. "It's fun that way. I kind of liked it. It demanded a pin-perfect performance right off the bat. When the villains came on they tilted the camera, as they did the dialogue. It was always fun to invent—at an angle, so to speak—so that what you *did* had surprise elements to it *all* the time.

"You're not going to fly off your mark, because the camera is not ready to catch you. You [did] try to have something up your sleeve that would surprise them and your co-star, but something that stays in the script, in the moment, in the frame."

"On top of what you see, it's comedy, and comedy elicits the unused intelligence in the back of my brain. Which I fancy a lot. Straight drama is fairly simple, you know—Saltines—but with



Newmar, the purr-fect Catwoman shows off her dynamic dancer's form in Patricia Barto's sleek costume design.

comedy, now we're creating something *magical*. To have fun with something is a very special focus: a very special energy.

"The actors were outrageous [on *BATMAN*] because if they didn't play it straight, they gave it away. You could go very far indeed, but underneath it all, you had to truly play it straight. The time when a person is at his most foolish is when he believes his own ego. He stands up and pounds desks, and you just laugh and think: what a damn fool. That's how it has to be."

But the fun wasn't just in the outrageousness of the actors or the script; trappings added a dimension to the magic. "They got everything they could get from the back halls or wherever they store that musty old scenery," she remembered. "I used to laugh when I got on the set. They used to have weird-looking string balls hanging there and these ugly looking chairs with cat skin. It looked much more marvelous on the screen. Those colors just gave it that zing. All the crafts got to come up with the most outrageous stuff. What fun!

"I love props because you

**“Straight drama is fairly simple. Comedy is creating something magical. It requires a very special focus, a very special energy.”**

—Actress Julie Newmar—

can fall over them, you can do funny things with them, you can accentuate certain important words with them," she said. "You can do so many wonderful things with props. I used to adore working with them. Anything that *didn't* work was even *more wonderful*. You could do a reaction off of it. And if that was funny, you'd react off *that* reaction. You'd have three or four laughs right there."

Newmar said she was unable to do the feature film, because of other commitments, but she didn't regret passing it up. "I think the whole concept of the show when it was really good, really fit a fair-sized TV screen, rather than the big screen," she observed. "It made it funnier [to be seen] there. That is reversed when you have a great and

beautiful film with fabulous scenery. You don't want to see it all scrunched down onto a small 24 or 36 inch screen. You want to be surrounded, so your eyeballs just pick up the edges."

She also missed playing Catwoman in the third season of *BATMAN*, because she was working in J. Lee Thompson's disappointing, extravagant adventure film, *MACKENNA'S GOLD*.

Even with her disappearances from Gotham, her Catwoman remains a fan favorite. "Actually, I get far more fan mail now than I ever did when the show came out," she said. "People would notice and speak up about it then, but not through the mail."

Her notoriety does have its drawbacks for a mother of two, especially when she's out at dinner. "People will come up to me—stick an elbow in my side and say, 'Purr. Now squat down and take a picture with my niece here. We want to take this back to Colorado.' Or, 'Will you please lie down so we can get to see how tall you are?' Sure, I'm in the middle of this roast beef, I'll just do that right away." □