

# Match Maker

## Brett Somers Returns to New York City For A One-Woman Show at Danny's Skylight

By **Bob Johnson**  
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Before Elaine Stritch started performing in *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, which went on to successful Broadway and London runs, Brett Somers began working on her one-woman show about her life, which opened July 7 at Danny's Skylight Room for a run of a month of Mondays.

When Somers was 18, she hopped a train to run away from her childhood home of Portland, ME, for a show-business career in the Big Apple. She decided not to take the bus.

"I did make the trip home on the bus once," she said in a recent phone interview from her barn-turned-into-a-home in Connecticut. "I thought I'd died and gone to hell."

That first train trip to the city, however, led Somers to quite a life in show business. In addition to performing on live television shows that included *Playhouse 90* and *Kraft Theatre* ("It was like performing theater with a gun to my head"), she originated the role of the mother in the Broadway-bound production of *Wait Until Dark* starring Lee Remick.

"I had been in rehearsal for three weeks and we were going to Boston. The director, Arthur Penn, came up to me and said, 'The part's been cut.'"

"I said, 'OK. Let me get my pencil.'"

"No," Penn said. "The part's been cut."

Somers wasn't devastated. She had signed on for a run-of-the-play contract. She didn't get to perform the role, but the producers honored her contract.

And despite holding the distinction of choosing the wrong mother to play in a Broadway-bound production, Somers managed to work her way into millions of homes for nine years as a regular panelist on the ever-popular *Match Game*, which is getting another life on the Game Show Network. To this day, people still approach her on the street to talk about it.

"I beg your pardon," they say. "Were you ever a teacher of mine?"

"And as soon as I open my mouth, they exclaim, 'Oh! *Match Game!*'"

And *Match Game* was the best fun Somers has ever had in the business.

"We had the perfect mix of people: Charles [Nelson Reilly], Dickie [Dawson], and me.

"We came in, taped three shows on Saturday, broke for dinner, then taped two more shows. We did the same on Sunday, then we were off for two weeks."

In addition to *Match Game*, Somers made guest appearances on *Love, American Style*, *The Odd Couple*, and *The Love Boat*. And, approximately 20 years ago, she began directing, with the Los Angeles production of the play *An Almost Perfect Person*.

"If I had been a man," she said, "I would have moved into directing early



'Odd' One Out: Somers at Skylight Room this month

on in my career. I love to watch the actors get out there and watch them perform. It's wonderful."

Recently, Somers directed an evening of short (as in 10 minutes or less) plays at the Theatre Artists Workshop of Westport, which was founded by actor Keir Dullea (*2001: A Space Odyssey*). She also wrote one of the night's plays.

Her play came out of a writing workshop at the theater. The writers were given the word "charm" and assigned to write a short play using the word as a starting point.

"I turned it into a five-minute piece that begins with a woman saying to her husband, 'Darling, do I have charm?' The husband replies, 'No, no, no. You're a very attractive woman, but Arlene is special...'"

As her current directing and writing project comes to a close, she'll refocus her attention on performance with her show at Danny's Skylight Room. She'll talk about her life and sing 15 songs, including "Most Gentlemen Don't Like Love" and "When I Was Seventeen."

The evening will certainly have charm and will be special. But, most of all, the evening will be all about Brett Somers. Who could ask for anything more? ■

An Evening with Brett Somers will be performed at Danny's Skylight Room (346-348 W, 46th St., 212-265-8130, [dannysgrand-seapalace.com](http://dannysgrand-seapalace.com)) on July 14, 21, and 28.