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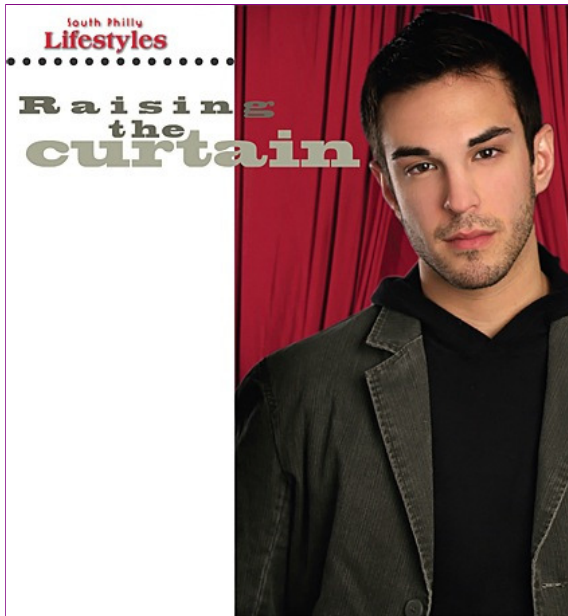

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LIFESTYLES
Raising the curtain

by Amanda Snyder
Peter Andrew Danzig's passion for the stage will be front and center Feb. 21, but he plans to continue in the biz long into the future.



Whether working at his day job in the president's office at a local university or performing throughout the region in theater and musical roles during his free time, the arts play a pivotal role in Peter Andrew Danzig's life.

The 24-year-old has experience in singing, directing, modeling and dance. Although Danzig enjoys striking a pose and refining his moves, they are just part of his job. And, while belting out a song is a passion, being on stage under the lights is a calling.

"I think to impersonate and become another person is just thrilling," the resident of 11th and Mifflin streets said. "You get to forget who you are when you step on stage."

Feb. 21, Danzig will headline "Celebrating Sondheim: A Musical Theatre Cabaret," paying tribute to composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim, who has penned hit musicals such as "West Side Story," "Gypsy" and "Sweeney Todd." Loaded with other Broadway classics, the event is part of the "Free at the Kimmel" series at Commonwealth Plaza, Broad and Spruce streets. Following the show, the composer himself will take the stage for a conversation with New York Times' columnist and former theater critic Frank Rich.

"Hopefully, we'll be able to fill the house," Danzig said.

Other roles require a complete transformation like in William Shakespeare's "Land of the Dead," showing March 12 to 28 at the Plays and Players Theater, 1714 Delancey Place. Danzig and the cast also will take part in pub crawls and happy hours starting Friday for "Zombiedelphia Month," which leads up to the show's East Coast premiere.

"I think that this is going to be a very exciting part of my acting career," Danzig, who will play 18-year-old apprentice John Rice, said. "It's something new that I don't think Philadelphia has seen."

Growing up in Brooklyn, Danzig's artist mother Carolyn enrolled her son in acting and modeling classes. By 9, his talents had him singing in choirs and performing in community theater. That year, the actor fell in love with music.

"I had been placed in a choir class," he said. "It was the highlight of my day. I couldn't wait to get there every day. It was my calling. There was no doubt about that."

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Danzig often traveled between Brooklyn and his family's summer home in the Poconos before the oldest of four siblings settled with his mother and father, Steven, an electrician, in Bangor, Pa. There, Danzig attended high school and auditioned for choruses, from county to state, and kept up with his school's plays and musicals. For college, he chose Philadelphia as his home after touring Temple University's campus.

"I fell in love with the city," the 2007 graduate, who earned a degree in theater, said. "I wanted something that was a city inside of itself, but not as busy as New York."

His love shifted to South Philly where he got his first apartment in '03 at Broad and Ritner streets.

"It reminded me of Brooklyn, but it had its own flavor," he said.

With five projects in the works, Danzig is constantly on the move, but always feels fortunate.

"I'm not going to lie," he said. "It's definitely tiring and exhausting to go to work 9 to 5 and go to rehearsal 5:30 to 11, but if you chose this profession, it's the price you have to pay."

Always looking for roles locally or even in New York, Danzig enjoys landing a character that differs from himself.

"I really like to step in the shoes of someone else. No two people are the same," he said, adding the fun comes in defining the specifics of a character. "I always want to glow and I want to find something new."

When Danzig began auditioning in the area six years ago, he was told by professors and upperclassmen not to be discouraged. Yet, his first time out, he snagged the role of Chuck in "Avenue X." The actor's resumé quickly filled up with roles in "Godspell," "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," "For Whom the Southern Bell Tolls" and "Tony n' Tina's Wedding."

He has been performing in the latter for about five years — playing characters from Tina's brother to her ex-boyfriend — in Atlantic City and on the Spirit of Philadelphia. While the show has a script with some guidelines, most of it is improvised.

"The surprise of who you're playing is part of the charm," he said.

In a show driven by the audience and their reactions, the cast learns quickly to keep things fresh and going at a fast pace, especially when the crowd challenges them with local references.

"For me, it's always fun especially with the audience in South Philly," Danzig said. "They come up with the wildest and craziest things and try to throw you off."

In addition to gearing up for his lead role in "Tell" at the Shubin Theatre, 407 Bainbridge St., he also is serving as assistant director for "The Meatpackers Book Club" at the Walnut Street Theatre and "The Lion King." The latter is with the Philadelphia Department of Recreation and will star children.

"As an actor, I want to become a better performer and directing gives me an insight I wouldn't normally have," he said.

Danzig enjoys giving back to the city's youth and sharing his love for the arts. Aside from working with kids on "The Lion King," he performed for The Boy Scouts of America and Philadelphia Young Playwrights while in college.

"I think it's a really invigorating feeling to know that you have a hand in encouraging the next generation of artists," he said.

He was delighted to introduce students to theater — many of whom had never been exposed to the arts — at Esperanza Academy Charter High School in the Northeast last Friday, where he recited monologues and shared his experiences.

Although he sees himself remaining in the area as he is constantly finding challenging roles here, in the future, Danzig is looking to get in the studio to record his own album and perform more cabarets. He also hopes to open his own theater for contemporary musicals, he said.

"I'm one of those performers where I don't set one specific goal for myself, but just see where my career takes me," he said. "Wherever that path leads is where I'll end up."

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