



Thursday, May 20, 2004

Former student acts in popular touring musical

By *Jeff Samoray*, OU Web Writer

Dave Havasi is living out his dreams, and they're every bit as good as he imagined. Formerly a student in Oakland University's **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance**, Havasi now is performing with one of two touring productions of "**The Producers**" with music and lyrics by Mel Brooks. Not only has Havasi had the chance to play multiple characters in this Tony Award-winning musical, he also understudied with Martin Short and worked with Jason Alexander during the show's stay in Los Angeles.

"This is what I've always wanted to do," said Havasi by phone from Florida, where the cast has a three-city engagement before heading to Washington, D.C. "Performing is a dream job. It's like when you're a kid and say you want to be an astronaut or NBA basketball player when you grow up. I love going out every night to perform for tens of thousands of people. It's a great feeling to work with talented people and a great management team – everybody wants that in their profession. It's not been easy, but I really couldn't be happier."

The role represents a high point in a series of more challenging and rewarding jobs for Havasi, who studied at Oakland from 1996-98 before finishing his degree at Marymount Manhattan College. Since graduating, he's appeared in off-Broadway productions of "Smokey Joe's Café," "Damn Yankees," "Beguiled Again" and worked with the Strouse family on the musical "Stolen." He also continues to model and do commercials.

"I try to get involved in as many opportunities as possible," said Havasi, a former Rochester resident who now lives in Queens, N.Y. "It's good to diversify. I actually auditioned twice previously for 'The Producers' before I got the job. I knew the casting director and one of his associates gave me a call last fall and said they needed a replacement for an actor in L.A. I auditioned a third time and got the job."

Havasi joined the West Coast production last December in Los Angeles, where he met and worked with Short and Alexander.

"Working with those guys was fantastic," Havasi said. "In some casts, actors of their caliber can be really standoffish, but both guys were very much part of the team and very welcoming. Jason is just an incredibly talented song and dance man. Martin is a great character actor and just as crazy as you'd imagine. Jason is actually quite subdued and relaxed, but he can really turn it on when he needs to."

After a month of rehearsals, Havasi began acting with the touring group, which performed across the Southwest and South before arriving in Florida. The grueling performance schedule includes eight shows per week with two each Saturday and Sunday. Mondays are Havasi's only days off.

"It's really exhausting, but I usually don't have to be to the theatre until about 7 o'clock, unless I have understudy rehearsal," Havasi said. "I definitely get jacked up by each performance. Because there are so many variables in live theatre, you're always kind of 'on.' It's certainly never boring. I have 17 costume changes in the show between my two roles (as Scott and Donald Dinsmore)."

The most memorable performance came one evening in Houston when former President George Bush and his wife Barbara were in the audience.

"The Secret Service guys came before the show and gave us a list of things not to do," Havasi said. "There is a lot of onstage gunplay, including cannons, howitzers and exploding sounds, which we were told not to direct toward the audience or the Secret Service would 'shut the show down.' There were guys dressed in black tactical gear patrolling backstage. There's a scene in which I carry a gun and holster, and I had this strange sensation that I was in a sniper scope."

"I met George and Barbara during the intermission when they came backstage. We talked about their upcoming 60th wedding anniversary and George's upcoming 80th birthday, on which he was going to go skydiving."

Working on "The Producers" has reinforced the importance of being persistent and having confidence – lessons Havasi began learning while a student at Oakland.

"I had a great two years at Oakland," Havasi said. "(Associate Professors of Theatre) Michael Gillespie and Karen Sheridan were very instrumental in helping me develop my professional and artistic approach. They really helped me build a foundation, which gave me an advantage when I first came to New York. The whole staff gave me the opportunity to work on different projects to nurture my ability. It's like an engineering student getting to be on the design team or a journalism student getting to work on the school newspaper.

"Oakland definitely helped me with my confidence and gave me a can-do attitude, which certainly hasn't hurt my career."

Other acting principles Havasi learned at Oakland continue to serve as daily reminders when he takes the stage.

"Michael Gillespie was definitely a mentor," Havasi said. "He gave me a respect for acting and an understanding of how it fits in our society. It's not a trivial profession, but a necessary one. Through acting and watching a performance you can learn a lot about yourself within the world.

"When working on various roles, you're always taking risks. What you need to do is find a niche as a means of making yourself marketable. At the same time, it's still important to be yourself. That's the ultimate balance to strike. It's also something I learned from Martin Short and Jason Alexander. They're at the top of their game, but are still just ordinary guys."

After "The Producers" finishes its tour next January, Havasi plans on working with his agent to find the next big role.

"I've worked on a lot of different projects and am always looking for bigger and better," Havasi said. "I'd like to do some Broadway work and maybe TV. If I could start working on a film, that would be great. Just like any businessman, I'm always looking for something more dynamic and challenging where the stakes are higher."

"The Producers" swept the 2001 Tony Awards, receiving the most awards in Broadway history, including Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, Best Original Score, Best Scenic Design, Best Costume Design, Best Lighting Design, Best Orchestrations, Best Choreography and Best Direction of a Musical. For more information on the musical, its cast, reviews, upcoming performances and more, visit "[The Producers](#)" Web site.

Havasi and the rest of "The Producers" cast will be coming to Michigan December 7-12 to perform at the [Wharton Center for the Performing Arts](#) in East Lansing. Tickets range from \$38.50 to \$68 and can be purchased by calling the Wharton box office at (517) 432-2000 or (800) WHARTON.

SUMMARY

Dave Havasi is living out his dreams, and they're every bit as good as he imagined. Formerly a student in Oakland University's Department of Music, Theatre and Dance, Havasi now is performing with one of two touring productions of "The Producers" with music and lyrics by Mel Brooks. Not only has Havasi had the chance to play multiple characters in this Tony Award-winning musical, he also understudied with Martin Short and worked with Jason Alexander during the show's stay in Los Angeles.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Thursday, May 20, 2004
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Thursday, May 20, 2004
Article Start Date: Thursday, May 20, 2004