

THEATER

Producing A Masterpiece On Stage

By Iris Wiener
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At a recent performance of Broadway's *The Producers*, Brad Oscar took **The Record** on a tour of his dressing room backstage at the St. James Theatre, where he resided during his run as Max Bialystock, one of New York's most familiar roles. Goofy notes and Disney villain figurines adorned the room, small memories placed alongside a photograph of he and Mike Piazza, a reminder of his and co-star Hunter Foster's experience singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" before the Mets played a double-header against the Braves at Shea Stadium in September. Oscar describes his collection in a warm, humbly triumphant voice. After all, it wasn't too long ago that he was living the common actor's tale - waiting tables while auditioning until someone recognized his talent. Fourteen years after his Broadway debut in *Aspects Of Love*, the *The Producers* star prepares himself for a new chapter - the West End.

So from small beginnings in Washington DC to Broadway, and now on to the West End! Your life must have been quite a ride.

Well, New York was always my fantasy land. My parents and family used to come up to the city from DC when I was a kid, and I knew that this is what I wanted to do, so to have been able to make me feel very fanta-



Photo Courtesy Paul Kolnick

Taking the role of Max Bialystock in *The Producers*, since the departure of Nathan Lane, is Brad Oscar, whose time in New York City has also been spent in *Jekyll & Hyde*, *The Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular*, and an upcoming episode of *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*.

met so many people. At the time I didn't want them to think that I

The guy who was playing Franz had some knee issues and need

about. This man has spent his life and his passion to ultimately cre-

Square and see my name and face up there is still hard to wrap my mind around. In this business everything is so random and crazy. I appreciate it because it is so special and so ridiculous in a way, but I think it's also important to stay grounded and temper that reality of the situation – it is what it is right now, and it's been extraordinary. Being involved with this show has been ups and lows and the most amazing thing in my life.

You've done a lot while building a career for yourself. What do you think contributed most to your current status?

I had a very traditional upbringing growing up in DC, I did the whole community theater thing, and some television when I was a kid, which was great. And then I went to Boston University and got my BFA, and later waited tables at a restaurant which used to be called Charlie's, on 45th St., which is now called Sam's. But Charlie's was always the restaurant that we would go to when we came to the city to see shows, and it wasn't only that there were a lot of stars there – Charlie's was like the cool place to hang out. And when I moved up here I thought, "Why not, sure, I'll wait tables." I think I had to lie to get the job because I had no real waiter experience. It was a great experience, I

wanted them to see me as an actor, but I still met so many people in the business and many of whom are now friends.

And you were a teacher as well?

Yes, that was also fun. At Marymount Manhattan College I taught several semesters of musical theater techniques class.

So how did *The Producers* come out of all this?

I was in a leave of absence from Broadway's *Jekyll & Hyde*, and I was playing Santa for *The Radio City Christmas Spectacular*. It was a blast! Going from *J&H* to Santa was going from the sublime to the ridiculous. It was a month before *The Producers* started in New York, and they were looking for a standby for the national tour, and I flew over from my day off and auditioned for the standby position. It all happened very quickly, and I got it. But by the time we actually started rehearsal, I was not only covering Max, but I was covering Franz, and Roger DeBris, and about four or five of the character men in the ensemble, so I technically had become a swing as well as an understudy – no longer the sweet standby position where you don't even have to show up unless the actor is out!

ed surgery pre-Broadway, and I went in for Franz, and they were very happy. So they gave me the role [for which Oscar was nominated for a 2001 Tony Award], and when we came back to New York, I was Franz.

When you finally took over for Nathan Lane as Max Bialystock, did you find that there was an added pressure because of his star power?

There was certainly a lot of pressure for the first year when I was his understudy and he was out, but the show is so damn good that it plays without stars. We just happened to have had two big stars who will forever be associated with this, and the fact is that I think the show is so well scripted, designed, structured, and directed, that it plays with everybody that is talented enough to make it there.

You've played Max for quite some time now. Do you feel that you and he are similar in any ways?

I think I do in his passion, and in his crazed obsession, I mean this is a man who loves the theater and who was a very successful producer but has fallen on hard times. The lengths that he goes to are fairly despicable in a way – if we look at it in that way, but that's not what the show's

ate theater and be the impresario, and somebody comes into his life in a capacity that he's never experienced before. That relationship is what it's all about. Because you know on the nights when it's tough and on the nights when the audience isn't as uproarious, there are people out there who are having this great experience and there is something in this evening that will be very special for them. That's very special for me, and for Max, I think...

Until we can see you on Broadway again, we understand you'll be popping up on prime-time?

You'll find me in an episode of *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*. I believe in January. It's called "Collective" and I play a toy shop owner, an owner of sort of collectible toys. I'm not evil, just your typical slightly uncooperative 'giver of information' to the two lead detectives as they try to track down and solve their weekly mystery.

Now that you've conquered Broadway and are on your way to the West End, have you officially 'made it'?

I don't know, you tell me! Had I not made it before? This is another amazing opportunity that has come to me by being a part of this project. So you know, just

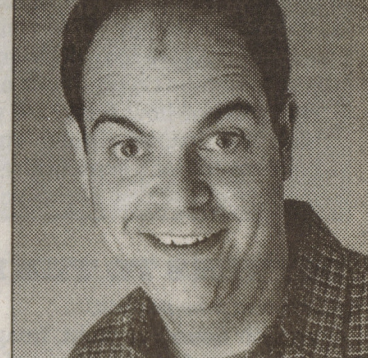


Photo Courtesy Judy Katz Public Relations

Brad Oscar said that he can see some of Max Bialystock in him – a man who has dedicated his life to molding a scenario that can entertain theaters packed with people.

when I was ready to leave Broadway January 9, and was sort of looking forward to some down time, this opportunity presented itself to go over there and I'm thrilled. I love it over there, I have visited, and I just think it's going to be an amazing experience because it's so much like Broadway, only centuries older. And that's one thing I just love about being over there, is how the history and just the years and years of accumulation of stuff is tangible and I love it. So yeah, I'm really looking forward to it.

The Producers is playing at the St. James Theatre in New York. For tickets call Tele-charge at 800-432-7250 or visit www.producersonbroadway.com.