

## THEATER

# Denis O'Hare Sweetens Broadway In *Charity*

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When excited fans wait by the Al Hirshfeld Theatre stage door after performances of *Sweet Charity*, Christina Applegate isn't the only actor that keeps them at the ready with a Sharpie. Denis O'Hare enters the crowd with the same boyishly handsome smile that has won him rave reviews and a 2005 Drama Desk Award for his role as Oscar Linquist in *Sweet Charity*. He modestly laughs with fans over their praise for his work on Broadway, which includes a stand-out performance in *Take Me Out* for which he won a 2003 Lucille Lortel Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, Drama Desk Award, and Tony Award. In 2004 O'Hare went on to receive a Tony Award nomination and Outer Critics Circle nomination for his role as Charles Guiteau in *Assassins*. When asked about his feelings toward the respect that he receives from a critical New York audience, he laughs, "I didn't know they respect me! Great!"

It's impossible for admiration and respect not to follow his performance in *Sweet Charity*. The Tony nominated musical takes a



Photo By Paul Kolnik/Courtesy Sweet Charity

**Denis O'Hare splits sides in his role as Oscar Linquist in the Broadway hit *Sweet Charity*, starring alongside Christina Applegate in the title role.**

come in from the fair and listen to me play - only because it was too hot outside. And I would play voluntary.

type. I didn't want to make him a caricature. I remember being at home working on it and going, "Oh, that was bad." Each day I'd get a little bit better and find

really entertaining for 90 percent of the evening, and all of a sudden you get something else, and that's a little bit of a reality check

don't necessarily have to have that. The Drama Desk helped me do that.

the fact that you were not only a nominee, but the winner of the 2005 Drama Desk for *Sweet Charity*, only to go on and get snubbed when it came time for the 2005 Tony nominations?

I was surprised, because you begin to feel like you know how things are going, and you can't help but hope and try to predict things. I was definitely disappointed because it was a letdown for the show, and I felt I should've done that for the show. But I also know that every year somebody is left out. Every year there's a list of people where you kind of go, "Oh my god! How could they do that?" and this year it was my turn. I don't take it as a personal snub, and it's not a referendum on my abilities or my performance. You know what? There were a lot of really good people in my category this year. And I was really happy that Dan Folger won. I've been nominated twice, three times would be great, but I

look at the mishaps of Charity Hope Valentine, a dance-hall hostess who wears her heart on her sleeve and the footprints of uncaring men across her chest. O'Hare plays the role of Charity's shy, slightly neurotic love interest, and brings down the house with his eccentricities and comical ease.

O'Hare enjoyed some hot tea while speaking with the **Half Hollow Hills Newspaper** in his dressing room before a recent performance of *Sweet Charity*.

### What is your earliest memory of yourself as a performer?

I was a pig when I was 8 ... literally. I played a pig in a thing called *The Peddler*, and my best friend got the lead. He was a terrible actor, so I was crushed. I had to wear pink tights! My mother made me a nose out of a Campbell's soup can and put cardboard paper around it. It smelled horrible! I smelled Campbell's soup throughout the whole show. Plus it was digging into my face. And around that time I also played the church organ. I played at Mass as a kid, and also at the state fair in Michigan as I was growing up. At the fair in Michigan they had this auditorium where something like nine people would

### *Sweet Charity* begin?

I just auditioned for it. I was doing *Take Me Out* at the time. I prepared a couple of scenes and the song "Sweet Charity." I remember I auditioned for it, and after I finished the one scene with the song I said, "Thank you very much," and then left. It turned out that they had wanted me to stay but I didn't know that. They never told me. I left the audition and was on my way to the gym next when I got a call saying, "Where are you?" and I was like, "I'm at 50th." And they said, "We're not done, you have to come back!" (*Laughs*)

**In one of your first scenes you get stuck in an elevator with Charity. You have something of a claustrophobic nervous breakdown, and it is clearly one of the audience's favorite scenes. How did you prepare for Oscar's hilarious bouts of emotional instability? Did it come naturally (wink wink)?**

No! (*Laughs*) It really didn't! I couldn't find the character for a while, it was very hard to find. I used that scene in the audition, and I had to work on it for a very long time. I found it very hard to find Oscar without making fun of him and making him this nerdy

better, and I worked a long time on that. But once I got it, I felt like I had it. Being natural was the goal, and if I didn't ever find a natural way to do it I don't think I ever would've been cast.

**(Spoiler Alert - don't read on unless you want the ending explained!) How do you feel about the unpredictable ending to Charity and Oscar's relationship?**

I love the way it ends. One of the things that attracted me so much in the first place was that it wasn't a happy ending. And I think it makes the musical more meaningful, and it makes the audience have to think and work a little bit. I know that the audience comes to care for this couple, and the fact that they don't get that happy ending makes the experience of the show different, and it's definitely more realistic. It makes it more about these people, and the possibility of what they have for the future more true. It's nice to have your assumptions upset. Do you come to the theater to have your ideas ratified or challenged? Do you come to the theater to be taught, or to be told something you already know? It's always more interesting to have something that challenges you. This musical is

**(Spoiler Alert - skip this one too!) Has anyone ever told you that they've been let down by the ending?**

Oh yeah, all the time. When I come out after the show people go, "We're mad at you Oscar, you should've married her, we liked you until the end!"

**Let's say you, Denis O'Hare, are having dinner with your Broadway alter egos: Charles Guiteau (*Assassins*), Mason Marzac (*Take Me Out*), and Oscar Linquist. Describe the conversation that would take place.**

I would probably ask a lot of questions. Oscar wouldn't answer any of them, Charles would babble on and on and on, and Mason probably wouldn't answer. (*Laughs*) It would be a bunch of misfits in the room with no natural leader. I would definitely have paid. Mason would've paid just in an effort to be magnanimous. I'm sure Charles would've found something wrong with something - the waiter would've been trying to kill him and he'd have to leave, or he'd get offended with the menu talking about him.

How do you feel about

were out of the picture.

I was going to be a priest until I was 17 years old. But until they have gay priests, that's not going to happen! I used to be very religious. I also dreamed of being a musician. I played violin, clarinet, organ and piano. But I don't think I have the discipline to be a musician. So maybe I would be a writer. I like travel writing, and I was a poetry major for two years in college. But now I make little home movies, so maybe I would do something with filmmaking. I take a lot of footage of the cast I'm working with while we're backstage, and I give it to them as gifts after however long the run of the show is. It's fun for me to do, and it's great for them to get because it's a real physical remembrance of the piece. Theater is so ephemeral that we don't get to see our performances and we don't get to see what we do, so they get a little taste of that, which I think is really important.

*For more information about Sweet Charity or to purchase tickets, visit [www.sweetcharitythemusical.com](http://www.sweetcharitythemusical.com).*

Keep your eyes open in the **Half Hollow Hills Newspaper** for an interview with one of Denis O'Hare's co-stars in *Sweet Charity*, Janine LaManna.