

Thursday, May 12, 1983 O&E

'I am what I am,' says actor of many roles



'In high school people used to say, "Kirk, you ought to be an actor." I was very loud-mouthed, your typically gregarious jerk. I used to get beat up a lot.'

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

YOUNG ACTOR Kirk Haas has managed to have a role on stage or behind the scenes in every one of the productions of current season at the Actors Alliance Theatre Company in Southfield.

At present Haas is playing one of the four characters in the Michigan premiere production of "Album," David Hummer's nostalgic play about high school students growing up in the '60s.

The show, which opened April 22, continues Fridays-Sundays through May 22 at the arena theater at Lycee International, 30800 Evergreen.

In the office of the school's acting academy, Haas talked about what it's like to be a performer trying to get ahead in a tough business. His bright blue eyes, curly hair and free-flowing movements give him a John Travolta-like charm.

BUT HAAS apparently doesn't seem himself that way. He said, "In high school, people used to say, 'Kirk, you ought to be an actor.' I was very loudmouthed, your typically gregarious jerk. I used to get beat up a lot."

Haas, who attended Lahser High School in Bloomfield Hills, said, "I was an avid spectator in high school. Physically I was a runt. I did my growing in college."

His friend, Mike, helped him take up weight lifting. The 5-foot 8-inch Haas hasn't grown any taller but he has gained some needed muscle. "I'm more of a typical all-American boy right now," he said.

Partly in an effort to look older, he grew a mustache and a beard. For his role in "Album," he is clean-shaven. "I am what I am," he has decided.

In March 1982, he appeared in the Stagecrafters of Clawson production of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," playing the sensitive young man who stutters.

THE PRODUCTION was one from Michigan community theaters groups that was chosen to participate in the Purdy Theatre Festival held at the Lycee. It took best production, best director, and two scholarships were awarded — one of them to Haas.

At that time, Haas' work schedule didn't permit him to take advantage of the scholarship, at the Lycee's Academy of the Arts, so he turned it down. This year, he made contact with Actors Alliance, the profes-

In 'Story Theatre' at the Actors Alliance, Kirk Haas performed seven different roles, played the guitar and served as stage manager. He's also been a delivery boy, a shoe salesman and an assistant manager of a sporting goods store.

sional theater company there, and subsequently became involved in all its shows.

The aspiring actor has held a variety of jobs, several in Birmingham. "I was a delivery boy at Noah's Down Under (sandwich shop) for a year," he said. "Before that, I worked at the Birmingham Theatre in the box office. Before that I was with Richard and Heals, the first six months it opened, as assistant manager." He also sold shoes at Lady Sherman.

During his high school days, Haas was not into theater, he said. He wanted to be an architect, and after graduation attended Western Michigan University, studying architecture for two years until he failed a math course.

He worked for a year selling sporting goods at the Varsity Shop in Birmingham, then at the Rochester store as assistant manager.

Haas went back to college, taking a general studies program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He happened to enroll in a radio-TV course and subsequently "got bitten by the acting bug."

ALL THIS led to his combining a theater-TV and radio major, specializing in the performance area instead of including backstage work.

He didn't get cast in any campus productions until he and nine other students got together and put on their own shows.

Haas thinks he's already come a long way since his very first role, in the third grade, as Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, and the two lines he spoke in a sixth-grade production when he wore girls' tights, at Traub Elementary School.

"I'm not real good at auditioning," he admits. "I'm better as a practice." He's had greater success at tryouts where he can be more spontaneous. "Tun good on a cold reading."

At the Actors Alliance, he appeared in the season's first production, "Romeo and Juliet," as one of the Tragic

gedians playing a recorder.

HAAS, WHO plays guitar, said he learned to play the recorder in a week. He acquired a musical background, from his father, Don Haas of Birmingham, who played in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for 20 years.

His mother and sister both live in Troy and his brother is a Livonia resident. Haas has been doing housecleaning for his family and finds this is a great job for him, what with his afternoon rehearsal schedule and evening performances.

In "Story Theatre," the second show at Actors Alliance, Haas originally was going to play guitar and be stage manager. When one of the actors, who had five roles in the show, injured his ankle, Kirk took over the five roles, plus two others, and took turns stage managing.

"Story Theatre," a family show, is a musical based on fairy tales. The run has ended, but the show continues to tour, playing to groups of 400 children. "They love it," Haas said. "We'll probably do the show all summer long."

He had to perform a song in the show. "That song convinced me I could sing," he said exuberantly.

THE COMPANY'S next production was "The Women Here Are No Different." "That was a big success," he said. Haas stage managed and was sound engineer. A performance of the show was videotaped for the archives of Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

In "Marat/Sade," where inmates of a mental hospital put on a play, he was a patient. "Actually a looney is what they call us." The role was especially difficult, Haas said, because "I had to play an actor playing a patient, playing an actor. It really tires one out after each of those performances."

Students claim film festival prizes

Students from Wayne Memorial High School, Beahan Junior High in Farmington and Brookside elementary in Bloomfield Hills are among the winners of the 14th Annual Michigan Student Film Festival.

All the award-winning films will be shown in the Friend's Auditorium of the Detroit Public Library, main branch, 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday.

Mary Seymour, a Wayne Memorial senior, produced her film, "Hell is for Children," after many months of research into the problem of child abuse. The project, voted "Best of Show," was supported by the Michigan Council for the Arts and was completed while Mary was enrolled in a media production course at the William D. Ford Vocational/Technical Center in Westland.

The film, which runs about five minutes, incorporates photos of abused children, drawings by children and newspaper headlines and accounts with a soundtrack of Pat Benetar music.

BEAHAN STUDENT Colleen McGowan's film, "G.I. Magellan Sells the World," won first place in the junior high division. In the film, G.I. Joe dolls play such characters as Magellan the explorer and the Queen of Spain.

"Grapes from Space," a film that tied for first place in the elementary division, was made by a group of fourth graders from Brookside School. In it a bunch of grapes terrorizes a tiny village while "I Heard it Through the Grapevine" plays on the soundtrack.

The Michigan Student Film Festival, sponsored by Detroit area film teachers and the Detroit Public Library, is open to any grade school student. Entries from around the state are shown at preliminary screenings and winners are selected by a panel of jurors comprised of educators and film professionals.

Prizes will be awarded Saturday.

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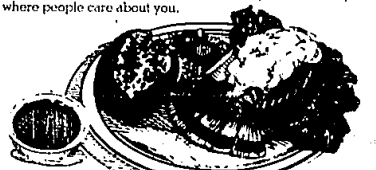
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