

Farmington Hills actor stars in three 'Forbidden' roles

BY JOANNE PORRETTA
SPECIAL WRITER

Farmington Hills resident Eric Gutman is enjoying success as understudy for the two male leads in "Forbidden Broadway," which is currently running at the Century Theatre downtown through Feb. 13.

Gutman, son of Howard and Karen Gutman of Farmington Hills, marked his professional theater debut last year, appearing in "Forbidden Hollywood" and the holiday season's "Forbidden Christmas"; both shows also ran at the Century Theatre. The three "Forbidden" productions are spoofs satirizing popular Broadway and Hollywood shows and movies, and in the Christmas version, the show pokes fun at holiday movies, albums and television specials.

The characters portrayed and spoofed by Gutman in his two Forbidden roles so far have ranged from his favorite, Roberto

Benigni, to the much more difficult Whoopi Goldberg. According to Gutman, each portrayal requires a strong comedic tone, accompanied at times with song and dance. And antics.

Forbidden Hollywood

"In Forbidden Hollywood, I understudied for roles, which consisted of Keaton Reeves, Leonardo DiCaprio - and we're just tearing apart Titanic, and also Austin Powers, Mel Gibson, and then classics like Humphrey Bogart and Gene Kelly. And then you get to Roberto Benigni, and you're climbing on the chairs in the audience. It's just a wonderful show."

Gutman auditioned for the shows six days after he graduated from Western Michigan University's Music Theater Performance program, at which time he was approached by producers looking for local talent. The three shows have run at the Century Theatre, otherwise

known as the Little Gem, a smaller playhouse connected to Detroit's Gem Theatre.

Performing in anything "Forbidden" is an excellent opportunity for a theater actor, according to Gutman, since the trilogy is well known in New York and has been running there for 16 years.

Gutman said his marketability on Broadway will have increased because he is the rare "Forbidden" actor who knows both male parts in all three shows. After his current show closes, Gutman plans to move to the Big Apple.

Another asset Gutman is eager to bring to New York is his newly acquired Actor's Equity Association membership card. This says he is a professional actor, who must be paid a union salary and benefits. According to Gutman, the Equity card may help open doors anywhere nationally.

Equity is a must

"To be on anything on Broadway right now, you need to be Equity. To be off-Broadway, you need to be Equity. And the big shows do have non-Equity casting calls, but it's to the point where you're literally in line at six in the morning and you'll wait for five hours outside, just to try to get to an Equity audition. With this, I can flash the card and get an audition time, and I'm set. It's a huge difference. I get to professionally be an actor. It's just the most wonderful feeling in the world. I wake up every morning and count my blessings."

Gutman enjoyed his childhood forays into performing - playing a toy guitar in fourth grade, performing as a child sweating inside a Toto costume in "The Wizard of Oz," his first big role in eighth grade as Danny Zuko in "Grease." These experiences eventually led him to study act-

ing. After a move from California at age 14, he attended Harrison High School and there was part of Harrison's award-winning marching band. His voice and electric guitar were featured in renditions of "Tommy" by The Who. Along with rock guitar, he is also proficient in finger picking and classical guitar, as well as piano, banjo, percussion and bass guitar.

He earned a bachelor of fine arts degree at WMU. His favorite university and summer stock credits include "Angels in America," "Assassins" and "Arsenic and Old Lace" for which he won the Region III American College Theatre Festival Irene Ryan Award. Other honors include a 1997 Theatre Guild Scholarship, the 1999 Beverly Belson Music Theatre Scholarship and the 1999 WMU Presidential Scholar award.

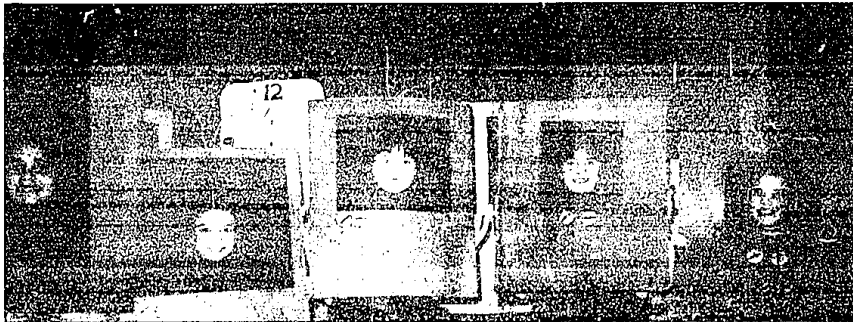
With the recent addition of the Equity card, Gutman is hoping



Eric Gutman

to add to his resume. When asked of his chances, Margaret Koltz, a longtime Farmington Hills piano instructor, said of her former student: "We're going to be hearing about Eric Gutman."

Hillside Elementary fifth-graders review 20th century in play



TV Boxheads: From left, Dunya Najim, Carly Todd, Toby Eidnes, Kim Baughman and Laura Fields-Sommers in a scene from "Play of the Century."

The place to be to view the last century was Hillside Elementary School for "The Play of the Century." The play was performed by the fifth-grade students in Sue Patee's class.

This play was written and directed by Sue Patee and was presented from the point of view of a little bug called Y2K. The music was provided by vocal music teacher Dale Phillips and choreographed by the students and their teacher, Sue Patee.

There was something for everyone in the audience to relate to - from a 90-year-old great-grandmother to school-age siblings. Each decade was well represented with headlines, songs and dance numbers.

Grandparents remembered "rocking around the clock" as parents tried to forget disco. The headlines made you remember where you were when a war ended, when JFK was shot, and the first footsteps were taken on

the moon.

Cast members included Peter Anthony, Kim Baughman, Lana Buttris, Theo Collins, Megan Duran, Nick Eason, Toby Eidnes, Laura Evangelista, Loren Evola, Laura Fields-Sommers, Jessie Gillis, Allan Gjetta, Sarah Koberline, Daniel Kroyer, Noah Lipson, Dunya Najim, Dan Phipps, Megan Rottman, Abdul-Rahman Shukriy, Carly Todd and Jason Vincent.

Parents provided props that made the sets come alive with rotary phones, an authentic 1930s radio, 3-D flapper and record albums. Glasper costumes, the dyed skirts and beads gave an air of authenticity to the dance numbers, which included "You're a Grand Old Flag," the "Charlestown," "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" and "Stayin' Alive."

The finale, "One Moment in Time," was a moving tribute to the effect each one of the children will have on the future.

Hospice offers grief support

Arbor Hospice announces the formation of two grief support groups.

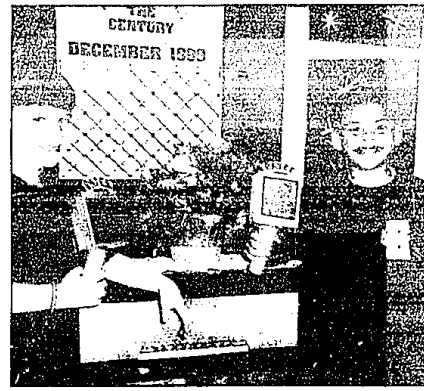
New Pathways is a six to eight week support group for adults who are experiencing grief due to the death of a love one. Group members learn about the grief process while gaining emotional support. The Northville group will meet Tuesdays 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. beginning this week to Feb. 29 at First United Methodist Church, 777 W. Eight Mile.

For adults who are grieving the death of a parent, a support group will meet Tuesdays 7-8:30 p.m. this week through Feb. 29 at the Arbor Hospice residence. The groups are free. Donations are welcome.

Arbor Hospice also offers various age and need specific support groups, including groups which address the special needs of grieving children. To register or for more information, call (248) 348-4980.



Beat generation: Kim Baughman, Lana Butris, Theo Collins, Laura Fields-Sommers and Jason Vincent perform.



Interviewers: Theo Collins and Dan Phipps are newscasters in "The Play of the Century."

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Refreshments Served-Plenty of free parking. Please arrive early, seating may be limited.

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