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# *Neal McKenna*

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## *The Rocky Horror Show* – *In just seven days, I can make you a man!*

BY: Neal McKenna



Dig out your shimmering, basket-hugging, gold lamé speedos and dust off those rippling stick-on abdominals, 'cause it's time for some good, old-fashioned un-wholesome fun! Yes folks, the world's best-loved cult-campy-musical-horror-comedy, "The Rocky Horror Show" is back in town! The sun and light once again comes streaming into your life as the Frankenstein's Place takes up residence at the Victory Theatre in Johannesburg's Houghton Estate.

Hot out of his show, "Mile High with Cathy Specific," Brendan van Rhyn is the bustier-clad Dr. Frank-n-Furter. And the sinisterly-creepy Riff Raff is played by Lyall Ramsden, who wowed Jo'burg

audiences with his performance as Zazu, the hornbill, in "The Lion King." The cast also includes gorgeous Clayton Heroldt as Rocky; and popular singer/performer Tamara Dey, as Magenta. Other well-known cast members include Ryan Flynn, as Brad, Lorri Glajchen as Janet, Dolly Louw as Columbia, Mark Richardson as Dr. Scott and Neville Thomas as the Narrator. Together, they combine their many talents to create the largest-ever cast to perform the show on a South African stage.

"The Rocky Horror Show" is now the longest-ever running British stage musical. Opening in London in June of 1973, it was written by playwright/songwriter, Richard O'Brien and developed in

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collaboration with Australian theatre director, Jim Sharman. Between 1973 and '79, the production moved, with a certain regularity, into larger theatres in better parts of London. Since then, the sun has never really set on Rocky Horror, with more than 20 official productions being staged around the world, along with countless amateur renderings. Now, for the second time, the show is back at the Victory Theatre and its run coincides with the new Australian production.

In many live show venues, fans dress up as the characters and shout “call-backs” at the stage. For instance, whenever the character Brad's name is mentioned by the narrator, the audience shouts “asshole,” and similarly shouts “slut” for Janet. Fans also use props at appropriate moments. – They throw toast when Frank calls for “a toast,” to honour the impending marriage of Brad and Janet. Audience members also use water pistols to create rain and have newspapers to protect their heads during an early scene. At the same time, they brandish lit lighters as the song, “There's a Light,” is sung.

However, many theatres no longer allow this kind of participation, citing reasons of public safety, but this is not the case at The Victory. “When The Rocky Horror Show was last staged here in 1998,” says company manager, Gregory Goss, “it played to packed houses and with audience participation way beyond expectation. Audiences came dressed to kill and be killed. They sang and almost performed along with the cast. Nothing less is expected this time around, in the new and vastly improved theatre.” His message to the audience is: “Give yourselves over to absolute pleasure!”

In 1975, the play migrated to the silver screen as “The Rocky Horror Picture Show,” starring Tim Currie, Susan Sarandon and Barry Bostwick. – And,

here is an interesting tidbit. – Author, Richard O'Brien appeared in the film as none other than Riff Raff. This is in spite of the fact that he had originally envisioned himself as Eddie, the biker.

Over many years of revival, the play has “evolved” and is quite different now, than when first presented in 1973. Scripts used in current stage productions are typically based upon the film adaptation. Certain bits of dialogue have been changed to be more like the film and the sequence of songs has been rearranged to match the order they appear in the film.

But, in the here and now, director, Maralin Vanrenen has introduced exciting concepts to the show. “I don't want to give anything away,” she says in a conspiratorial voice, “but these added bits, although new, actually bring it closer to the true essence of the original production.” So be on the look-out for subtle differences.

“Richard O'Brien has described Rocky Horror as a rock panto and I am inclined to agree,” she says, nodding her affirmation. “Frank-n-Furter is really the dame – a man playing a woman.” She breaks into a knowing smile. “Well, all right, in this case the dame is a transvestite – and a sweet one at that – but it all boils down to the same thing.” She continues. “But, our version certainly has more of a sexual edge. When Rocky Horror was new, it was truly shocking for audiences. It really pushed the limits of the time. But now, the original version is just fun; no shock value at all. We wanted to bring that back. So, we have placed a different spin on it. I think our audiences will be surprised and titillated by our show. Costumes are more revealing and the characters are more overtly sexual. On the other hand, Brad and Janet play it straight – ultra conservative – so when they are turned to the dark side, we really see the transformation.”

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For Vanrenen, there is another close connection with The Rocky Horror Show. In 1975, as a young actress in London, she shared a flat with Frank-n-Furter, himself, Tim Currie. "We shared the flat just after he completed filming the picture," she explains. "He always seemed surprised with the impact the show had. We would talk about it at length and he was always an interesting flatmate. It was a wonderful time in my life."

Vanrenen, trained in Theatre Arts at the University of Cape Town. In her career as an actress, she picked up numerous acting nominations. After a four-year stay in London, she toured Europe with the female rock group, The Sadista Sisters. Following this, she did regional tours of England with a production called "Groucho at Large." Later still, she appeared in the BBC TV series, "Tycoon." In 1980, she returned to South Africa and since then, her career as a director has been prolific.

She has been in such demand, that at one time, she had five different productions running concurrently in various parts of the country. Today, she continues to write for the SABC-TV series, "Muvhango" and also scripted the camp cabaret show, "Mile High with Cathy Specific."

As stated earlier, Gregory Goss is the Rocky Horror Company Manager. Having seen the show in five different countries and spending much time attending musical theatre productions worldwide, he comes to the show as a real Rocky Horror fan. "It is such a pleasure to be working on my favourite show," he enthuses. "We have such a fabulous production team and a top-class cast... And, the

newly renovated Victory Theatre is again one of Johannesburg's best upcoming theatres."

As company manager, it is his job to take care of all the loose ends. "I think of myself as the company's fairy godmother. I'm the problem solver and the appointment maker. I'm also the official shoulder to lean on when something needs to be made better. I suppose I could be likened to a welfare officer. I keep everyone happy and make sure all the bills are paid."

Composer and music producer, Clifford Cooper is the show's Musical Director. Playing the piano since he was nine, he has worked around the globe. Of course, Cooper is no stranger to television audiences having been featured as associate Musical Director for two seasons on SABC-3's, "Popstars." Other projects include being the Musical Direction for the international touring production of "Boogie Nights," the world tour of "Spirit of Broadway" as well as "Fame – The Musical."

"Doing Rocky Horror again is absolutely wonderful." He is enthusiastic. "It's one of my favourite shows. Even though it is such an old score, Rocky Horror really works. That's because the music is sooo good! It's timeless." However, this is not to imply that a good thing can't be updated. "But, I have added some kick to the score," he explains. "Like everything else in this production, the music has more edge. I have added some elements of gospel rock to it, so the music will probably seem a little more funky than what people remember..."

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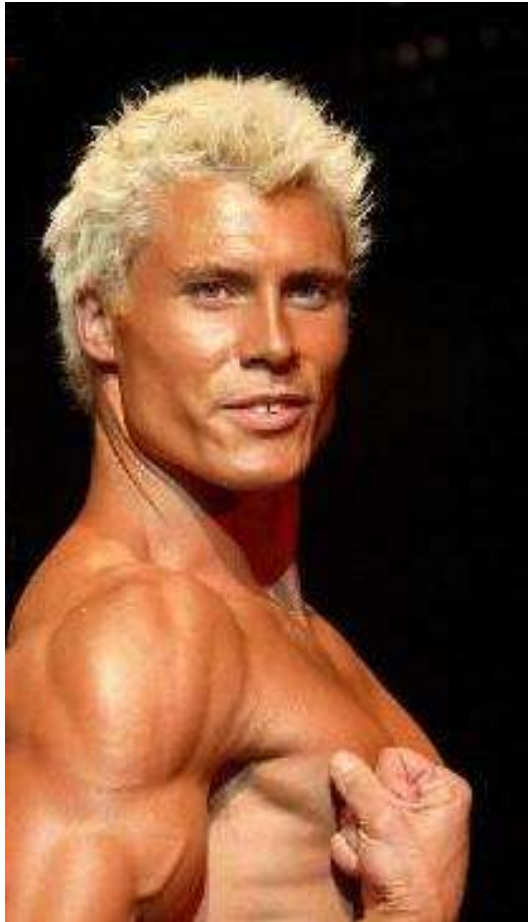
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“I have twenty amazing voices to work with. We also have ten phantoms – four extra voices – so I really have a choir and I've made full use of that. I have added lots of harmonies. It's completely terrific to be part of the largest-ever production of Rocky Horror to be staged in South Africa.” But, being the Musical Director for an over-the-top musical is a lot more than simply touching up the score, voice coaching and waving a baton. “Actually, I'm the only member of the production crew who also performs in the show. When the curtain rises, I'm with the orchestra, playing piano and keyboards. – And that's just great!

Just to be sure you have all the details The Rocky Horror Show is open for a limited season through the month of June, at the Victory Theatre, 105 Louis Botha Avenue, in Houghton Estate. Tickets range from R115 for the cheap chairs, guaranteed to have ladies with big hats in front of you, to plush and spacious stall seats, going at R330 per. As well, there is an excellent restaurant and three bars on site to make it a complete evening out.

And, this reminder goes out to all the sweet transvestites, wild and untamed things, not to mention superheroes out there, every Friday is dress-up night! Tickets are available at the box office by phoning 011-7299603 or Computicket, on 011-340-8000. Take it any way you like, but when



Dr. Frank-n-Furter says: “In just seven days, I can make you a ma-ha-ha-ha-han,” you know it's gonna be fun!

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## Clayton Heroldt is Rocky

Twenty-five-year-old Clayton Heroldt is “Rocky” in the current production of “The Rocky Horror Show.” And, if you take a good look at his photos – and I'm sure you have – you might notice he bears a striking resemblance to another bit of hunky beefcake. I am talking about none other than “the muscles from Brussels,” John-Claude Van Damme. Whaddaya think?

Being a Gay Pages cover boy came to Heroldt as a complete surprise. “I'm not a model,” he confesses. “I'm not used to posing for still photographs and often, I don't feel comfortable having to do that sort of thing. But being on the cover of this magazine was an opportunity I couldn't let pass me by. So, I had to get into the role. Maybe I'm not a model – but I am an actor. So I decided I could be Rocky for the camera. Then, the shoot got easier. The Rocky Horror Show is all about sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, so I just vamped it. I flirted with the camera.”

The photo session was completed in just under 60 minutes in the foyer of the Victory Theatre. And as you can see here, the results were spectacular. Though doing photo stills may be unnerving for him, Heroldt says he doesn't at all mind being semi-naked on stage as long as he “maintains a little

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mystery.” – But, the way I look at it – and I *have* looked at it – a sequined speedo tends more to provide excellent viewing rather than large dollops of the mystery factor. Be that as it may, most of us will concede this state of affairs is perfectly wonderful.

Heroldt says he started being a gym addict at around age sixteen. Clean and jerked, he was into press ups, chin ups and the Snatch, long before he ever had notions of playing the iconic Rocky. However, because of all that, and because he still goes to the gym four times a week, he was a natural to play Frank'n'Furter's boy-toy. “But my audition was challenging beyond my expectations and a little embarrassing.” He laughs. “I was required to sing, dance and read from the script. All that went very well...

“Then, the director says: “All right then, off with your shirt. We want to see some muscles.” That was okay too. Then she said: “Drop the trousers. I wanna see some leg.” That's when I choked because I wasn't wearing any underwear. I think I must have blushed. Maralin just crowed. She said: “Oh, my Gawd! This one isn't wearing any undies!” So I had to proceed with an impromptu strip-show. My embarrassment abruptly disappeared when she said: “The chest is good but the legs need some work.” That's when I found my voice and my courage. I pulled up my jeans with all the dignity I could manage and said: “Well, we have six weeks before the show opens. I can give you

Rocky legs, it that's what you want.” I think this was the turning point. Shortly after that, I was told the part was mine. Maybe not wearing underwear was the lucky charm.”

On the technical side of things, Heroldt has a Bachelor of Arts degree in live performance from The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance (AFDA). There, he majored in acting for stage, screen and musicals. Internationally, he has worked in stage drama, and musicals, film and television, as well as commercials. Ironically, the commercials tend to pay the best. His most recent works include the ArtsCape production of “Dalliances” and the film, “Scorpion King – Rise of the Akkadian.” – Any way you look at him, Clayton Heroldt is one gorgeous hunk o'man and I for one, would love to get my hands on his bu... ba... biceps!



## **Brendan Van Rhyn is Frank-n-Furter**

Brendan Van Rhyn is an imposing and statuesque Frank-n-Furter. In his platform heels and fishnets, he measures in at just under two meters tall! Standing at least a head above everyone else on stage, he is not easy to miss. Add the black merry widow, and centre stage is anywhere he is. “I can't think of a better role for anyone.” Then he winks and breaks into Frank-n-Furter's leering smile. “Well, of course, there's Cathy Specific, but either way, I'm still in lipstick,

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lashes and high-high heels.” Naturally, he is referring to his just completed and highly successful run in “Mile High with Cathy Specific.”

Van Rhyn's take on Frank-n-Furter is also a revitalised one. “I think there is a bit of Frankie in all of us. He is the total manifestation of delicious evil – with a cherry on top. And it is so much fun to play this kind of villain. I think there's also a new energy brought to this role in our production – something not seen before. It's a character that's fabulously sexual and Frank-n-Furter appeals to both men and women. Better yet, it allows me to show a great pair of legs. An outrageous role like this doesn't come around very often – and I'm embracing it with both arms.”

Frank-n-Furter is a man, dressed as a woman and that's how Van Rhyn plays him. “Frankie is overtly butch,” he says. “He may wear slutty lingerie, fishnet stockings and spike-heeled shoes but he is all man. He is hardcore masculine in drag. That means all my movements have to be strong and decisive. That burns up a lot of energy. After two hours of him strutting his stuff, I am exhausted!”

Interestingly enough, in 1998, Van Rhyn auditioned for the Rocky Horror Show when the play was first produced at the Victory Theatre. “I didn't make the cut,” he confesses, “but just look at me now!” Then he laughs. “But now, I am so, so lucky to have this cast and crew to work with. Everyone is top-notch in a top-notch show.”

Brendan Van Rhyn started playing the piano at the age of five and hasn't stopped since. “And, I started wearing heels at six,” he admits. “So, you might say I've been preparing for these kinds of roles all my life.” In 1996, he joined a touring production of The

Beggar's Opera while on an exchange programme in England. There, he also obtained his Grade 8 singing qualification through The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

By then, the performing bug had bitten him severely. He returned to South Africa to complete his musical theatre diploma at the Pretoria Technikon in 2000. A leading role in Pieter Toerien's “The Judas Kiss” marked the beginning of his professional career. Then, out of the blue – or more precisely, into the blue – he decided that “chicken or beef” seemed to be a more glamorous option. For the next five years, he traveled the world as a flight attendant. “It's very much like being on stage,” he explains, “except the passengers don't applaud!” Finally, in 2005, he returned to the stage in “Ladies Night.” Now, from a seven-foot, platinum blonde airhostess to a sweet transvestite, this versatile actor has gone full circle. – This single 30-year old once again finds himself in 6-inch heels. All you other heels out there, take note!

## Lyall Ramsden is Riff Raff

Lyall Ramsden has taken Riff Raff and made the character his own. And though he has seen Richard O'Brien's film depiction of the emaciated handyman many times, he has diligently tried not to be influenced by that performance. “My version of Riff Raff is just as sinister but he is also sexy,” says Ramsden. “He's still a hunchback but he is far less deformed than other Riff Ruffs I've seen. Maralin, our director, wanted him to be more modern, more hip. I had to figure out how to play him that way and still be the Riff Raff everybody would recognise.”

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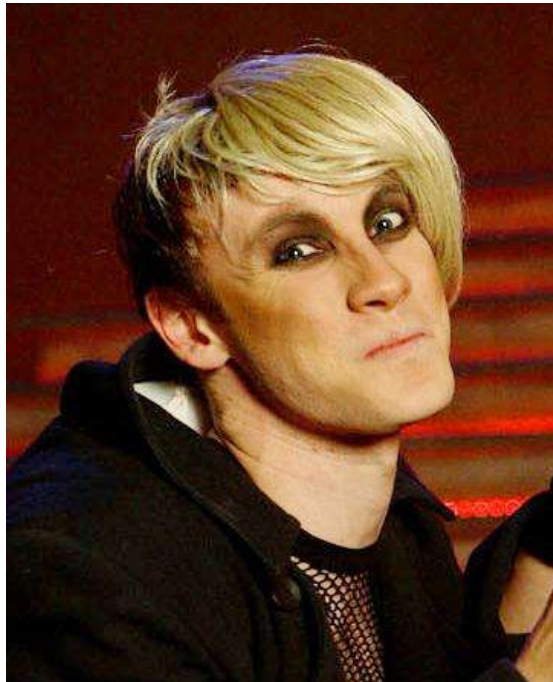
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"I finally learned to play him sexy through more subtle body language, by leading with my shoulder and with my eyes." He demonstrates an entrance, without benefit of hump or costume. His face undergoes a marked transformation. The eyes become hawk-like and menacing. *"The Mawstuh has been expecting you,"* he says, in an oddly familiar drawl. Then, as quickly as he appeared, Riff Raff is gone. Lyall Ramsden is back and he grins. "...Something like that."

It seems becoming an actor has been a life-long goal. "I have wanted to do this since as far back as I can remember – ask my Mom." He laughs. "I really fell in love with acting, especially Musical Theatre, when I performed in the annual Musicals at Northcliff High School that toured to The Natal Playhouse. ...What I love about stage acting is that anything can happen at any moment. That's what so magical – and terrifying – about live theatre."

Born and raised in Johannesburg, Ramsden has just recently performed the role of Zazu in Disney's *The Lion King* of which he was nominated for a Naledi theatre award and will embark on an international tour later this year. He had studied musical theatre for almost a year when offered a part in Janice

Honeyman's pantomime, Cinderella and the role of Friederich in the *Sound of Music*. Other productions include *Oliver*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Coming Out Again*, *My Fair Lady* and his introduction to the movies in *Uncle Max* for BBC film. In the meantime, he will put his 'voel' away for a few months and brings life to Riff Raff, the handyman.



Performing in front of the footlights is truly what he loves best. "I can't get enough of that adrenaline rush you get when you step out onto the stage. It feels a lot like a heavy-duty heart attack but I love it. Some nights are good night, some nights are not so good but the initial rush is always the same. It's the best legal high you can get – and the most fun you can have with your clothes on." Oh yes, he's currently, he's single and "kind of looking," so that's

good news for any of you guys in the market for a sweet, regular guy – with a wild theatrical streak. All in all, he is thrilled to be part of this particular "Rocky" production. It's a show he has dreamt of doing since – forever. He's more than happy doing the time-warp again and again and again...