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SEPTEMBER 23

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# The Phantom Strikes...

charm, great sense of humor and most certainly...very good looking!

BY SUZANNE TAKOWSKY AND MICHAEL NAUGHTON

There isn't much to say about the Phantom of the Opera other than it is likely the most seen play seen on planet earth—and totally fabulous. Few people see it once—because once is never enough. I had tickets for opening night a couple of weeks ago, and it was spectacular. The music is euphoric and thrilling, the cast is grandly entertaining, the costumes are nothing short of brilliant—but certainly all eyes are on the Phantom. It's a typical love story; beautiful woman and troubled man. Only in this case our leading character has more than just emotional issues to deal with—his looks are quite a turn-off. The terrific news is that in real life the Phantom is handsome, funny and our interview was down to earth and anything but dramatic. Tim Martin Gleason has been the Phantom since the end of 2001—for the first seven years with the play he was 'Raoul' but also the Phantom understudy as well. By the time Gleason actually went on stage as the Phantom he had appeared more than 150 times on Broadway as the character and had plenty of practice.

Down time. "After the show I get as much rest as possible and sleep late in the mornings. There is no other way to play that role than with intensity. I just can't do it any other way. Even if I'm not up for a performance or have had a bad day—once I put on my costume and get on that stage I play it with all the intensity I have.



Tim Martin Gleason

It's a like a "first performance" every night. I use my off stage time to relax, watch a little TV and visit with friends. Then, at night I am ready to go."

How it all began. "I started singing when I was 6-years-old in the church choir. I was the youngest of four children—the baby of the family—so I was the big attention getter and I got a lot of it for my voice. I ate it up and that's what got me started. I attended an all boys high school and played sports; I loved sports. All I ever wanted to be was a major league baseball player. It was funny. I would play baseball all day, then take off my cleats and put on my sneakers and go over to the school auditorium and practice for the school play. Back then I was picked on all the time for doing it, but later I realized how cool it was that I could do both. Sports was always my thing. I never thought I was good enough to be a Broadway actor. I just sang because it was fun."

Before Phantom: I had a bunch of crappy jobs I wandered through and was miserable doing. One day I was sitting at my job at Enterprise Rental Cars (I had to be to work at 7AM every morning) and I thought to myself...I'm missing doing theater. I hadn't done it since I graduated from college. I went out and started auditioning and got a part as Tony in Westside Story. I quit Enterprise Rental Cars, found an accounting job and sang at the theater at night. I was tired, but I liked what I was doing. Someone suggested that I go to New York. I did and while singing at a piano bar one night an agent was in the audience and told me to give him a call. That was almost 14 years ago and well here I am." ●