

# Neil Maffin



## Takes (It) Off

by Michael Giltz

Neil Maffin is describing one of the goofier plot twists from his days on the soaps. "I played an undercover FBI agent on 'One Life To Live'. While acting as a mobster, he had to disguise himself as an Amish farmer, complete with a fake beard and hat, and then kidnap two characters and stay in a root cellar for two weeks."

Naturally, the other characters soon realized the mobster/FBI agent really wasn't an Amish farmer, and, in a moment reminiscent of the scene in "Tootsie" where Dustin Hoffman argued with a director about whether a vegetable would sit down,

Maffin stopped the taping. "Why am I still wearing a beard and a hat?" he asked.

The beard and the hat stayed.

These days, instead of arguing about what he should keep on, Maffin is discussing how many pieces of clothing he should take off.

For an actor, this is real progress.

Maffin has been cast in the lead of the Classic Stage Company's revival of Joe Orton's "Entertaining Mr. Sloan," a famously lascivious role and one that helped launch the career of Maxwell Caulfield during the play's last Off-Broadway revival. Sloan is a happily amoral young lad who rents a room, finds himself

sleeping with the landlady (OBIE winner Ellen Parker) and acting as chauffeur for her brother, Ed (the great Brian Murray), who dresses Sloan in leather pants and the occasional shirt, and who clearly wouldn't mind driving for a while himself.

As David Esbjornson, the production's director, notes, there is a certain irony to all the focus on non-costuming, as it were. "Orton is talking about exploitation and morality, and we're sitting there trying to decide whether Neil is going to be wearing pants or not."

Whether Orton would approve of Maffin's casting is another story. At age 36 or so (Maffin declines to discuss his age), Maffin isn't exactly the "young and innocent" type Orton specified. "I think I'm miscast, well not miscast, but interesting casting in terms of temperament, size, age, everything," says Maffin. "Orton would probably look at me and go 'no'. But hopefully, he'd see my performance and go 'yes!'"

Esbjornson is confident he would. "He earned the role the old fashioned way. He auditioned," says Esbjornson, who was unfamiliar with Maffin's previous work. But Esbjornson knew what he was looking for. "What I find with really young actors," he says, "is that they don't have enough life to bring to the stage. It takes a very strong actor to play this role, somebody who has a lot of experience. I don't think you could find any 18- or 20-year-old to pull it off. Besides, when you see Neil on stage, you'll see that he comes across a lot younger." So Maffin is working out constantly and getting used to his character's snakeskin boots and leather pants. ("I love them," he says.)

Although Maffin's first love was singing, he has made his mark in drama: Al Pacino's Broadway production of "Salome," the Off-Broadway hit "The Sum of Us," and an 18-month stint on CBS's "As The World Turns" as rebel poet/songwriter Bo Farrell. Yet, despite his stage and television successes, his neighbors back in his hometown of Shenandoah, Iowa (pop. 5000) still ask Maffin, "How come you don't do movies?"

Well, it's not for lack of trying. Maffin came this close to landing the Craig Sheffer role in "A River Runs Through It" as well as a part in the current film, "Beautiful Girls." But without name recognition, it's a longshot.

"You know there's a list this long of people they're offering [a part] to. I get to audition in case 10 people turn it down, and I blow

them away [in a reading]."

Nonetheless, Maffin is determined to break through to the next level, obstacles and all. Which means a definite strategy. Which is why we go to his agent's office to pick up a stack of scripts, including one for a TV pilot called "Daytona Beach." Which is why he turns down a chance to appear in Shaw's "Arms And The Man" in Texas with his girlfriend of six years. (Maffin was previously married and divorced). Which means that in order for Maffin to take off, he needs to stay put.

"I've been in New York for nine years, and I've spent half that time being out of the city doing regional work, and I've never had to do anything else," he says proudly. "But if I want to make it in New York, I have to stay in the city. If I want to keep auditioning for TV and movies and make something happen, I have to be here." ★

