

# MARINE BOY

» From Ramsay Street to Hollywood Boulevard, the critics are raving about Luigi Lucente. **Matthew Myers** finds out why.

**DNA:** Let's start at the beginning... You've actually played five different characters on *Neighbours*. Was Ramsay Street a good place to cut your teeth?

**Luigi Lucente:** [Laughs] Yes, I mean it's Australia's longest running television serial! It was fun and working on that kind of show teaches you that you just have to jump right

into it. There isn't a lot of time to be too concerned with whether it's right or wrong. Self-consciousness and anxiety have to go out the window because once you're on, you're on. **Have you played a gay role?** Yes, I've done a couple of plays that explores the man-on-man stuff. There was *4 Seconds* and also *The History Boys* where I played Dakin who seduces his teacher. I've also done *The Rocky Horror Show*, which is one of the most sexually confronting shows you can be in. I've danced in high heels and underwear on stage! So it certainly doesn't faze me too much, as long as I can understand the artistry behind it.

**Do you ever get mistaken as gay?** People do make that assumption in the theatre world if they don't know you. But the theatre world is where I met my partner. I have to say it is

certainly a great place to meet women. The odds are very good!

**If you were gay, who would do it for you?** I have a bit of a man crush on James Franco. I think he's awesome. He's so individual and doesn't care what people think. What he did in *Milk* was quite extraordinary and I think that was his strongest work.

**You received fantastic reviews for your cabaret piece *Jim Morrison: Kaleidoscope*.**

**What is it about him that interests you?**

In my teenage years I became a big fan of The Doors and got into their culture. When you listen to Morrison's lyrics, what he was talking about still speaks volumes today. And it's not just the artistic side that interests me, but that he was such an enigma and had all these different personalities. He was a melting pot of different ideas and people. I thought it was interesting to explore all of that in the show. I gave a different treatment and reimagining to his songs and really enjoyed it.

**You have also had roles in *Rocky Horror*,**

***Wicked* and *Jersey Boys*. Is there any**

**particular favourite?** *Jersey Boys* was quite close to my heart. That was a catalogue of music that felt familiar to me, and with the whole Italian-



American story that those guys went through. That was also my longest show, which I did for three years. I think you take different things from each production, but *Jersey Boys* was pretty special.

**What was your experience from working on the US production, *The Pacific*?** I was pretty young and green and went through a few audition rounds to get it, and it was around the same time as the Hollywood writer strikes so it was also kind of up in the air at one stage. For my first day on set in LA, I got off the plane and went straight to Sony Pictures, and Tom Hanks was there to greet me. It really was a baptism by fire.

**Tell us a about your new show, *Dogfight*.** It's a really exciting musical that premiered in 2013 in New York, and also had a London run. I'm playing the lead, Eddie Birdlace, for the Australian production. It's based on the 1991 film with River Phoenix, so I have some iconic shoes to fill. It's a great unconventional love story set on the brink of the Vietnam War where two people connect in an unfortunate tradition where marines find the ugliest girl to take to a party, in order to win the pot. Eddie meets Rose, who is an unconventional wallflower songwriter and they have this one night of discovery. It's quite a beautiful show.

**Who is your diva?** She's a bit more of a local hero. I really like Tina Arena. For me her voice is just sublime and I really warm to it. If I had to pick a female voice to listen to, I'd just choose her. I love her cover of *I Want To Know What Love Is*. And the way she sings *Sorrento Moon*. I've heard whispers that she may be doing *Evita*. That would be amazing!

**What's good about being part of Generation Y?** The accessibility of information is pretty amazing and quite profound. It just makes life so much easier and faster. But to our detriment it does make us rely on technology a lot more, and we are somewhat under-resilient without it.

**What's bad about it?** I think there is a notion that we just come to expect things very fast. There isn't really that ability in us to work hard for longer periods of time. There's a bit of an 'I want it all and I want it now' culture.

**You're in good shape. What do you do to keep fit?** A combination of yoga, running and gym with a personal trainer. I actually see a guy who is also a performer named Josh Piterman and he runs a gym specifically for performers called Pitfit.

**This is our fashion issue. Do you have a favourite look?** At the moment I'm into denim. As you can see, I've got black denim jeans and a blue denim shirt on right now! I tend to go pretty classic and a fashion icon for me is the James Dean or Marlon Brando look with the leather jacket, white T-shirt and aviator sunglasses. That's kind of my aesthetic and what I'm drawn to.

**James Dean appeals to a lot of young actors, and yet he died sixty years ago. Do you think it's because his look is similar to young guys now?** Absolutely. He's still so current and his look and performance was so universal. He's still such a cultural icon, much like Jim Morrison who was only around for five minutes, but still he's bred into our culture.

**Have you ever had a wardrobe malfunction on stage or set?** I was dancing in *Guys And Dolls* and I had to lean over and do a big kick cartwheel, and my pants just split down the middle!



Luigi as a marine in *Dogfight* (top) and his inspirations, James Dean and Jim Morrison.

**"I've done a couple of plays that explore the man-on-man stuff... I've danced in high heels and underwear on stage!"**

So here I was in this grey three-piece suit and unfortunately I was wearing purple underwear that night. I just had to get through the rest of the number and then run off stage where they put a couple of darts into my pants!

**What's a 'pinch yourself' moment you have experienced so far in your career?** It was amazing to work with Richard O'Brien when I did *The Rocky Horror Show*. He wrote the

show and played the narrator for the Adelaide season. To share the stage every night with him and hear his words coming out of his own mouth, that was just incredible. I mean it was his brainchild and he was Riff Raff in the film!

**Who do you look up to in the industry?** Simon Gleeson. I think he's a fantastic ambassador as a great leading man in theatre and also as a person. He's just a constant role model in life and career. He's someone that you've interviewed, so you'd know what I mean.

**I do indeed, and he's a mad Essendon supporter. What team do you follow?** Carlton. **You might have to change that!** [Laughs] Yes, maybe I will have to!

**Are you a boxers, jocks or freeballing man?** I'm jocks during the day, but boxers at night. I like a bit of air at night!

**MORE:** *Dogfight* opens May 1 at the Hayes Theatre in Sydney. Follow Matthew Myers on Twitter @MattMyers1964.