

BAD BOY!

From *Jersey Boys* to *Grease*, Stephen Mahy makes musical theatre magic. He tells Matt Myers about dressing in drag, his *Fifty Shades* parody and how Jennifer Hudson overcooked his veggies...

DNA: You play Kenickie in the current revival of *Grease*. That's a bad boy role.

Stephen Mahy: It is! It's my first taste of playing a bad boy and the first time I don't have to be clean-shaven for a show! Kenickie



is a bad boy but he also has an undercurrent of love – it just comes out in anger and frustration. I think the relationship between Kenickie and Rizzo is better than Sandy and Danny's, but I'm biased.

No doubt you've seen the movie? I won't tell you how many times! Before I did *Jersey Boys*, I didn't realise that *Grease* is sung by Frankie Valli. I had never put two and two together. All those songs from the movie are so iconic and infectious. I don't think it matters how old you are, we've all heard the *Grease* megamix a hundred times on the dance floor.

How was playing Bob Gaudio in *Jersey Boys*? It was incredible. I got to meet Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio and I travelled Australia and went to America. It was my biggest role to date and changed my life. *Jersey Boys* is still running in the US and London, and the movie is also coming out. Just to know I was the original Australian Bob Gaudio makes me very proud.

You were also paid a visit by Tom Cruise. Tom came after opening night in Melbourne, and all I could think of was Maverick from *Top Gun*! [Laughing] I'm 6'3" (190cm) and he's not, at all! Katie Holmes was there too, with little Suri, and we all had a publicity photo together.

You are classed as a tenor. How do you define that? It's the range you have and what notes you can really sing. The sound of a tenor

has a higher timbre to it, compared to a bass that's very low. A baritone can hit low notes to a mid-range and I can go from low notes to a high range. **Have you heard the terms baritone and hunkentenor?** No, I haven't!

There is even a calendar online with hunkentenos like you. I'm flattered. I'd love to see the calendar. It would be interesting to see if I made 2014!

Who is your diva? At the moment, Jennifer Hudson. I was recently cooking and I put on some Jennifer Hudson and ended up letting the water boil out on the vegetables!

You became a household name competing in the reality TV show *I Will Survive*. How did you like dressing in drag? I was scared because I thought

I wouldn't make a pretty woman. Our first make-up call was early in the morning and the transformation was incredible. To see how your face changes with all the base make-up and shading, lips and all of a sudden fake eyelashes come on and I remember saying *there she is!*

Have you done drag since? No, I haven't. I don't think I'm going to make a career out of drag. I'll leave it to the fantastic drag queens out there at the moment!

How does it feel being a straight man in the world of musical theatre? It's great. Having me in high heels is no different to a gay man playing the straightest army soldier in *Miss Saigon*. I love that all sexualities are a part of our industry.

Has anyone ever come out to you? Yeah, growing up I had a couple of friends who said to me they didn't know what to do. I told them to follow their heart and instincts and to remember that the people who do love them will be there. And of course that was exactly what happened when they did come out.

If you were gay, who would you go for?

There is that scene in *Fight Club* where Brad Pitt comes out looking pretty masculine and his body looks incredible. So it would have to be Brad, considering he looked so ripped.

Last year you played Hugh Hansen in *Spank! The Fifty Shades Parody*. Please explain!

There's not much to explain if you've read the books [laughing]. Hugh Hansen is a parody of Christian Grey who, if you look at it, is a lot like Batman. He's a millionaire who has all these fancy toys and his sexual experiences are a little different. There was a great scene with Caitlin Berry where I had a whip and spanked her, then I did a burlesque striptease down to my Batman undies, mask and cape, which certainly got the audience going. To do that was pretty daunting, but once you get an audience reaction it does wonders for your ego!

Have you ever been spanked? I've never been spanked, but studying the book for the role I thought my sexuality must be really boring. It was certainly a big eye-opener for me.

You studied at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. What advice would you give to someone wanting a career in the theatre? Go for it. If that's what you want to do, then work hard, listen and never stop learning. I was 21 when I went to WAAPA, so I was a few years out of high school. My thing is, if you're unhappy with what you're doing then stop and change your life. You have to take a chance or your life will never change.

Do you wear jocks, fitted boxers or freeball? I'm half G-Star and half Abercrombie And Fitch. It's very specific and I don't like changing my underwear brands, so I have seven pairs of each!

more: Grease opens at Her Majesty's Theatre Melbourne from January 2. greaseistheword.com.au