

Stephen Black: young Canadian actor

Story by Gilbert Bouchard

Round One: Some Background Information

Free trade, the Canadian movie industry's future, and sexual politics are not the typical subject matters discussed when you interview an actor. But Stephen Black is hardly your typical actor.

Black, currently alternating in the lead role of Dean Rebel the chauvenistic professional wrestler in the Citadel theatre's production of *Trafford Tanzi*, graduated from York University with an honors economics degree: a degree that he earned in only three years. Certainly not the educational background you'd expect.

"I've always wanted to be an actor," says Black. "I wanted to go down to New York right after grade 12, but got a scholarship. So I decided to go to university. I'm glad I got the degree. So many actors are limited. The more you know about life, the more it helps your acting."

"Most people think actors are dull and dumb, but it's amazing that on the whole actors are well read and intelligent. A lot of people, because actors are treated like cattle start thinking of them this way."

Black speaks disparagingly about the mental blinkers most people wear, and adds that the first time he visited New York he visited Broadway the first day and Wall Street the next. Black is one actor who wants to keep his options open.

Round Two: Black on Family

"My parents breed thoroughbred horses outside of Toronto. I was raised around race-tracks and horses."

"My father would rather I had become a lawyer, but once they accepted the fact that I wanted to become an actor they were very supportive. My mother saw *Trafford Tanzi* 15 times over the summer in Toronto. (Black played the role of Dean Rebel for five and a half months in Toronto.)"

"So many people of our generation (Black is 27 years old) don't even know their parents, I guess I'm lucky to be close to mine. It's so important to have parental support in this business."

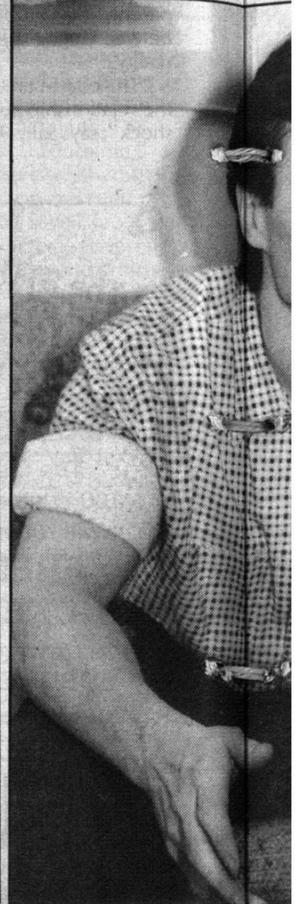
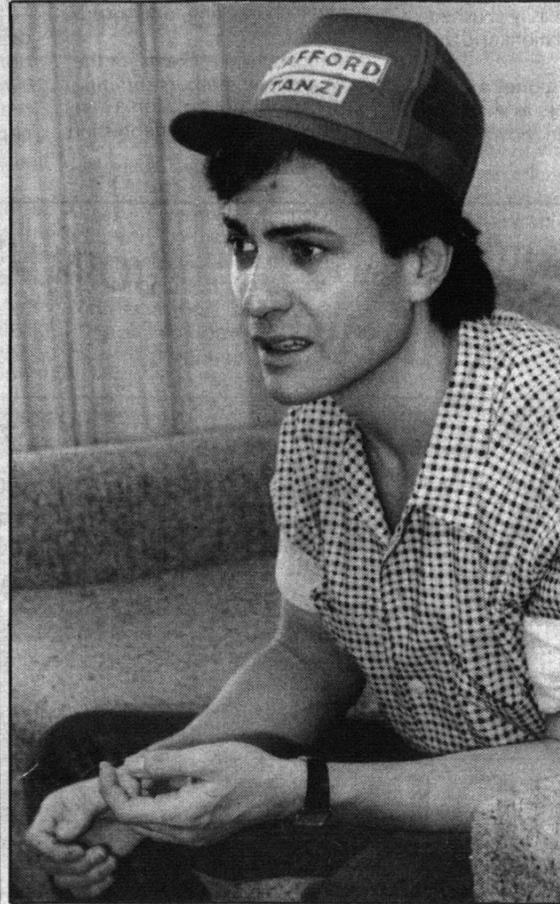
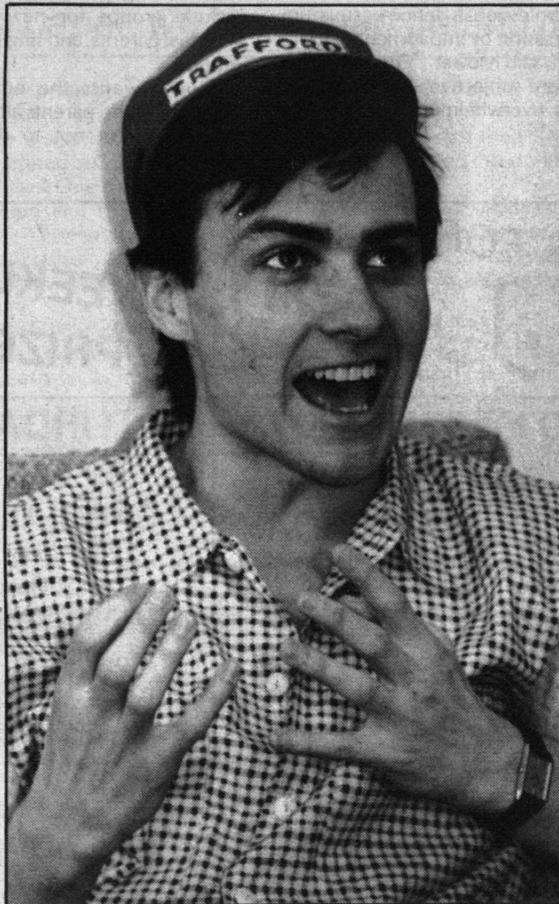
Round Three: Black on Stereotyping

"Film and television are so visual. Commercials are all look. 99 per cent of the time if you don't get the role it's because they don't like your looks. It's not so bad on the stage."

Black's problems with stereotyping so far have had to do with his clean cut "boy next door" appearance. "I get that line so often," he says.

Not that Black has let stereotyping hinder his career. Black has been employed steadily on the stage for the past several years, and those same good looks that he decries get him lucrative work in commercials. You've seen Black on the boob tube hawking Labbat's Blue, and Air Canada.

While Black loves the theatre and is probably one of Canada's finer young stage



actors, he leans towards television and film work. Money, while not his primary reason is certainly a factor. For example, one day's work on a television commercial equals the pay for two months of work on the stage.

As for Black's stage work, he wants to do more "crude, rough characters", he's confident that as he grows older and is "developing more edges" he'll be able to shake his boy next door stereotype.

Black has put a lot of thought into the development of his career. He is methodical in the choice of not only the productions but also the genres he chooses to act in.

For example, he balances out the kind of work he does: some classical, some musical work, some new Canadiana. "I'm doing different kind of plays which is the most important thing for an actor in my stage of development to do. I've studied dance and voice, but if you do musical comedy and musical roles you get slotted immediately. I had to decide between musical and drama -- people can do both -- but you do get slotted by people. I chose drama."

Round Four: Black on Stage Acting

"The film camera can read your mind. Film

"Sandy Wilson (*My American Cousin*) stuck to her guns and cast people who she felt were right for the part - not names."

"Because of the value of the Canadian dollar we will see the busiest summer ever for Canadian film."

"It's not that we're not doing film work here, but it's that they are cast in New York."

is internal acting, but on the stage you have to be a lot larger, a lot more full. Acting overall is more internal, it has to start from within yourself," says Black.

"It's amazing what a film camera can see in someone's eyes. It's a lot easier to fool an audience on the stage, but you always have to be full and complete. You can't do a retake on stage."

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