

Hitting the heights

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Tuscarora native gets big break off-Broadway

By DONALD R. SERFASS dserfass@tnonline.com

A man with local roots will get a big break in the Big Apple now that the renowned People's Improv Theatre has announced their plans to produce a show written and performed by a Tuscarora native.

Greg Portz, son of Greg J. and Deborah Portz, has learned that his work, "In Polynesian Mood," has been selected for production by the famous off-Broadway comedy venue. Portz teamed with Ashley Rebecca King to create the show, which is part concert, part monologue, and follows the pursuits of two cover band artists trying to make their way to a South Pacific resort without much success.

Greg Portz is a writer, lyricist, composer and performer whose work has been described by the Village Voice as "catchy." His most recent work was composing music for the play "She of the Voice," an adaptation of a short story by award-winning author Hari Kunzru.

Portz holds a degree in theater and management from Marymount Manhattan College and is a 2001 graduate of MMI Preparatory School.

Portz has fond thoughts and memories of life in the village of Tuscarora with his parents and brother Alec. He drew on those thoughts for inspiration.

"The whole opening part of the show is a monologue about my childhood in Tuscarora, and about driving down Route 209 in rainstorms, listening to the radio. A lot of people were interested in that section so I found myself talking a lot about my hometown, which is fun because it comes so easily to me," he explains.

Co-creator King says the theme speaks to some basic yearnings.

"It's a show about hopes and wishes. It is also about believing in yourself and setting goals, so it's wonderful to see you can really reach goals like we did with this show."

Portz moved to New York City to pursue a career in performance. The announcement by the People's Improv Theatre represents a major door opening for the creativity demonstrated by Portz and King.

The People's Improv Theater is a highly selective venue, and is at the epicenter of the New York comedy scene. Its stage is routinely graced by comedy elite. Everyone from comedy newcomers like Ellie Kemper (Erin on NBC's *The Office*) and Kristen Schaal (Mel on HBO's *Flight of the Conchords*) to legends such as Terry Jones of *Monty Python* have performed there.

Portz can now add his name to that list with his heart-stopping, toe-tapping production. In the wake of a successful trial run of "In a Polynesian Mood" in early November, including standing room only seating and the first standing ovation in the theater's history, the People's Improv Theater Artistic Director Jeff Lepine offered the duo a theatrical run beginning in February 2010.

Portz and King hope to bring their show on tour to the area sometime in late 2010 or early 2011. An opening night gala for "In a Polynesian Mood" is planned for Thursday February 11, 2010, at 8 p.m. at the People's Improv Theater, 154 W. 29th Street, NYC. More information is available at <http://www.thepit-nyc.com> or email: polynesianmood@gmail.com.



KEITH HUANG/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES NEWS Writer, lyricist, composer and performer Greg Portz, a Tuscarora native, will launch a theatrical run off-Broadway starting in February.