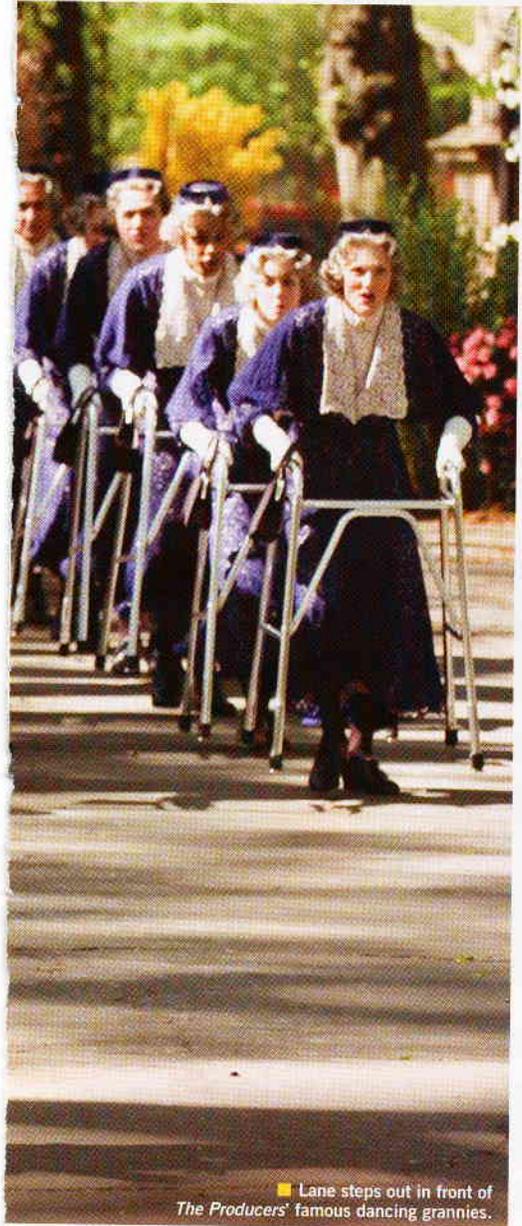




# His favorite year

An exhausting, exciting year for Nathan Lane involves Sondheim, London's West End, injuries, Terrence McNally, Broadway's sold-out *Odd Couple*, and a little movie called *The Producers*  
By Michael Giltz

**L**ike Superman, actor Nathan Lane has been coming to the rescue throughout 2005. First he rewrote the book on Stephen Sondheim's long-neglected musical *The Frogs*. Then he dashed off to London's West End at a moment's notice to open *The Producers*—to massive acclaim, of course. A bum knee led to a bad back and a brief respite back in the United States. Then he filmed the movie version of *The Producers* and tried to rest again. But a longtime friend, playwright Terrence McNally, needed a last-minute lead actor for his new play, and Lane responded heroically. Again. That led right into a revival of *The Odd Couple* on Broadway



■ Lane steps out in front of *The Producers*' famous dancing grannies.

that's the biggest hit since...*The Producers* When you're hot, you're hot.

Obviously it's been a very good year. And exhausting. The Terrence McNally play, filming *The Producers*, and now *The Odd Couple*. Every year has its ups and downs. Does 2005 seem like a particularly good year for you?

I don't know. I just keep going. I don't turn around and look at it and say [*in a slightly plummy tone*], "Well, this was a good year." It has certainly been busy. I finished [my revival of the Sondheim musical] *The Frogs*, and I got this phone call from [director Susan] Stroman to go to London because things weren't going ►

■ Lane's famous chemistry with costar Broderick helped turn *The Producers* into a Broadway juggernaut.



well to open [*The Producers*] there. And I had a torn meniscus in the left knee, which required surgery, but they said I could get through on just physical therapy while I was doing the show. Then my back went out because I was compensating for the knee. And I was in enormous pain. So I left a couple of weeks early, and I came back and had the surgery. Six weeks later I was filming “Der Guten Tag Hop-Clop.” So it was a whirlwind. That was three months or four months or whatever it was. I went out to Long Island to finally lie down. And then Terrence lost the actor who was going to play the lead in *Dedication*. He was so depressed—and again it was moments before they were about to open. And I said [*laughing*], “Well...I’ll do it.” And then I said, “Who said that?” Anyway, it turned out to be a really good thing for the both of us, and it was great to work together again. And it certainly helped him out. It was a really great experience that I was back in a rehearsal room with him again.

From the outside, the impression was that you and Terrence had had a falling-out and had been estranged for years. Obviously, his work is always good, so it wasn’t the work that brought you two back together. What was it?

That was long past. We certainly had been friends. It wasn’t like we weren’t friends, and then we did this, and now we were. We were having dinner together when this all came up. The other stuff has been overblown. That was a long time ago. When I said, “I’ll do

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**—Nathan Lane**

it,” it meant a great deal to him. Yes, I think it did heal something... [*laughs*] that I thought was healed.

But it’s even more healed.

It’s even more healed. It did do something. It meant a great deal to him, so I’m doubly glad I did it.

I’ve no doubt you and Matthew Broderick are delighted by the attention and the sales, but I get the impression from the outside that it’s got to be exhausting. People are expecting sliced bread. You two have done two shows together, and I think it was *The New York Times* that

referred to your legendary rapport. I thought surely you should have to do at least 10 shows together before you can be burdened with having a legendary rapport.

Exactly. What can you do? You don't have any control over expectations. We were as shocked as anyone—the fact that it sold out before we went into rehearsals was rather extraordinary and unprecedented. It's exciting, but you get a little nauseous thinking about how there will be a lot of expectations.

Next year you'll do *The Gin Game* together.

[Laughs] Oh, Jesus. No, I think we'll take a vacation for a while.

In the mainstream media profiles there were a few that made you seem very...solitary, melancholy, sad on the outside because you cry on the inside. Oh, that's all a lot of horseshit.

I wondered if you recognized that or thought, *Who are they talking about?*

That's what they decided. I had no vote. Look, a lot of that stems from this article in *The New York Times Magazine* that Alex Witchel did. I've known her for years, and I like Alex, and she's a good writer, and it's a well-written article. The one thing we'd joke about is that I'd say, "Whatever you do, don't turn this into the sad-clown article." But you have to live with that. People take their cues from that. Many articles have decided she must have gotten it right. It gets to be a little much. I'm not saying I'm not a complicated person. But I'm not clinically depressed.

*Time* magazine had an article on *The Odd Couple*, and one passage was so awkwardly worded that they made it sound like you were currently dating Victor Garber.

Oh, I know. And Victor's one of my best friends. Hilarious. That whole piece—again, you're sometimes a victim of these things. There's a guy [the reporter] who showed up in our dressing room—my dressing room—and Matthew and I are sitting there, and talk about clinically depressed, he came in and sat down like this was the last place he wanted to be. He said, "You know, I'm the book guy. I don't usually do entertainment." I said, "Oh, OK." He said, "The last piece I did was Joan Didion." I said, "Well, we're a little funnier than Joan Didion." So he said, "So tell me something: What is this 'previews' thing?"

[Laughs] No, no, no.

I'm not lying. I'm not making this up. "What is this 'previews' thing?" I said, "Well, before we open, we're getting warmed up." And then he said, "I guess this Joe Mantello, he's done a lot. I should have heard of him, huh?" I said, "Where have you been?" So anyhow, in the middle of this conversation—because we're doing *The Odd Couple*, and it's about divorce—he said, "Well, to tell you the truth, it's a little sad because I just got divorced." And I thought, *She made the right decision*. And then the article comes out. There's been this whole thing, "*Time* magazine wants to write an article on you!" I spent an hour with this gentleman, and the article he writes—he decided that yes, again, emotionally I was Zelda Fitzgerald. And he referred to Matthew and me as B-list performers who'd had no success before *The Producers*. And you think, *Well, why did they want us to star in it?* [Laughs] Anyway, you have to live with it until it winds up in some dentist's office.

And during the run you'll turn 50.

Oh, yes, that's right.

Does that matter to you? Is it exciting?

Sure. Now there's a time to look back and say, Well? It's been pretty good. I'm planning a big party. I've rented the Rainbow Room. It'll be a nice celebration, I think.

You came all the way out officially in *The Advocate*, which we certainly appreciated. I wondered if I could compare it to getting married for people who've been living together. They're already basically married, but then they say the words, and it means something. How have things been since that final step? Initially, it didn't have a huge impact—

Everyone in your life knew.

It didn't feel like I'd been hiding anything. Once you say, "I don't want to talk about my private life," that means you're gay. Yes, sometimes it has an impact that I don't feel. Maybe some young person looking at someone successful—if it helps someone, you'd like to think you did. But honestly, it didn't change anything for me other than that it was in a magazine and it was official. And then you have to live with "openly gay actor Nathan Lane."

It's better than "the private Nathan Lane." Or "the sad clown." ■

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