

THE NEW KIDS



JULIA KATHOS

Lance Bass spikes up 'Hairspray'

The former 'N Sync-er is ready for his Broadway debut **BY MICHAEL GILTZ**

Lance Bass has performed at massive stadiums around the world as a member of the massive pop group 'N Sync. So getting up in front of 1,400 people for his role in "Hairspray" should be a breeze, right?

"I'd much rather play to 50,000 people than 1,000!" says Bass, who plays Cory Collins, perky and popular dance-show host in 1962 Baltimore, starting Tuesday. "In a theater, you can see everyone!"

"It is like doing a live TV show," adds the 28-year-old Mississippi native who shot to fame as one of the members of the massively successful group, who, at their peak, rivaled Backstreet Boys for squealing fans and launched the careers of Justin Timberlake, Joey Fatone and the rest.

"Everything has to be perfectly in-sync," Bass says, smiling at the pun. "I hate to use that phrase. But [on stage] you don't

want to miss your cue."

Even though Bass made headlines by coming out last year, among the 'N Sync guys, it's Fatone who's the real musical-theater buff. He even beat Bass to Broadway by appearing in "Rent" and "Little Shop of Horrors."

Like other out pop stars, Bass says the fears that fans — especially young female fans — would grow disenchanted with him was wildly off-base.

"When I came out, my female fan base

exploded," says Bass. He'll be testing that again next year by developing a reality show for the gay cable channel Logo (and, he notes, hopefully MTV; both networks are owned by Viacom).

Bass says he fell in love with performing as a kid, when he appeared in his church choir, in Attache (the "show choir" that was a huge part of his adolescence) and high school productions of "West Side Story" and "Bye Bye Birdie" before dropping out his sophomore year to join 'N Sync.

In small-town Clinton, Miss., "you either played football or you performed in Attache," says Bass, who notes that one strength of the show choir was that kids needed to act like adults and train with utter professionalism.

"That's where I learned the discipline I needed to do 'Hairspray,'" says Bass, whose autobiography, "Out of Sync," will be published this October. He explains that the group had constant rehearsals, a band, their own stage crew and a repertoire that ranged from Broadway classics to Van Halen; they gave two annual recitals and competed nationally.

It underscored a passion for the stage that began even earlier for him.

"The first time I was ever on stage, it was in the third grade," says Bass, friendly and confident despite being dubbed "The Shy One" during 'N Sync's heyday.

"I played Smokey the Bear. I remember being so happy that I'd memorized all my lines; I knew the entire script, and I was so proud. And I had a bear costume. I was so cute!" he insists drolly. "And, I wore it for Halloween, too." ♦

The new
Cory Collins
knows about
wild fans.

IN TOWN

Chills, they're multiplyin'!

'Grease' is back, now with reality TV stars and favorite songs

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

The latest revival of "Grease" has a secret weapon — and it isn't the stunt casting of the leads, Max Crumm (as Danny) and Laura Osnes (as Sandy), via the recent NBC reality show "Grease: You're the One That I Want."

For the first time ever on Broadway, "Grease" will include four now-iconic songs from the smash 1978 movie that weren't in either the original production during the 1970s or the successful revival that ran in the early '90s. Director and choreographer Kathleen Marshall (a Tony winner, most recently for her revival of "The Pajama Game") says that's actually one of the reasons she signed on to this show.

"Now Sandy says, 'Tell me about it, stud,' and Danny finally gets to sing: 'I got chills, they're multiplyin'," says Marshall about the climax of the show with "You're the One That I Want."

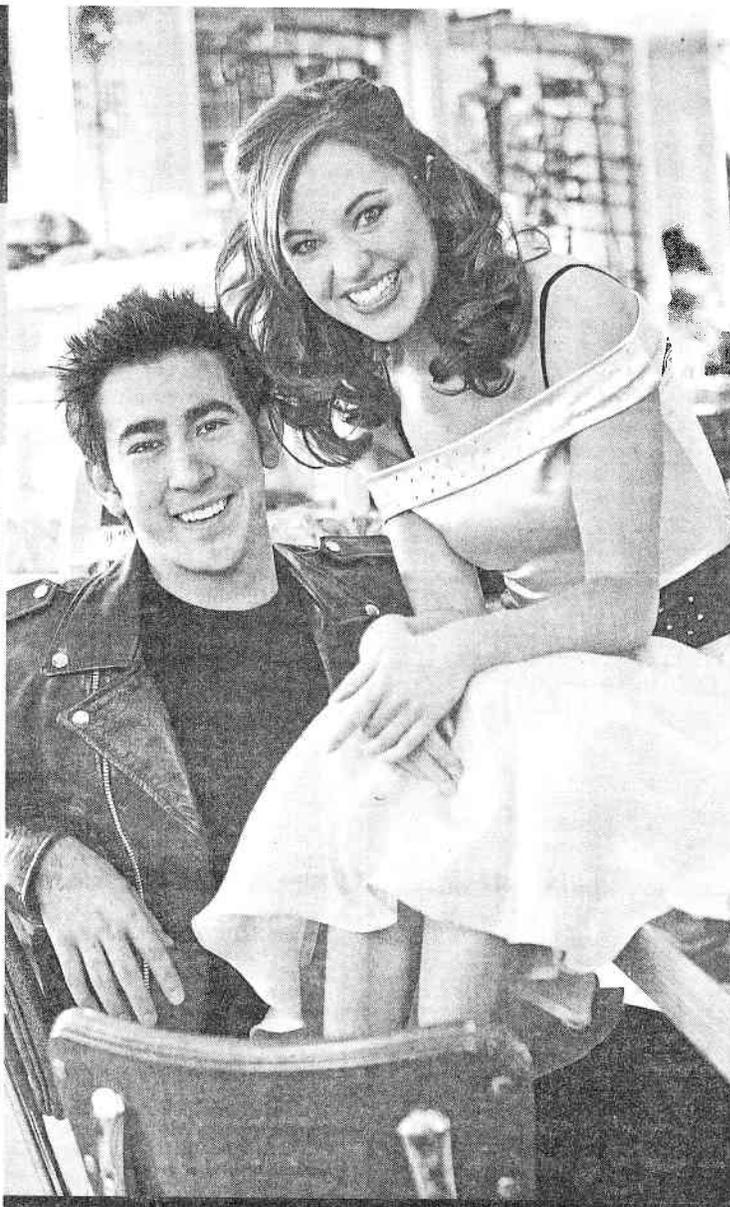
That No. 1 smash hit from summer '78 appears along with "Sandy," "Hopelessly Devoted to You" and the new opener, "Grease Is the Word." (Ironically, "Grease" spillover is everywhere: Frankie Valli, who sang the title song, has a Tony-winning life story on view in the current smash "Jersey Boys," and Olivia Newton-John's musical followup to "Grease," "Xanadu," is also packing them in, with tongue firmly nestled in cheek.)

It has been almost a decade since the last revival of "Grease" closed on Broadway but Marshall pooh-poohs the idea that this revival is too soon.

"I look at the audience and you see a lot of families and a lot of kids who weren't born when the last revival came out," she says. "It would be like a dance company not doing 'The Nutcracker.'"

She says opening the same weekend as "High School Musical 2" airs on the Disney Channel — that's the sequel to the massively popular TV movie — feels right, too.

"When they were filming 'High School Musical,' I heard that they were calling it



Max Crumm and Laura Osnes add fire to "Grease," with added tunes from the '78 film.

SCOTT GRIES

Amazingly, no B'way Danny Zuko has ever sung 'Sandy.'

"Grease 3," says Marshall (there was, of course, the ill-fated 1982 sequel "Grease 2"). "It's another high-school romance with people from different groups, the jocks and the brains."

As for the reality show that played on TV this winter and gave the show its leads, "Grease: You're the One That I Want" only reached about 7 million viewers a week. But most episodes scored higher than the Tony Awards in the ratings. Still, it was a risk of tainting the actors as not pros. In the U.K., they pulled the same tactic and the revival that recently opened in the West

End got withering reviews.

"Some people will come in with a preconceived notion about the show and a preconceived notion of how our leads were cast," says Marshall, who has also done acclaimed work on "Wonderful Town," "Follies" and "Kiss Me Kate." "And if they decide to be negative, they can be."

But all those eager new kids performing all the songs people associate with the movie and show are her biggest plus.

"We've got 14 people making their Broadway debut," says Marshall. "We've got a really fresh, young exciting cast. They've got a spirit and energy you kind of can't fake. You can't fake freshness." ♦