

Michael Wright will soon be 'The Happiest Fag in the World'

● **Jenny Brown**

a Vancouver personality on the 'up and coming list'.



The pavements of Hollywood North are being pounded by many a struggling, aspiring actor. They continually face the endless routine of casting calls, cattle calls, call-backs and quite often, no calls at all. But if you asked any one of them if they would give up this madness for a 9-5 job with a stable income, chances are they'd snort at you in disgust and shudder at the thought of such horror.

Ontario native Michael Wright may be one of these hopefuls, but not for long – he's going to be a star!

This articulate, effervescent, openly gay performer has chosen an industry that, in his words, is very accepting. He is a 'triple threat', an actor/singer/dancer and judging from his passionate and determined nature, he is a personality that belongs on the 'up and coming list'.

Michael's most recent success came when he received an award of Most Outstanding Performance for his role as Judah in Jeff Hyslop's Joseph and his Amazing Technicolored Dream coat.

This was Michael's first step out onto the boards after what he calls a 10 year 'cocoon'. He almost didn't make it. After the first of a gruelling 3 day audition process, he came home discouraged after witnessing the immense talent he was up against. But with encouragement from his sister, he returned the next day and was picked from 800 people to be the second lead. This was no small feat for a performer with no dance or vocal training. So what's kept all this talent hidden from the world for 10 years?

Six of those were spent employed as a social worker, a job that appealed to his need to help others. He worked closely with the founder of the Youth Action Coalition in opening and running Covenant House, the storefront service for Vancouver's downtown eastside youths. But in the end he realized, "You can't go through life just taking care of other people's issues. You have to nurture yourself".

He looks back now and realises that the signs that he should be a performer were always there but he always pushed them aside. For example, he would start singing whilst at work and people would constantly comment on how great a voice he had. He sheepishly admits to being a little naïve in his dreams. He was waiting for stardom to come to him, always thinking "Why haven't I been discovered yet?"

Michael recalls his very first performance at the age of 5. He was to sing Silent Night, accompanied on the piano by his music teacher. He recalls standing there and becoming so mesmerized by being the focus of 200 people's attention that he missed his cue. He remembers it being a terrifying experience, but at the same time, "a delicious scare. I was a precocious and extroverted child and I wanted to challenge this fear".

He took a one year performance training intensive in grade eight, and began auditioning for the Sarnia Little Theatre. He won the title role in 'The Grinch who Stole Christmas' and then in Grade 11 was cast as 'Beast' in Beauty and the Beast.

Michael began his first year at the University of Western Ontario with the intention of becoming an advertising executive, after being inspired by his high school marketing teacher. But he soon realised that the scenarios, numbers and accounting were not for him. He employs that same imagination now in his roles, but "It's not all so serious".

Like many other actors, Michael supports himself by bartending (he is the star at 'Likerish' nightly). He says that bartending and acting go hand in hand, because it draws on the same talent of mixing with people and having charisma. "There aren't any boring or ugly people in the serving industry and much like acting, its all about confidence".

Through the experience of working on Joseph, he has found confidence in himself. "I learned to push myself and ended up realising I'm capable of doing much more than I imagined". He describes the artist as being a conduit, and believes that the spiritual and performance aspect of life are closely linked. "Auditions are no longer as nerve wracking because I believe it doesn't have to be personal. To a large extent it's a numbers game, and eventually someone, somewhere is going to love you. It's about hard work and persistence."

He doesn't feel limited by being a gay actor. "I won't be considered for certain roles for film and TV, but I think passion and belief in your talent contributes largely to success".

Michael is getting ready for rehearsals of David Blue's **"The Happiest Fag in the World"** which will run November 24, 25 and 26 at the Waterfront Theatre. This workshop piece addresses the issue of gay marriage with a cast of characters that includes a guardian angel, a fag hag and a smarmy ex-boyfriend called Carlos. Blue's intention is to use the proceeds of this show to finance a full two week run that will coincide with the opening of Gay Pride 2003.

So what are Michael's aspirations? "Every performer wants to be a star, but I just want to make my mark. I want to record an album, I want power, and I want to drive my own projects." He is in the process of writing a stand-up comedy show that pokes fun at his life experiences and his Jamaican mother's eccentricities. It is entitled "I Shouldn't Have Worn That Skirt".

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