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SPOTLIGHT TheatreSquared Broadway actor uses home-grown skills

By [Cyd King](#)

Sunday, November 15, 2009

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LITTLE ROCK — Rob Sutton lists clogging in the “special skills” section of his resume.

It’s a talent the Broadway actor stepped into while growing up in Mountain View, home of the culturally rich Ozark Folk Center.

Sutton, whose more notable credits include Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway and *Mamma Mia!* in Las Vegas, can still throw down with the hoedown, as he did to the roots music of fiddles and banjos back home.

“I’ve been in New York long enough now that sometimes I know the people who I’m auditioning for, and some just have me pull it out because they need a laugh for the day,” Sutton says of his clogging abilities.

While he values his heritage, he says he’ll stick to mostly Broadway numbers when he performs at a fundraiser for TheatreSquared in Fayetteville on Friday. Some 180 people will congregate within the intimate confines of Teatro Scarpino for the 2009 Gala for Education - a wine reception, dinner by Brick House Kitchen and 45-minute cabaret-style performance by Sutton.

A product of Mountain View High School, Sutton came to the University of Arkansas with medical school in mind. He started singing in Schola Cantorum under conductor Jack Groh, then changed career paths after stumbling into a musical theater class his sophomore year.

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"I realized quickly that musical theater and acting classes were a lot more fun than dissecting a cat at 7 a.m.," Sutton, 38, says with a laugh. He credits much of his talent to his voice teacher, the UA's Janice Yoes.

He earned a degree in vocal performance in 1994, added a master's degree in acting from the University of Arizona then headed to New York in 1996.

A highlight was playing understudy to The Beast and Gaston in the Broadway version of the Disney movie. Working as an understudy "keeps you on your toes," he says. They seldom rehearse, and when they do, it's only with other understudies and with no orchestra or costumes.

"You're working in a vacuum, so it's up to you to make sure that you stay on top of things and that you're home alone in your apartment just in case the phone call happens," Sutton says. "There were many, many times when the phone would ring at 7 p.m. with an 8 o'clock show and I would have to run over there and get ready not having done the role in six months."

He was The Beast for three consecutive weeks while the lead took a leave of absence.

"I felt like the role was mine for a brief amount of time," he says. And because it was on the calendar, he could invite family and friends. One Saturday night, there were more than 20 people from Arkansas seated on the front row of the mezzanine.

"When I get a call at 7 p.m., it's hard to say, 'Come on down, I'm playing The Beast tonight.'"

He most recently finished I Left My Heart: A Salute to the Music of Tony Bennett in upstate New York. Starring with two other crooners and backed by just a basic, four-piece jazz ensemble, his numbers included "As Time Goes By," "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good," and "I'm Just a Lucky So and So."

Sutton is currently fine-tuning the lead role of Whip Masters in a satirical musical, Idaho!, a sort of bawdy relative to Oklahoma!

Friday's gala is hosted by a dozen or so well-to-do TheatreSquared supporters and will honor Louise Schaper, the recently retired director of the Fayetteville Public Library. Proceeds will benefit the group's arts-in-education programs, thus the fundraiser's new name, Gala for Education.

When Sutton got his first part on Broadway, one of his first calls was to his former college professor, Amy Herzberg, now associate artistic director for TheatreSquared. He says he's a little anxious about performing for her and others who played a part in shaping his talent.

"There's a part of me that wants to make people proud. You go away to pursue your dream ... you want to come home and do well." More information on TheatreSquared or the 2009 Gala for Education is available at

the atresquared.org

Northwest Profile, Pages 39 on 11/15/2009

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6:00 pm **DINNER**
7:00-9:00 pm **DANCING** *Light Refr
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