

# The Dream Role

by Samuel Stokes

When I was growing up, several of my friends were aspiring actors that performed in community theatre, school plays, and other community groups. I remember chatting with my friends on several occasions about what their dream roles might be. One wanted to be Tony in *West Side Story* while another dreamed of playing the part of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.

I'm an actor of a different kind. I'm really a musician that got into theatre in high school. I played in the pit orchestra for several shows, but I also tried out for the plays and had various parts in several of them. I didn't really know much about theatre or any of the big name shows at the time. I only dreamed of being the leading man – star of the show. However, at 5'7" and 115 pounds, that left a pretty big gap to be filled by my precarious acting abilities. When auditions for *You Can't Take It With You* were posted at my high school, I promptly acquired a copy of the audition readings and immediately marked a preference for the part of "Tony," the dashing male romantic interest in the story. I marked a secondary preference for the part of "Ed," a smaller role, but an interesting and delightfully eccentric character with numerous hobbies (much like myself) including playing the xylophone. As a percussionist in the school band specializing in keyboard mallets that also happened to be interested in acting, I was kind of a shoe-in for the part (is that type-casting or what?).

While I was disappointed in not being seriously considered for the romantic lead in the show, I grew to

really love the part of "Ed." I mean, who is this guy? Not only does Ed play the xylophone, but he runs a candy delivery service for his wife, he is an amateur printer, he designs masks, and he has a genuine child-like interest in whatever anyone else wants to talk about. Of course, if you have ever seen *You Can't Take It With You* you'll know the show is filled with equally delightful and eccentric characters. I began to feel very much at home in the eclectic residence of Martin Vanderhof. I loved the characters and the joy and laughter that filled this home. Playing this part was a fun and heart-warming experience.

When I was at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, I was directing the music for *Nonsense* for the Central Missouri Repertory Company, when the guest director for *You Can't Take It With You* asked at the auditions if I could assist with teaching an actor to play the xylophone well enough to play the part of "Ed". On a whim, I said, "Well, actually, I played the part in high school, maybe I should try out myself." So I tried out and got the part, and it was even more fun the second time. It was like a trip down memory lane, visiting old friends in a familiar place (but with better acting - even mine, I think!). It was so interesting to see what elements of the show were different under a different director and with a different cast. Also, since I was again arranging the music myself, I had even more fun with it the second time because I was a much more experienced arranger and improviser by then. I was able

to work with the actress that played "Essie" (Ed's wife, a ballerina with two or more left feet), who had an excellent sense of humor, and we worked together to coordinate some really funny routines.

Recently, I saw an audition posting online for the Bell Road Barn Players production of *You Can't Take it With You* directed by Matt Hentges. While I have composed, arranged, and directed music for a number of shows, it has been five years since I have acted in anything. When I saw this notice for a production that was reasonably close to where I live, I immediately started considering if it would be possible for me to reprise the role of "Ed." Ultimately, I found that I am unable to make the time commitment this summer as I will be moving to Baton Rouge in August to being the PhD program in music theory at LSU. However, I am serving as the musical consultant for the show and am working directly with Sean Hogge who will play the role of "Ed," and of whom I am extremely envious!

Sitting through the readthrough was such a delight. It was a heart-warming experience to hear the laughter of a new cast coming together to breathe new life into this show. I am confident that it will be a real joy for everyone involved. Although, this time I will be watching from the audience, I take pleasure in knowing that I helped bring the character of Ed to life for a third time, a character that unwittingly became my dream role. I personally hope to play the role again and again, if the opportunity arises. It would truly be a joy. ▣