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# The Philadelphia Tribune

## 'New World' actor explores, expands his stage talents

- Rita Charleston Tribune Correspondent



Julius Thomas plays Santuit in “The New World.” — submitted photo

The year is 1620. And in the play, “The New World,” running at the Bucks County Playhouse through Dec. 2, Native Americans are enjoying a gluten-free, low carb meal when they are

suddenly invaded by the nation's first immigrants — the Pilgrims! Well, there goes the neighborhood. But in the tradition of all good musical comedies, love will soon conquer all.

Taking the role of Santuit, one of the Native Americans, is Julius Thomas III, a NAACP Theatre Award-nominated actor originally from Gary, Ind.

“While this is the imagined story of the first meeting between Native Americans and the Pilgrims, it is still relevant today in that it speaks to things in our society like acceptance, allowing people to have their differences and figuring out ways to make those differences work,” said Thomas.

In the play, Thomas added that “Santuit very much wants to live up to his calling and find his own destiny. But the hopes and dreams of his mother and his tribe are being thrust upon him. They want to see him become chief and fit the mold of those who came before him.”

In real life, Thomas tried to fit the mold he thought would be his destiny. Winning a full scholarship in biology to the University of Northern Iowa, he remembers doing extremely well in everything — except biology. He was discouraged, to say the least.

Until one night when he happened upon a theater production of “Rent.” Having sung in his church choir and been involved in theater back in high school, Thomas suddenly saw a bright new road he might take for his future.

“Watching that show I suddenly realized I could do that. So I dropped my scholarship and headed off to Wichita State to become a theater major,” Thomas recalled. “I knew I had been blessed with a gift, and I was determined to make the most of that gift and all my abilities.”

After receiving his bachelor of fine arts degree in musical theater, Thomas, who thought he wasn't yet ready to try his skills in New York, headed to Chicago instead. In short order, he was cast in the “25th Annual Putnam Valley Spelling Bee.” And that, he says, was the beginning of his theatrical success.

Now, filled with hope and confidence, the young actor headed to New York and began booking many shows. Today he is a Broadway veteran, having appeared in the original companies of “The Scottsboro Boys,” “Porgy and Bess” and as the lead in the smash hit, “Motown the Musical.” He's also been seen on TV in such productions as “Modern Family,” “Odd Man Out” and “Live with Kelly and Michael.”

Additionally, he's a featured vocalist on many recordings, but says he is most proud of his song of inspiration, “I Am Here” (available on iTunes, with proceeds benefiting Broadway Cares Equity Fights Aids).

“I tell everyone trying to make it in this business to never despise wisdom because it can come from places you never dreamed of,” Thomas said. “I remember one of my professors telling me I'd never be able to support myself as an actor. On hearing that I could have cried, but I took his

criticism to add fuel to the fire and try even harder. So you might be one of a lot of people saying no, but eventually you're gonna be somebody's YES!"

The Bucks County Playhouse is located at in New Hope. For tickets, call (215) 862-2121.