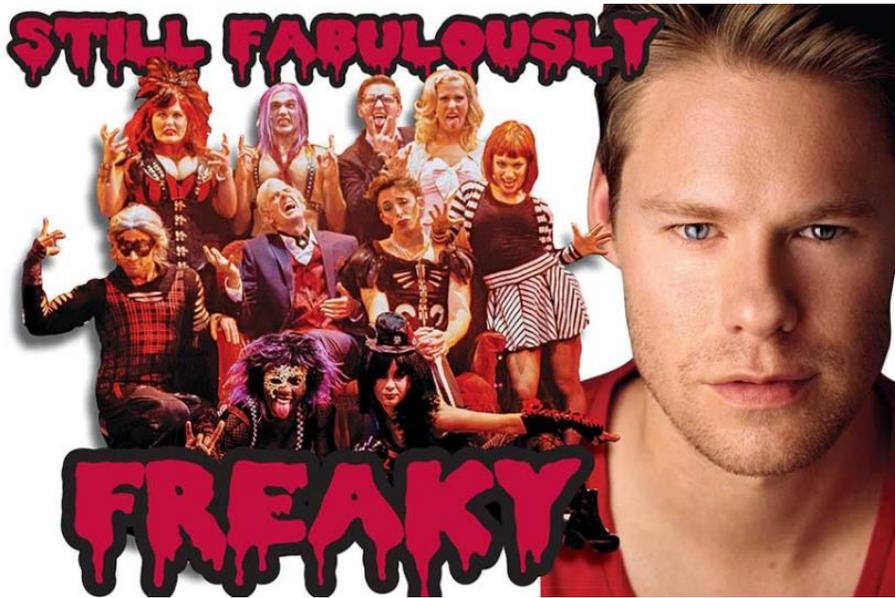


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Still Fabulously Freaky: 'Queer As Folk' actor stars in 'Rocky Horror'

By Larry Nichols

Bucks County Playhouse is getting into the spirit of the Halloween season with the return of Richard O'Brien's "The Rocky Horror Show," a musical that inspired the 1975 cult-classic film "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

Adding to the excitement of the production, on stage through Oct. 29, is "Queer As Folk" star Randy Harrison, who is starring as Dr. Frank-N-Furter.

"The Rocky Horror Picture Show" didn't exactly set the world on fire when it debuted, but its eccentric characters gradually caught on with audiences at midnight screenings, many of whom identified with the film's themes of fluid sexuality and marching to your own beat.

Harrison said that even though there are far more adventurous films and media accessible to the mainstream public these days, younger generations are still finding inspiration in a classic like "Rocky Horror."

"I think it probably means something similar [to younger generations]," he said. "It's still a radical piece of material and it brings people together of an interesting subculture. I feel like the performances are so much about the community of people being together and responding to the film or the show. It's grown and swelled from what it was when it began."

If your only experience with "Rocky Horror" has been from seeing it on the screen, Harrison noted that experiencing the show live on stage will take it to the next level.

"It's more personal," he said. "I feel like it takes in more of the community that it's being done in. You're watching human beings inhabit the characters and bringing a fresh take to it because it's not something that was put on celluloid 30 years ago. The audience is very much a part of the show. When you're watching the film, the audience is participating but the film isn't responding. Here, the audience really shapes the experience not only for themselves but also for the actors on stage. It's really a live, fluid, living, organic thing. The feeling is very different than shouting at a screen that is not going to respond in any way."

And yes, the actors on stage are expecting the same level of audience participation for the live show as they would for a midnight movie screening.

"I think it will depend on the audience and the time of the show," Harrison said. "We have 7 o'clock shows and we have 11 o'clock shows. I think the later-evening shows will be more active but it's very expected and encouraged. In fact, various audience members get bags and props of things they can throw on stage. They're clearly encouraged to. And we're hoping they will. I think it will be even more active than the film once the show gets running and they see that it's clear that they are intended to."

"Rocky Horror" might be a fun and campy musical, but Harrison said the show really has some rich and deeply complex characters, with a message that has resonated with audiences for more than 40 years.

"You really discover what a radical piece of political theater it is with everything it's saying about gender, self-expression and sexuality, especially for the time, but even now," he said. "It communicates about fluidity in a way that people still are having a hard time accepting. Both sides are true — the camp humor and the glamorousness of it and the rock 'n' roll — but at the same time it's about shattering these 1950s linear expectations and finding your true self in a way that is really, really powerful."

The central role in the show, Dr. Frank-N-Furter, has had some impressive actors slide into his platform boots and fishnets over the years, but Harrison said he was eager to put his own stamp on the iconic role.

"Frank-N-Furter was absolutely the role I wanted to play," he said. "It was very, very exciting. I wanted to honor what's come before and what audiences were expecting to some extent but at the same time it's one of those characters like The Emcee [in 'Cabaret'] where the more you fill it with yourself and your own humor and ridiculousness and your own glamour, the deeper the performance is, the clearer the story is and the more fun everybody is having. I felt an obligation to bring as much of myself to it in order to fulfill the role."

Harrison has starred in numerous stage, television and film productions over his career and said he plans to stay busy once this production of "Rocky Horror" wraps.

"I directed a web series that's just being released on 'Funny or Die' right now called 'New York is Dead,'" he said. "Our first two episodes were released on Friday the 13th and it will be released every week until Nov. 7. We're trying to begin shooting the second season. I like to switch it up. When I do a similar style of thing for too long, I get anxious to do something different. So I've been doing a lot of musicals

recently and I'm missing doing more plays and dramatic content. And I certainly miss being in front of the camera. It's a very, very different way of performing and a different kind of living when you're doing it that I do miss. If I were to pick a favorite, I would say I'm a stage person. I feel like I kind of belong there. I feel like it's my community."

With a lot of popular TV shows returning years after ending, we had to ask Harrison if there is a possibility of the groundbreaking drama "Queer As Folk" coming back to revisit those characters.

"The cast has talked about it," he said. "We'd all be game. We had a great experience shooting that show and we're still connected to those characters in some capacity but I don't know that it will happen because it was originally a BBC series and Showtime doesn't own it. I think there is a legal reason that it would be impractical to have it made again, which is unfortunate. I think it would be interesting but it would be different now that the characters would be in their 40s and 50s. It would be very different storytelling and I would be interested in what it would be."

Bucks County Playhouse presents "The Rocky Horror Show" through Oct. 29, 70 S. Main St. For more information or tickets, call 215-862-2121 or visit <http://bcptheater.org>.