



HAIL, CANTOR!

ACTOR, DIRECTOR AND INSTRUCTOR
GEOFFREY CANTOR HAS RUBBED
ELBOWS WITH SOME OF THE BIGGEST
STARS AROUND. [HELLO, GEORGE
CLOONEY AND JOSH BROLIN!] MAYBE
YOU'VE RUBBED GEOFFREY'S ELBOWS
RIGHT HERE IN RAMSEY!

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IT ALL BEGAN WITH A TIME MACHINE.

OR, SHALL WE SAY, A PLAY ADAPTED FROM THE H.G. WELLS NOVEL *THE TIME MACHINE*. DURING THE SUMMER OF 1973, WHILE AT SUMMER CAMP IN MAINE, GEOFFREY CANTOR DECIDED TO WRITE AND DIRECT HIS FIRST PLAY INSTEAD OF PARTAKING IN A MANDATORY RAINY DAY REST PERIOD. NOT A BAD WAY TO BEGIN AN EXCITING CAREER DEDICATED TO PERFORMING, IS IT?!

DOWNTOWN RAMSEY: Tell us all about that summer camp experience when you realized you might be on to something as a performer.

GEOFFREY: It was my first role, and it was the lead in a staged version of *The Time Machine*. I was seven, and not only did I star in it, but I wrote it, directed it and produced it! Does that count? I don't know if I knew I wanted to be an actor then as much as I knew I loved to act. I was also singing in choirs at school. I think my first real taste was when I was asked by Pascack Hills High School to join the chorus of *Most Happy Fella* as a townie. I was in 5th grade at the time and it was like being on Broadway to me.

And that continued through college?

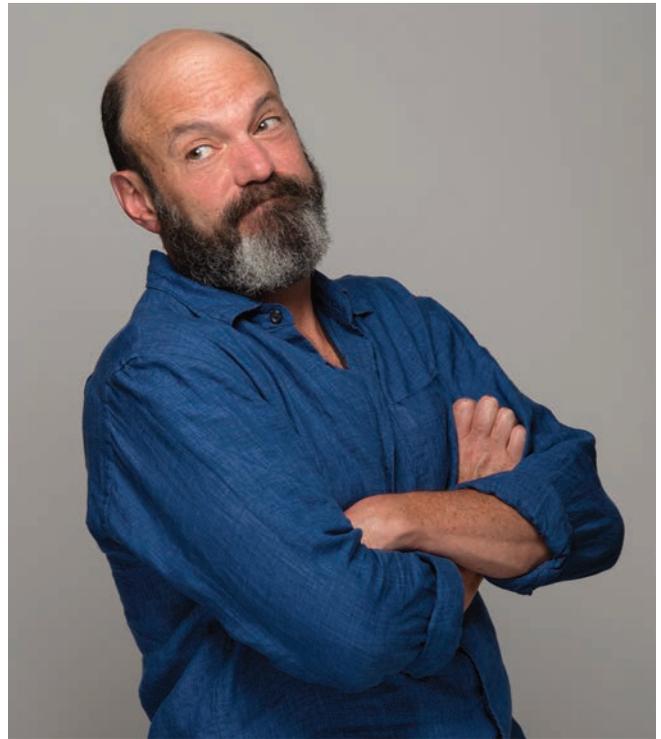
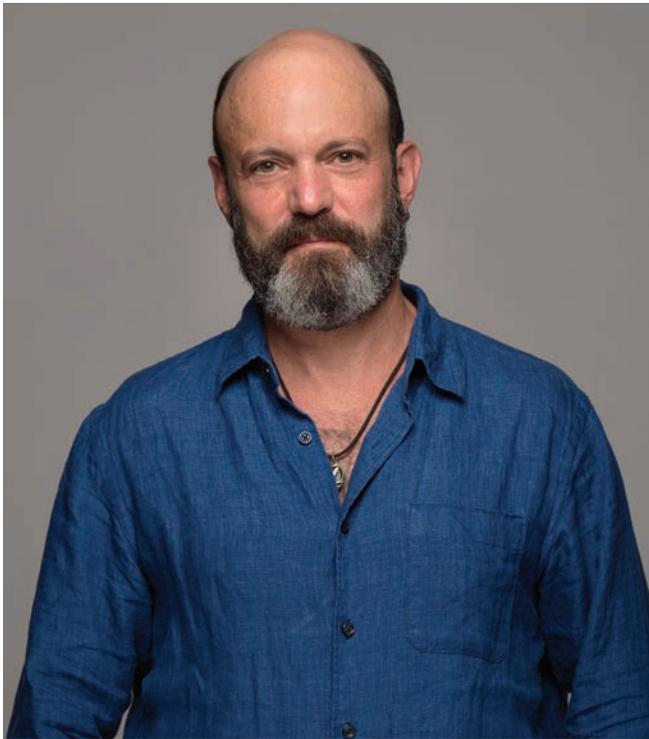
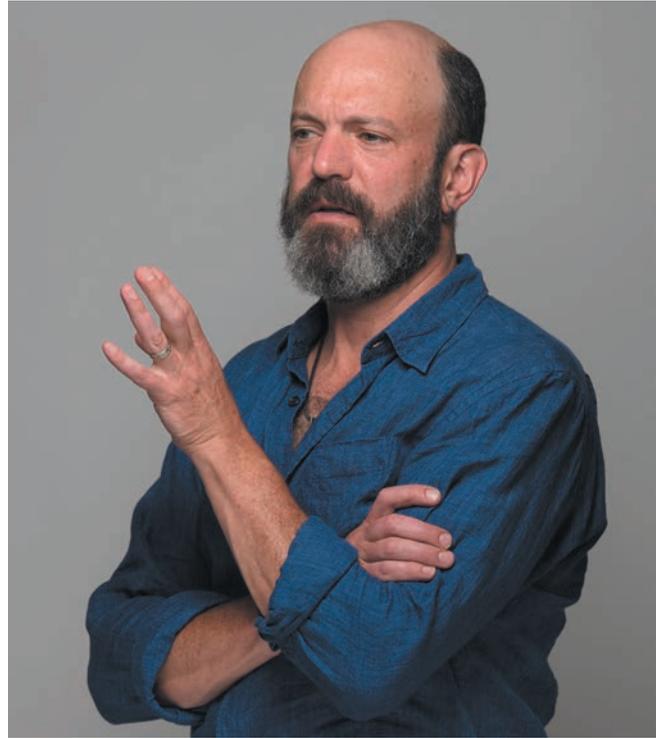
Until I got to college, I thought it would be a hobby. That all changed when I did *West Side Story* at Amherst. I played Action, and following a performance I received a handwritten letter from Len Berkman, the head of the Smith Drama Department at the time. In it, Len described my acting in terms that were unlike

anything anyone had ever said to me. He saw my commitment to the inner life of Action, and told me that when I was on stage, he couldn't help but watch me. That was a really big moment. It was then that I decided to declare my major, and consider seriously pursuing acting as a career. I have told him since that I blame him entirely. [Laughs]

You've played many characters over the years in both film and TV. Do you have a favorite?

My favorite role is the one I'm playing right now. Whatever I'm currently working on, wherever my focus is, that is my favorite role. But when I look back, there are some standouts. I loved the role of Matt in *Talley's Folly*, which was a stage role. I enjoyed





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playing Bernard in *The Kill Point* on Spike TV back in 2007. It offered a great opportunity to play a character with an arc over an eight-episode series. Raoul in *One Last Thing* was kinda fun—you'll have to look that up! [Laughs] And Frank in the upcoming Netflix series *Maniac*, while in some ways was quite like other roles I've played, has some moments that are quite special. Of course, Ellison in *Daredevil* and *The Punisher* on Netflix is a wonderful role, and the first that I've been able to craft over a number of seasons. He is perhaps my favorite right now.

Tell us more about him.

Ellison, like most of the characters I've played in the past few years, is a man of integrity. He's a thoughtful, brash, no-nonsense guy with a job to do. He manages this pretty well, all things considered. He is also the perfect window through which the audience can view the superhero world. His reactions are precisely those that the viewer might have. He doesn't know the secrets, but rather makes the best decisions he can based on the combination of the knowledge he has and his life experience. Now that I've completed the third season of *Daredevil*, and one season of *The Punisher*, I'm "in the middle of him" in the way that I've never experienced before. It's an honor to get to be his voice, and have my voice come through so clearly.

What's your favorite thing about being an actor?

It fully involves me on every level—emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually. There is nothing else that does that. And when you fully engage in the process, you learn empathy, you gain perspective and you discover things. You discover yourself, really, as you experience what you wouldn't experience otherwise.

We've got three words for you—the Coen brothers! You were in their 2016 film *Hail, Caesar!*, which starred George Clooney, Josh Brolin, Scarlett Johansson and Jonah Hill. What the heck was that like?

The best part may be the fact that *I was in* a Coen brothers movie! [Laughs] Joel and Ethan are two of the smartest movie makers out there, and just to be in the room with them, even during an audition, is thrilling. *Hail, Caesar!* was my third time being seen by them.

When did you audition for them previously?

I first auditioned for the lead in their 2009 film, *A Serious Man*. I got a call back for a supporting role. I then

auditioned for a one-act that was part of a trio of plays in New York. They're extremely supportive—like a two-person audience. They clearly enjoy watching actors say their words. While filming *Hail, Caesar!*, I remember one moment when we were working on the office scene with Josh Brolin. They direct in tandem, which was a very new experience for me, and they couldn't agree on this one word in a line of dialogue. So they asked my opinion—the sort of tie-breaker vote.

Talk about nerve-wracking!

I was very diplomatic—read nervous—and said we could try it both ways, and they could pick which one they liked in the edit. Other fun facts about that movie: Josh Brolin drove me home after my first day. He had his own car on set and a house in Santa Monica. I was staying at the home of a director friend of mine, Steven Shill, so when I heard where he was headed, I asked for a lift. We chatted the whole way home. I also met Jonah Hill on that shoot, and had the good fortune to be paired up with him on *Maniac*, which is coming out on Netflix sometime this year.

What's Jonah like? He's come a long way since *Superbad*.

He's really great to work with; he's extremely collaborative. He always has so many projects going on at once, but he is incredibly focused and has a great understanding for what the directors are trying to achieve in each scene. All of my scenes in *Maniac* are with him. One day, we had on the same sneakers and it made me feel very hip since I'm old enough to be his uncle. [Laughs] And Emma Stone is in it, too. She is exactly how you would expect her to be—very effusive and warm, and always ready to give you a big hug.

Where can we see you this fall?

Daredevil and *Maniac* both hit Netflix in the autumn. If you can't wait, and feel that you need to see me in something sooner, you can head over to IMDb. It lists everything I've done, and you can see most of them on Amazon. I finished a short film in June and worked on another over the summer. I was also just cast in a play, my first since 2014, called *My Parsifal Conductor*, a Wagnerian comedy by Emmy-

award winning playwright Allan Leicht, directed by Robert Kafilin and produced by the award-winning Directors Company. The first preview is Sept. 25; the opening is scheduled for Oct. 10 at the Marjorie S. Deane Little Theater, West Side YMCA, in Manhattan. Other than that, I'll do what most actors do when they aren't in something—look for work! Maybe I could write for *Downtown Ramsey* magazine. I have a computer! [Laughs]

You're hired! But wait. Can we see a resume?

I'll try to get one to you as soon as possible. But I can get you a teaching or directing resume when I get home. Yes, it's true. I'm also a teacher and director. These aspects of my creative life began at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. I attended the National Theater Institute in the autumn of 1982. One of my teachers, Michael Posnick, who would become head of the drama department at Manhattanville College, was teaching one of the acting classes, and over lunch one day, asked me how long I'd wanted to be a director. I was actually insulted—my young-man-actor-ego was on full display! [Laughs] But he saw something in me and the way I presented my work in class, and recognized that it reflected a broader vision of the work. He then recommended me for a job at the National Youth Theater Institute that summer. I was a counselor and acting teacher, and I realized that I had both a knack for and a love of teaching and directing. Flash forward a few years, and I began coaching privately, mostly professional working actors, and directing occasionally. Michael was right. As I am a full-time actor, my students appreciate the fact that I work, and that I can directly relate to their experiences.

Tell us your Ramsey story.

My wife Cat and I came to Ramsey 14 years ago. We'd been living in Chestnut Ridge, but my sister was here with her three kids. We would visit a lot; we really liked the town. We enjoyed Ramsey Day, the fireworks and all the restaurants. We bought a house on the street where they lived, and the rest, as they say, is history.

What do you like about living in Ramsey?

We're great friends with my sister and her family, so that's a real plus. I really love the ease of the town. We've got everything we need; great restaurants like Gao, Tawara, Ronnie G's, Bobcat's Texas BBQ, Brady's and, of course, Café Panache. There's a train, a Starbucks with a dry cleaner next door, Steve's Market, nice neighbors and our own movie theater. I've even gotten used to the commute! [Laughs]

What's your favorite thing to do in town?

One of my favorite things to do—besides eating—is hosting the Ramsey Wind Symphony in Finch Park before the fireworks on the 4th of July. Ramsey is so fortunate to have its own wind symphony, and the town does a wonderful job every year. The park is full, the fireworks are awesome and the music is great. This year, my band, Bobby and the Israelites, played before the wind symphony. I'm the singer. It was our first time playing out in my hometown and it made the day even more fun for me than usual.

Have you ever thought about giving up on acting?

No. I've never thought of giving it up. It's not a job in the traditional sense. It's a vocation. My brain is hard-wired that way. I look at everything through a creative lens. I'm not sure which came first. And more than any accolade, it's the process that I love. I think it's why I enjoy other creative pursuits as much as I do. ↪

