

La Crosse Tribune

BUNGE BACK ON STAGE – AND BUSY – AT THE COMMONWEAL

Date: Saturday, June 14, 2008

Byline: Terry Rindfleisch

Many theater-goers are glad that Eric Lorentz Bunge is back on stage with the Commonwealth Theatre Company in Lanesboro, Minn.

Bunge, a Spring Grove, Minn., native who formed the theater company 20 years ago, hasn't acted at the Commonwealth since 2004.

Now he is playing the lead role in two productions in repertory through Oct. 25 – "Harvey" and "Man of La Mancha."

"It's a little bit nuts, but I'm an old track and field athlete," Bunge said. "It does fuel you, especially when you do what you love."

Bunge, the theater's managing director, said the new Commonwealth theater, which opened last summer, was his dream, so he suggested that 2008 be a season of dreams and dreamers. Hal Cropp, the theater's artistic director, liked the idea.

"I always wanted to do 'Harvey,' so Hal said then I had to play Elwood and I said OK," Bunge said. "Since it was the season of dreamers, we had to do 'Man of La Mancha,' and Hal said I had to do Don Quixote.

"We looked at what was the best work I could be doing in 2008, and it was to headline those two plays," he said. "It was potentially the biggest return of my time for the company."

Cropp said Bunge is a very good actor who is always working on his craft and supporting other actors.

"He brings lots of energy and positive creativity," Cropp said.

Bunge said he always wanted to play Elwood P. Dowd, who is 47 years old in "Harvey" just like him.

"I like Elwood's generosity, and he's genuinely interested in the other," Bunge said. "That's so refreshing. He's not dopey, he's so alive."

Bunge was cast to play Don Quixote in Commonweal's 1996 production of "Man of La Mancha," but he and his wife were expecting their first child, so he gave up the role. He subbed later in the run.

"Quixote is the opposite kind of dreamer who feels so passionate that he has to affect one more person with his dream before he dies," he said.

Bunge had lived in Minneapolis and returned to Commonweal to direct and act every so often. But he moved his family to Lanesboro and officially retired for several months in 2005.

He returned to Commonweal as project manager for the new theater. Bunge then became the theater's managing director to oversee the business operations in 2007 and 2008.

Bunge has been rehearsing "Man of La Mancha" during the day and performing "Harvey" at night.

"Then I look at the books and do the business side of theater," he said. "I have to pinch myself. I have a good life in theater."

"Man of La Mancha" previews began Friday, and that meant the end of day rehearsals.

"I'm doing pretty good, and my voice is holding up pretty well," Bunge said. "I'm looking forward to just performing."

"It's been fun being on stage again, in a new theater with an audience all around you," he said.

Don't be surprised if you see Bunge again on the Commonweal stage later this year in "A Christmas Carol." He's not looking for a big role – he just wants to be in it.

www.commonwealtheatre.org

All content © La Crosse Tribune and may not be republished without permission.

The La Crosse Tribune archives are stored on a SAVE™ newspaper library system from NewsBank, inc.