



LIGHT IT UP

What's brighter than the neon
lights on Broadway?

Josh Segarra's rising star

Words by Vanessa Pascale
Photo Credit Jenny Anderson, Broadway Style Guide

“Enjoy the moment, Papi,”

Josh Segarra quotes Emilio Estefan's advice to him, “that's what he's always saying.” And that's exactly what Josh is doing. There is a mega-watt light surrounding the 29-year-old actor—who is all smiles and electric energy on stage, and when we meet at Gramercy Park Hotel. After Josh hugs me hello, I immediately praise his performance as Emilio in the Broadway musical, *On Your Feet! The Story of Emilio and Gloria Estefan*.

Marquis Theatre is set ablaze with Emilio and Gloria's inspiring story in this fiery musical fraught with the Billboard-topping songs (like “Conga” and “Rhythm Is Gonna Get You”) that made Gloria and Miami Sound Machine an international

sensation. As Emilio, Josh brings it. Thoroughly entertained the entire duration of the musical, I left the theater motivated by this loving power couple's drive to attain the American Dream. Josh is remarkable at capturing Emilio's fire—and showcasing that he was the steady spark that ignited and fueled Gloria's success. “Thanks a lot,” Josh says with a Crest-ad-worthy grin. The blue-eyed, dark, handsome actor is sporting a thick, well-groomed beard, New York Yankees baseball cap, jeans, grey hooded sweatshirt, and a black leather jacket.

Was it intimidating to play a real person? “It's exciting. I guess intimidated could be the right word—from the beginning, but it wasn't anything that lasted very long. Once I met Emilio... he's such a calming presence. I kinda felt like he was excited to be a part of the process, so it made me excited,” says Josh, who was offered the

first reading without an audition, almost two years ago. [Josh was previously the lead in the Broadway musical *Lysistrata Jones* and performed in the musical *Dogfight* on Second Stage.] "I'd just finished the first season of *Sirens* [series regular, Billy, on Season One and Two] and they were like, 'Hey man, what do you think about doing this little musical?' When I read that script, I didn't want anybody else to do it. That first reading was really important to me. I'm the vessel; I'm getting to introduce Emilio to the world. I wanted to bring everything I could from my upbringing, my background into it and combine that with him." Throughout the process, the Estefans have been completely hands-on. While the cast and crew were in the theater from noon to midnight during tech, so were they. "It just shows their dedication to it, how much they care about it. We were all kinda holding hands throughout."

While depicting Emilio on stage, Josh employs an accent. "The accent is so important to him, something that's very important about him, about his makeup. The first time I was reading it, I didn't have the accent and I just knew it wasn't right, so I started looking up the difference between the Cuban accent and Puerto Rican accent 'cause I grew up doing the Puerto Rican accent and I wanted to make sure it was more appropriate to him. Hopefully that's what I got up there." What has Emilio said about your portrayal? "Ah, he's the best," he says with adoration. "He makes me feel like he's proud of me. He's all heart." Presently, there is no closing date in sight—as long as the people keep attending the show, they'll be performing. "To be a part of something that's being well received is really nice, ya know? I get to learn, grow, and experience what a good job feels like, what a good story feels like. How many times in life do I get to play a character who's strong and smart, and driven and gets to show fire, and gets to be funny? Those are all really fun things to get to explore, so I'm enjoying every moment I can."

Josh grew up in Orlando, Florida singing in church, but it was never something he thought he could pursue. "Like, I know singers that are *singers* in the world, so I can never claim I'm one of them... I like to think of myself as a storyteller and if it happens to be through song, then hopefully I can convey that story through song." At 17, Josh moved to New York

City to attend New York University's Tisch School of Arts, where he joined their a cappella group, The N'Harmonics. "I was probably the worst one in the group." He laughs. "But they put me in there, 'cause I like to have a good time. I was kinda like our 'hype man.' I was really excited all the time." And it appears that nothing has changed as Josh's positive energy is definitely palpable. In The N'Harmonics he'd beat box and rap, but the modest performer doesn't claim to be either. "What else are you supposed to do in college other than try new things? And if you're not good at it, you never do it again. I get to rap now on stage, so maybe that prepared me for this." He credits his skills to the likes of LFO, NSYNC, and Boyz II Men. "I wish I could give myself a harder sound that I grew up listening to. But no, I learned how to rap with those boys." He laughs. "Now, I get paid to do it—that's pretty dope."

nerve-wracking but the second I got there everybody was so cool on set." Working with Judd was a big deal for Josh as he's been a fan of his since *Heavyweights*—his favorite movie as a kid. "I got to talk to Judd a lot about my fandom for a lot of his movies. He was so cool."

At an early age, Josh knew he "just wanted to do this thing that I saw all the time—whether it be in my favorite movies or be in my favorite plays or musicals." He cut his teeth on school plays, which served as the foundation for his future undertakings. Josh also entertained the idea of becoming a pro wrestler when he grew up. ("I'm still a huge nerd for that!") And now that he's an actor, it's quite possible he might get to explore that dream on on-screen. When asked what role he hopes to take on one day, he replies, an athlete. "If they ever do a biopic on The Rock—to play The Rock

in 5 or 10 years, put on the muscle, and just get training, ya know?" he says excitedly. "Me and my buddies joke if they ever make a biopic of Giancarlo Stanton from the [Miami] Marlins, maybe I'll get to play him one day. I just want to do something where I get to jump into something that I loved for so long and swim in that pool for however long it takes to come out with a good product in the end. Wherever that next project is, just let me know. I'll jump on that one."

On NBC's *Chicago P.D.*, Josh recurs as Justin Voight, the son of Hank. "Whenever they feel like Justin is needed in the story line, they ring me up, and I pop out there for a few weeks and do it. I think it's a good way to show Hank's softer side. I've got a son on the show now." The whole cast, which includes our former cover girl Sophia Bush, has welcomed him with open arms. "I love Jason Beghe. I love that cast." The ice cream bar they had his first night on set was a definite selling point for this ice cream connoisseur. "I was like, Wait, we got ice cream here?! This is good. I think I'll be alright," he laughs, then enlightens me with why Ben &

Jerry's is his favorite ('cause it's creamy) and why the other brands don't compare. Other than that and a few other projects in phases too early to mention, Josh is dedicated to *On Your Feet!* "I've never done anything this long on Broadway and it's taught me a lot about the stamina that it requires. I want to give everybody 100% when we're on that stage. People pay a lot of money to take a date or take their families and for me, that means a lot. There's a responsibility that comes along with that. So that's where my heads at right now, doing this thing strong." **ML**

TELL US MORE

MOST SURPRISING ASPECT OF DOING ON YOUR FEET!

"You nailed it with the first question—playing somebody that's alive. Playing these people that are very big presences in the world. They represent an entire community of people and they're telling their story about the American Dream. That's something I couldn't have, in my wildest dreams, dreamt that I'd get to tell this story. My little career, that I have so far, has been filled with people telling me, 'Maybe you're not Latin enough' or 'Maybe you're too Latin for this.' It was always so interesting 'cause I never thought of myself like, characterized by my ethnicity. I'm just a kid who grew up in a suburb of Orlando. Yeah, I'm Puerto Rican, but it was never anything defined. You get into this business and it's the primary thing that defines you because they're trying to peg you. So to be able to tell a story that's so close to home for me, that means so much to my family and to my people is pretty special. That's been the most surprising thing: the pride that comes along with it."

WHAT ARE YOU WATCHING ON TV?

"I'm watching *Better Call Saul* on AMC, *Fargo*—other than that, I watching March Madness, college basketball and then that'll go into the NBA playoffs. Right now, we go into a long stretch of basketball. I get home from the show, decompress, have some dinner with the fam, watch a little sports, go to bed, do it again the next day."

WHO ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

"Leon Bridges, he has an old-school-R&B-bluesy sound. Really great quality to his voice, just saw him not too long ago at the Beacon. Listening to a lot of Sam Cooke, a lot of that old school sound. Everyone goes through waves and that's where I'm at right now."

Last year, Josh and his bare derriere appeared in *Trainwreck* as Amy Shumer's character's one-night stand. "That was the coolest part of my life," he says about working with Judd Apatow and Amy. "Amy was a star. She was so funny, taught me a lot about comedy the few days I was there. We hit it off right off the bat—cracking jokes, sharing stories... You go on a new set where you don't know anybody and you're kinda put on the spot in a way. You're around some of the funniest people in this business. *Alright man, go head, be funny.* That's pretty