A MAN
FOR *all seasons*

Aubrey Poo   (pronounced PawHaw), star of David Kramer's new musical,
Orpheus in Africa, *chats to EOA about his life on and off the stage.*

Q What Attracted You To The Arts Industry?

It was fate. Come the early 1990s, my mother searched for a Model C school for me and I landed up in an arts school. I was bitten by the performing arts bug and the rest is history.

Q What Has Your Experience As A Performer Been Like?

Growing up, I always had the chance to be on stage, but the magic and excitement of it all only started dawning on me in high school, as drama and other artistic disciplines were part of the curriculum. It's a continuous revelation to me with every project I do. Even after 15 years in the industry I still get excited and moved by things I discover onstage.

Q Is There One Creative Role To Which You Feel Most Drawn?

The stage is my first artistic love. However, one can't specialise in this country and, as a result, you find yourself wearing many hats. I've been fortunate enough to work in most mediums and even go as far as producing and directing, which has given me a more rounded perspective of my craft and the industry as a whole.

Q How Do You Find Time For All The Things You Do?

I make time! As a freelancing actor, producer and director of my own company, I don't have the luxury of dropping the ball at all. Every minute counts, as that translates to income. Also, as a typical Joburg resident, I get a thrill from the rat race and the satisfaction of accomplishment.

Q How Do You Recover From Career Setbacks And Challenges?

By taking time to gain perspective and absorbing the lessons that they pose. The nature of the industry doesn't allow you to wallow. You have to move on to start with the new from a clean slate.

Q What Have You Learned From Your Difficulties?

Often your talent is not the question; instead, politics and other business decisions may be the reasons. You have to keep your self-belief intact because you can only do your best if you believe in yourself.

Q What Did It Mean For You To Perform In Marikana The Musical?

It was my debut performance in my hometown of Pretoria and that was special. The process was challenging as this was new work, but we landed on a final product that was truly special.

Q Name Some Of Your Biggest Professional Highlight So Far

Touring the US with *Dream Girls* tops the list, but I've enjoyed an amazing career thus far and have found every project to hold its own special memories and offer something to take away. From playing Nelson Mandela in Cape Town Opera's *Mandela Trilogy* to playing on The Market Theatre John Kani stage after 13 years of being in the industry and yearning to do so. And, of course, playing the lead for David Kramer in *Orpheus In Africa!*

Q What is Orpheus In Africa about?

It's the incredible true story about an amazing group of African-American singers, The Virginia Jubilee Singers, and their leader, Orpheus McAdoo, who travelled across South Africa and achieved remarkable success, considering the era.

Q What's It Been Like Working With David Kramer And The Rest Of The Team?

The process has been amazing! We discover new music and magical moments daily, so much so that we look forward to coming to work every morning. David Kramer is a treasure trove of information about the story he wants to tell, the characters, and the period in time. That also comes in handy.

Q What Are The Broader Goals For Your Career?

I'd like to start directing and producing mainstream theatre works – I've done both in corporate and industrial theatre. I'm still keen on playing Mufasa in *The Lion King;* we'll see how that goes.

Q Tell Us More About Your Goal To Diversify The Country's Theatre Offering?

We need to change the demographic of theatre patrons in this country and that can only happen once we start telling stories, in all scales of production – small, medium, and large – that reflect *all* our people. There's a place for *Les Misérables, Phantom of the Opera,* and the likes, but an equal place for *Sarafina, Marikana, King Kong,* and *Orpheus In Africa.* E

Orpheus In Africa is at Cape Town's Fugard Theatre from 22 September to 31 October 2015. Book at Computicket.