

Stern Guest Vinnie Favale Is Serious About His Art

By: Stewart King | October 13, 2014

The road from Lincroft to just off-Broadway has been long for Vinnie Favale — well beyond the crowded commuter bus rides and spotty cell phone reception he was once known for as a frequent “Howard Stern Show” guest.

It’s been just over a decade since Favale, the gregarious executive vice president of late-night programming at CBS, was first moved to write lyrics about a local teen who had been killed in drunk driving accident.

Those verses would eventually find a theme. Songs were recorded. A musical book centered around the afterlife was born. And a not-so-small fortune was sunk into a production, providing plenty of fodder for Stern, who thought Favale was wasting his time.

But here is Favale, 11 years later, on the brink of seeing his masterwork, “[Hereafter](#),” get an open-ended run at the [Snapple Theater Center](#) in midtown. The emotionally powerful musical, directed by Terry Berliner, opens officially on Oct. 25 after a series of well-received previews that started last month.

Contrary to natural curiosity, Favale’s mission is not necessarily to see “Hereafter’s” next life on the Great White Way.

“Our goal here is simple and unglamorous — and that is to be able to bring this show to the public in any way, shape or form,” Favale said. “We went into the last off-Broadway run (in 2012) just to see if the piece would work and it did beyond our wildest expectations. We’d be thrilled with any outlet that lets us bring this show to the public.”

“Hereafter” is a story of three women who happen upon the home of a world renowned medium to reconnect with the loved ones they have lost to the other side. The musical doesn’t aim to convert the psychic skeptic as much as play on the universal theme of wanting one last chance to see or be with the one you miss.

To be sure, the tissue boxes strategically placed in the theater lobby aren’t there for allergy season. But the show’s poignancy is balanced by its spirited playfulness.

“I got the most incredible compliment from a person who had lost someone close to him,” Favale added. “He told me that he internalized a great deal of his pain. He was there on opening night of the preview and it was clear he had been crying by show’s end.



Vinnie Favale of Lincroft co-wrote the play “Hereafter” with Frankie Keane.

“Knowing the rough year he had, it was quite understandable. He was thinking about who he had lost. But he also said his tears were for the characters on that stage and what they were going through, dealing with their own grief. And that’s a testament to the actors on that stage who have brought these characters to life in a way that Frankie and I never imagined when we wrote it.”

Frankie is Frankie Keane, the Chicago-bred, Hoboken-based singer and actress who first got a call from Favale in 2008 — when all he had was sketches of a production. It was the addition of the Keane that threw Favale’s vision into high gear. Beyond being the perfect fit for the role of Anita, a 1940s actress who perished in a plane crash, Keane was also a writer who drew heavily from the same pain of untimely loss.

In the ’70s, Favale lost his 7-year-old brother, Frank, to an accidental fall and his oldest brother, Johnny, to cancer at age 24. And Keane had lost her mother and two brothers at young ages. So in Keane, Favale found a writing partner who brought new ideas and a different energy to a book rife with characters desperately needing to reconnect.

“We’ve all had these experiences and we all have a certain way with dealing with them,” Keane said. “Getting together with Vinnie and creating this theater child, if you will, has been a great exercise in tapping into something people have felt and to kind of commune with them from the stage.”

Unlike Favale, Keane isn’t shy about what she hopes is the show’s end game. She wants it on Broadway.

“I just want more people to see it,” Keane said. “People get crippled by grief and I feel like Vinnie and I were brought together to tell this story to help people get through it. You know, after the services end and the friends and family stop sending the food, you eventually don’t become their focus and you’re still in that pain. I hope this show gives people that permission to be okay with still feeling sadness and coping with it.”

For Favale, 55, his work will go on after “Hereafter.” He continues to serve as CBS liaison to “Late Show with David Letterman” and he’ll maintain the same role for Stephen Colbert when he takes over 11:35 p.m. in 2015.

The question now is will Favale get a chance to return to Stern’s show to promote it? It’s been years since Favale’s infamous “Oh Debbie” tapes, but he still makes the occasional contribution to the show.

“I would love to promote it, but I think what we’re doing is too niche for them,” Favale said. “There was a time when my role on the show was very organic to what they were doing. I worked with them on a daily basis and put myself out there in a way that was fun for the audience and for me. But that show has such a long and rich history and has evolved so much that I know my place these days is on the Howard replays.”

For get tickets or learn more about the play, visit hereaftermusical.com.