



Eric Petersen has a very busy summer ahead of him. The actor and former Carol Stream resident is coming back home to Chicago as everyone's favorite ogre in the national tour of *Shrek the Musical*. Petersen made his Broadway debut in this same role.

In addition to transforming himself into a giant green ogre — which takes nearly two hours of make-up — Petersen and his wife, Lisa Marie, are expecting their first child, a daughter, this month.

But Petersen isn't nervous (one can immediately hear the excitement in his voice) as those around him ask him how he'll manage it all. Instead, he's looking at the musical's national tour and pending fatherhood as "two exciting births of new things," citing lots of help from family and friends.

Shrek the Musical runs July 13 through September 5 at Chicago's Cadillac Palace Theatre.

Q} You first got involved in *Shrek* on Broadway. How did that come about?

I had gone to auditions for the original Broadway run but didn't get called back. Then, last summer, I got a call from my agent while I was in a show at the Barn Theatre in Kalamazoo, Michigan. (I've spent four or five different summers there.) He told me to come to New York the next day for an emergency audition. They needed a replacement for Papa Ogre and the *Shrek* understudy. I auditioned and a couple days later my agent called, and I got the part. It was a dream come true. I mean, I had moved to New York to be on Broadway. Accomplishing that goal was really great for me. I had two weeks of rehearsal and then was in the Broadway company for about two months. Then the actor who was playing *Shrek* left the show to do a play, so the standby became *Shrek*, and I became the new standby. A week after that I went on as *Shrek*. It was amazing.

Q} How does it feel to be opening the tour to a hometown Chicago audience?

I can't even put into words how excited I am to be coming home. I grew up in Carol Stream and went to Glenbard North (1999 graduate), and then went to Bradley University in Peoria. I moved to New York in 2003 and have had a decent amount of success. But none of the other shows I've been in have ever traveled through Chicago. Most of my family and friends haven't seen me in anything since high school. I want to show them there was a reason I moved to New York.

Q} *Shrek* requires a lot of make-up and costuming. How long does it take you to get ready for a show?

The call time for an actor is normally a half-hour before curtain. For *Shrek*, it's two hours before call time and probably a little before that to warm up and get yourself ready. It's an hour and 45 minutes for the makeup

process — and that's just the head. It's another 10 to 15 minutes to get into the fat suit, which weighs 35 to 45 pounds. It's shocking to wear the suit because each breath you take has to be that much bigger. Since you get so hot in the suit, they have you wear Under Armour under everything, and they put ice packs in it. Those are changed out at intermission because they've melted by then. It's the hardest thing physically I've ever done, but totally rewarding.

Q} You've also been on TV shows like *Law & Order* and *As the World Turns*. Do you prefer theatre or television?

As an actor, you just want to work. I've done a lot in musicals and theatre and that's where my training is, but I'm also trying to break into television and movies. I'm having pretty decent success, but I'll never stop doing theater. There's nothing like performing for a live audience and working with other actors on stage and the give-and-take that's there.

Q} Were you always interested in acting?

My freshman year of high school I was planning on playing soccer, although I wasn't a great soccer player by any means. My best friend said, "Hey, we're trying out for football." I was tiny. I got demolished during tryouts and decided to quit. It's the only thing I've ever quit in my life. Because I tried out for football, I missed soccer tryouts. Someone suggested I try out for the play. I tried out for the *Hobbit*, made it and got hooked.

Q} What are your favorite places to go when you're back in the Chicago area?

Oh, I have a few. Garibaldi's is an absolute favorite. And I love Portillo's and Gene & Jude's, a hot dog place in River Grove. I'm mentioning a lot of hot dog places (laughs). But it's funny, they're so commonplace in Chicago, but when you're gone — they just don't make hot dogs like they do in Chicago.

Q&A RAPID FIRE

Favorite *Shrek* character besides *Shrek*?

The Three Little Pigs.

Favorite actor? Robin Williams.

Favorite music/band? The Avett Brothers.

They are kind of a bluegrass/punk band.

Favorite book? *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. I

have a friend working on a musical version now.

Best advice you've received? Try to say yes to

kind of everything. Obviously that has boundaries, but I try to look at the positive side of every opportunity. If you can help people and be a giving, positive person, that comes back around.

Q}With the fourth Shrek movie just opening, is it challenging to bring a character to life that movie audiences have watched for so many years and grown to love?

I think there are challenges because everyone is so familiar with the character. It's different than if the character is being created by you and the audience accepts that as who you present to them. The trick with Shrek is people come in with preconceived notions. I can't change him up and make him with a New York accent or something. Certain aspects of the character have to remain true. But the plus side is everyone does love Shrek and the story of Shrek. They are rooting for me from the get-go. It's such a great story. I think he is one of the best characters in modern fiction because he's so identifiable. We all see ourselves in some light as 'I'm not good enough, that everyone has expectations of me.' He talks about everyone 'just sees me as an ogre.' I think we all deal with that. You see people put you into a pigeon hole. The story shows you are more than that and can be a multi-fac-

eted person. Playing it has its challenges, but it's also great. It's such a well-written character.

Q}You were involved in college theatre at Bradley. Is that where you first got into acting or did your interest start earlier than that?

My freshman year of high school I was planning on playing soccer and that was my whole plan. I wasn't a great soccer player by any means. My best friend said, 'Hey we're trying out for football team.' I was tiny. I got demolished and destroyed during tryouts and decided to quite. It's the only thing I've ever quit in my life. Because I tried out for football I missed soccer tryouts. Someone suggested I try out for the play. I tried out for the *Hobbit*, made it and got hooked. I didn't seriously consider it as college major until a senior in high school. I was also involved with art and thought I might do something with that.

Q}Do you have any preshow rituals to get you ready to go on stage and calm any jitters?

I used to when I was younger. Now, I don't really. I warm up my voice and

stretch a little bit. I like to eat right before a show, which some people don't like to do.

Q}Your wife, Lisa Marie, is also an actor, and you have done some shows together at the Barn Theatre. How is it working/acting together?

It's great. That's where we met (Barn Theatre) in 2003. I love nothing more than working and then on top of that working with my wife. She's directed me; I've directed her; we've been in plays together. It's great because that's what we both love to do and when you're sharing it with someone you love, it's that much better.

Q}Your expecting your first child this month (July). How is it preparing for the Shrek show and a new baby?

It's very exciting. A lot of people are asking 'How are you doing this?' I'm seeing it as two exciting births of new things. We're having a girl. I'm so excited about my daughter being born, and I'm excited about playing Shrek. I'm not looking at it as stressful. We have lots of help in Chicago with my parents, aunts and uncles, and friends. – *Brittany Ashcroft*