
Stillwater native goes 'mad' in TV show

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STILLWATER - After palling around with Anne Hathaway in last year's "The Devil Wears Prada," Stillwater Area High School graduate Rich Sommer is again showing his acting chops on television in the critically acclaimed "Mad Men" an original series on American Movie Classics.

An Ohio native, Sommer moved to Stillwater when his was 8 years old, and became serious about acting at SAHS. In an interview with the Gazette last year, Sommer insisted he "wasn't one of those theater kids," though he became involved in improvisation comedy "back before improv was really cool."

He listed improvisation as his primary "hobby/study," and previously spent much of his time with the "Upright Citizens Brigade," an improv acting troupe in New York.

"I'm a bit of a nerd," Sommer said.

After graduating from SAHS in 1996, he attended Concordia College in Moorhead, majoring in theater. However, that decision was much to the chagrin of his father, who wanted Sommer to take a more pragmatic class load. But his dad came around after watching Sommer in a production of "Fiddler on the Roof" at Concordia. Since then, Sommer said his father has been supportive of his chosen profession.

"I lucked out in that I have a pretty realistic sense in what the opportunities are out there," he said of life as an actor. "Realistic in that it's an extremely difficult thing to obtain."

Sommer has spent most of his acting career on stage. Aside from "The Devil Wears Prada," he has several national commercials to his credit and has appeared in an episode of "Law & Order." Before then, Sommer performed and taught improvisation. In addition to his work with the Upright Citizens Brigade, he has performed at the Brave New Workshop in Minneapolis.

His theater experience includes roles in "Far Away," "A Lie of the Mind" and "Off the Map." Sommer received a master's degree in acting at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

The latest role on "Mad Men" is a far cry from his beginnings in his native Ohio, playing Johnny Tremain in a first grade play.

Like a true Stillwater guy, Sommer described his acting style as "Sam Shepherd-y," calling himself more representative than presentational.

"I tend toward the more natural," he said last year, "more toward representative of real life."

When "The Devil Wears Prada" hit screens last year Sommer said, "Hopefully, it's kind of a snowball effect," he said. "After (the movie) it's whatever comes up. That's the good/horrifying thing about this profession."

"Mad Men" airs Thursday nights on American Movie Classics.

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