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IT'S ALIVE!

Hunter Foster stars Off-Broadway in *Frankenstein*, a new musical that proves there's room for more than one monster in town

by Roger Maxwell

during the two and a half years that Hunter Foster was being Leo Bloom in the Broadway musical of Mel Brooks's *The Producers*, Brooks himself came to the show a couple of times.

Did he have anything to say? "Oh yeah, he gave me a few notes. He told me not to play the jokes so harsh."

Foster is now in another musical in which there are few, if any, jokes at all. It is *Frankenstein*—yes, that Frankenstein—at 37 Arts (on W. 37th, of all streets), not to be confused

much later caught up to the masterly 1931 James Whale/Boris Karloff film. "I also used to love *The Munsters* and *Dark Shadows*," he boyishly confesses.

Less boyishly, he talks about the novel he has indeed recently read, Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. "I don't want to criticize Mary Shelley, but it's a difficult book to get through. There's no actual creation of the monster in it, no lightning storms, none of that. Upon seeing what he's done, the terrified Victor Frankenstein runs to his bed, pulls the covers over his head, and when he emerges—whew!—the monster is gone. [He] has created this thing and doesn't want to take responsibility for it. But then again," says a reflective Foster, "that's what we do all the time in our own world, isn't it?—create monsters and pretend they aren't there. What monsters? Wars. Atomic bombs. Bin Laden was created by the CIA. We created Saddam Hussein. There you are. We do it all the time."

The stoic speaker of these thoughts once wanted to be a baseball player, of course. "But I wasn't good enough as a pitcher, so they put me in right field. This was in sixth grade. The Rec department gave instruction in soccer, football, tennis and, believe it or not, acting. My mother suggested I take acting." Twenty years later, a Tony nomination for his Seymour in *Little Shop of Horrors* would lead to a *Frankenstein* reading that would subsequently lead Hunter Foster, brother of actress Sutton Foster, husband of actress Jennifer Cody, to thunder and lightning, snow and ice, and a final frieze of Lesson Learned, six nights a week at the North Pole on West 37th Street. ♦



with *Young Frankenstein*, the big new Broadway musical crafted from another much-worshipped Mel Brooks movie. In *Frankenstein*—music by Mark Baron and book and lyrics by Jeffrey Jackson—the very healthy, All-American-looking Foster, at this offstage moment graced by a Nashville Guitars T-shirt, is gaunt, neurasthenic Victor Frankenstein, creator of a pieced-together creature who (or which), intended to help man- and womankind, instead terrifies them or otherwise does them to death (his own and Victor's not excluded).

"I'm such a fan of the *Young Frankenstein* movie—big time," says Foster who, born June 25, 1969, in Lumberton, North Carolina, started watching a TV Frankenstein series as a kid of five or six in Augusta, Georgia, and only



For more about Hunter Foster and *Frankenstein*, listen to our podcast at PlaybillRadio.com

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