



# liquid dreams

// Photographed by JOSEPH CULTICE  
// Produced by JOSEF SIEGLE

Talk about diving in: Stage novice **Chris Kattan** makes his debut on Broadway in *The Frogs*, the summer's most prestigious project. Will he sink or swim?



**WEBBED FEAT**

Kattan twirls around in an orange suit, \$845, by D&G (212-965-8000). Shirt, \$90, by Abercrombie & Fitch. His fellow *Frogs* cast members (from left) Naomi Kakuk, Joanna Manning, Mia Price and Jessica Howard keep their poker faces in swimsuits, \$170-\$185, by Norma Kamali (800-8KAMALI). Manning and Howard's shoes by Stuart Weitzman, \$225 to \$265. Necktie, belt and earrings by Erickson Beamon, available at Showroom Seven (212-643-4810).

Styled by Eric Niemand. Grooming by Melanie Harris. Ladies' hair by Davlen Edwards. Makeup by Angela Di Carlo. Props styled by James Masterburg.

By Erik Jackson

The secret's out: Former *Saturday Night Live* star Chris Kattan owes all his success to a unique pre-performance ritual. "I light fifty candles around me and lie naked and watch *The Golden Girls* for an hour," he reveals solemnly. After spending just a few minutes with Kattan, only one part of that sentence sounds implausible: He doesn't seem capable of sitting still for a single commercial, much less 60 minutes of *Golden* oldies. The nudity and the candles? Sure.

Abandon all hope, ye who want a serious answer from Kattan, who's making his first foray on the legit stage in Lincoln Center's high-profile production of Stephen Sondheim's *The Frogs*. Still, it doesn't take a shrink to figure that Kattan's yuk-yuk sidesteps might just be a case of nerves; after all, this theater tyro is testing the waters alongside three of the genre's giants: composer Sondheim, co-star Nathan Lane (who has also rewritten the book) and Tony-winning director/choreographer Susan Stroman (*The Producers*).

At the **Show People** photo shoot, the wary actor once dubbed "the thinking man's moron" is mugging impressively. Between setups, however, he's solicitous and shy—just not about picking his nose, which he does absentmindedly during our interview. Perhaps that's not so odd when you consider that his most famous *SNL* characters exhibit a similar—though freakishly exaggerated—combo of the endearing and the inappropriate. Take, for instance, the half-man/half-monkey Mr. Peepers, who humped and spat apples on Charlize Theron. Or Mango, the inexplicably alluring hetero male stripper who made straight studs like David Duchovny and Samuel L. Jackson go mad with lust.

But will audiences experience a similar rapture when Kattan, 33, steps onstage in *The Frogs*, playing Xanthias, a surly servant to Lane's Dionysos? Luckily for him, show geeks are already drooling over the musical itself. *The Frogs* was briefly staged in 1974 with a cast of nearly 70 green-mesh-and-jockstrap-clad actors in the Yale University pool. (Adding to the show's legend, such then-unknowns as Meryl Streep, Sigourney Weaver



and playwright Christopher Durang were in the chorus.) In the 40-minute work, Sondheim and original bookwriter Burt Shevelove (*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*) did for the Greek playwright Aristophanes what *Forum* did for the Roman scribe Plautus, updating the 405 B.C. comedy with a similar burlesque spirit. For this production, Lane is expanding the book to two acts, and Sondheim has written six new songs.

The plot of the 30-year-old tuner sounds even more relevant today. After a catastrophe on the earth, the people cannot be consoled by the political leaders. "So Dionysos, who is the god of drama and wine, decides he needs to bring back a poet [from the Underworld] to help ease their hearts," says Stroman. Sounds gloomy, but the director envisions this trip as a *Road to Mandalay*, with Lane and Kattan as a Greek Hope and Crosby. Besides, Sondheim rhymes "art" with "fart." "It's definitely a mix of highbrow and silly comedy," Kattan says.

It's a mix he knows well. In 1973, when Kattan was three, his mother divorced his father, a member of the influential L.A. comedy troupe the Groundlings. She and her new husband moved with Chris to Mount Baldy, a spiritual retreat north of Hollywood, and immersed themselves in Zen study. On weekends in L.A., the young Kattan would soak in his dad's stand-up; during the week in Mount Baldy, he found himself taking walks with the writer Carlos Casteneda. Still, it was a mostly solitary youth. "When you don't have a lot of kids to play with," he has said, "there's not much else to do but climb trees and see what happens when you fall."

In 1985, in the middle of his freshman year in high school, Kattan's family moved to Bainbridge Island, Washington. The new kid in town won over his classmates with daring impressions of teachers. (His hijinks have staying power: Years later, the local paper referred to Kattan's "controversial codpiece caper" without having to provide any additional details.) When he joined a kids theater company across Puget Sound in Seattle, he got his first taste of Sondheim, acting in a question-



#### TALENT POOL

The ganny comic gets caught in the net of four ocean-ready leggy favorites. Shirt, \$185, and jacket, \$850, both by Calvin Klein, available at Calvin Klein Dallas. Pants, \$145, by DKNY, available at Macy's. Sneakers by Marc Jacobs (price upon request). Kakuk and Manning's swimsuits, about \$200, by D&G. Shoes by Stuart Weitzman. Jewelry by Erickson Beamon. Howard's swimdress, \$134, and Price's tankini, \$225, both by Paul & Joe ([www.paulandjoe.com](http://www.paulandjoe.com)). Shoes, about \$540, by Sergio Rossi, available at Sergio Rossi Honolulu. Cuff, \$860, by Robert Lee Morris (212-431-9405). Other jewelry by Fragments ([www.fragments.com](http://www.fragments.com)).



**THE BEAUTY PART**

Amphibious chorines can stay glamorous with Heat Lip Lacquer, Fuschia Lip Mix, Black-Tied, Pink Venus and Jewel Blue eye shadow; Coppertone Blush; Cultured Lip Gloss; Stiletto Liquid Liner; Black Fiber Lash Mascara; and Fast Response Eye Cream. All products by MAC.





**FASHION  
FIXTURE**

Kattan hangs out in a jacket, \$1,180, and pants, \$750, by Louis Vuitton (866-VUITTON). Dress shirt, \$275, by Dolce & Gabbana, available at Saks Fifth Avenue. Swimsuit, \$200, by Norma Kamali. Shoes by Sergio Rossi. Choker and cuff, both \$2,995, by Robert Lee Morris (212-431-9405).

ably conceptualized *West Side Story*. "We set it after the apocalypse, and we wore chains and whips and everything on the set was blown up," he says, giggling. "Imagine Officer Krupke never being seen; instead he's just a voice through a TV, like 1984's Big Brother."

After high school, Kattan followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Groundlings. Five years later, in 1995, *SNL* came calling. Kattan's Jerry Lewis-esque turns grabbed attention and the inevitable big-screen spinoff ensued: *A Night at the Roxbury*, featuring Kattan and Will Ferrell as head-bobbing geeks desperate to get into L.A.'s trendiest club. That led to roles in equally ignored flicks like *Lucky Numbers* and *Corky Romano*.

So perhaps it's not surprising that Kattan has turned his attention once again to performing live; director Stroman thinks he's wisely playing to his strengths. "Chris is used to working in front of a live audience. That's why comics fair better in theatrical ventures than, say, TV stars or movie stars," she says. "They are able to surf an audience: They know how to ride the laugh, and they know how far to let it go down before they deliver the next line." But with the mercurial Nathan Lane as his partner, the gauntlet has definitely been thrown down. Can Kattan hold his own? "His improvisational skills are extraordinary," says Stroman, but, she adds, "he is going to have to be disciplined, and be disciplined every night for two hours."

In fact, two hours into the photo shoot, Kattan isn't squirming quite as much in his chair. The actor is discussing the voice and dance lessons he's been taking. He hasn't cracked wise for, like, a minute or two. Relatively speaking, the mood suddenly seems very serious and one can't help wondering if this face-pulling, nose-picking joker just might be the Broadway musical's next big thing. Kattan responds as if it's a no-brainer. "I'm a triple threat," he proclaims. One expert beat later he adds, "to myself."

*The Frogs* begins June 22 at the Vivian Beaumont Theater (150 West 65th Street, New York City; 212-239-6200).



**CHEST IN  
SHOW**

Kattan has a ball with Price, as Manning rides a wave. Tuxedo jacket, \$1,220; pants, \$950; and shirt, \$340; all by Marc Jacobs. Bikinis, \$182 and \$235, by Moschino, available at Neiman Marcus. Ladies' shoes, about \$520, by Christian Louboutin, available at Saks Fifth Avenue. Price's cuff, \$660, by Robert Lee Morris. Necklaces by Erickson Beamon. Ladies' sunglasses by Gucci.