

BRONX NEWS

35¢

Playwright relates the Italian-American experience

By Daniel Gesslein

Frank Ingrassiotta hears over 30 voices in his head and they all speak Italian. Ingrassiotta's one-man play "Blood Type: RAGU" is a comically bittersweet performance relaying his story as a first generation Italian-American adjusting to life in New York while at the same time balancing his immigrant parent's way of life.

Since he was working as a stage manager in the off-Broadway production of "Godspell" 20 years ago, Ingrassiotta has been struggling as an actor and now is poised to have it all pay off. His play has been running for four months at the Belmont Playhouse on Arthur Avenue and NBC could pick up the work as a possible sitcom.

Ingrassiotta has appeared in the soap opera Guiding Light and continues to have a recurring role on One Life to Live. He has directed several plays, including a production of "Guys and Dolls" starring firefighters and actors which raised \$20,000 for the NY Burn Center.

When he is not performing, Ingrassiotta is teaching playwriting and acting to students from second grade to high school in city public schools which he calls both challenging and rewarding.

"There is a sore need for the arts to be restored in the schools."

After being fired from a law firm, which he saw as a lucky break, Ingrassiotta redevoted himself to the theater and began writing his play. "Blood Type: RAGU" is based on his life as a child of Italian immigrants. Of the 32 characters in the play, Ingrassiotta plays his parents, brother, sister, uncles, aunts, nuns and many more.

Growing up, Ingrassiotta had to act as a translator most of the time for his parents to get through life in this country. During parent-teacher conferences, he would relate what the teacher was saying to his parents, of course it was altered to make him look like a great student. Ingrassiotta also had to keep the parents' customs and the way they acted from his friends when they would visit for fear that they would be viewed as different.

"You have one life in your outside world and another at home."

Such themes are not just indicative to Italian-Americans but to children of immigrants from any country who have to walk the line between the world of their parents and the one in their new county.

"It's a story about family and coming to terms with who you are," he said of his play.

On May 2, Ingrassiotta will tape a performance of an act from his play for NBC executives to see whether they want to develop the production into a show for their network. Even if that does not work out, the playwright hopes his "Blood Type: RAGU" will end up off-Broadway.

Ingrassiotta said his play veers away from the stereotypes and instead focuses on the expressions, feelings and viewpoints of Italian-Americans which he thought would be the hardest audience to win over. However, not only have Italian-Americans embraced the play but Ingrassiotta said some have even talked openly during the performance. "I'm having a *deja vu*," he said he heard one man state during a performance.



Playwright Frank Ingrassiotta

"It puts a mirror up to the culture," Ingrassiotta said about the play.

To order tickets call the Belmont Playhouse at 718-364-4700.

"A comedian and actor of ability and heart, Frank Giano Ingrassiotta invites us to witness and hear the stories of his Italian-American upbringing. He is adept at portraying the dozens of family members and neighborhood eccentrics that colored his youth. He speaks honestly about the eloquent conclusions he's drawn from his experiences . . ." **BACKSTAGE**

"... a plangent, detailed chart of post-peasant navigations" - THE VILLAGE VOICE