

# Profile: Giancarlo Esposito



Giancarlo Esposito and Alvin Alexis

Twenty-two year old Giancarlo Esposito, star of the Negro Ensemble Company's original play "Zooman and the Sign" has reached an important milestone in his career. The role of Zooman (for which he has received rave reviews from new york critics) heralds his first dramatic role.

Throughout his show business career, which began at the age of nine, Giancarlo had always been cast in musicals. In 1968, he launched his career in the Broadway musical "Maggie Flynn" with Shirley Jones and Jack Cassidy. Giancarlo's initial effort proved so successful that he consistently worked in Broadway musicals for the next five years.

During this time, he performed in a number of plays which included, "The Me Nobody Knows"; "Lost in the Stars" with Brock Peters; "Seesaw" and "Miss Moffett" with Bette Davis.

Giancarlo states, "This was a wonderful time for me. From the age of nine to sixteen I never stopped working. Going from one show to another my energy just kept growing and growing."

"Then I went to California for a while. I did my club act. I also found out how rough it is in California. People in the business told me not to go out there unless I had some work. Well, I had some work but it wasn't enough. But I stayed there for a year and a half, working odd jobs and pushing to get my name around."

Giancarlo's odd jobs ranged from restaurant work at Kelly's Steak House to hustling shopping carts for stamps that he cashed in for food.

"Man, I'm telling you," Giancarlo chuckles, "that was the lowest ebb."

He eventually decided to come back to New York and complete his high school education. After returning to New York, Giancarlo did some occasional film work but the theatre just wasn't happening for him.

"I was sixteen which was considered in between ages. I didn't look young enough to play ten anymore. Yet, I didn't look old enough to play the eighteen to twenty year old parts. Consequently, I didn't work in theatre for a while."

To sustain himself, Giancarlo worked at a Westchester, New York dinner theatre in practically every capacity from the kitchen to head waiter to manager. After he had been manager for a year he was asked to do a part in one of the theatre's plays, the musical "South Pacific".

Although this experience was somewhat rewarding, Giancarlo still yearned to be back on Broadway. However, he was patient and decided to take advantage of that time by going back to school. He attended Seton College and received an Associate Degree in Communications. Along the way, he obtained an FCC third class license, had his own radio show for a while and even directed and played in a musical variety show with some of the other students. He also studied jazz piano and dance.

The turning point in Giancarlo's career came about this past summer when he decided to get into a straight play. He studied with the Actor's Institute and also began to think about the Negro Ensemble Company.

Giancarlo Reflects, "A few people that I knew who had worked with the NEC encouraged me to go up there. I sort of forgot about it until I saw a

notice in the trade papers for open interviews at NEC. I took my picture and went up there."

When Giancarlo arrived, he recognized the stage manager, Clinton Davis from the play "The Me Nobody Knows". Davis, however was not involved with casting so he could not assist Giancarlo in getting a part. After a few months, Giancarlo was asked to come to NEC and read for an upcoming production. He was elated.

He met Douglas Turner Ward and read for him. Giancarlo was called back four times to discuss interpretation of the role with Ward. Giancarlo felt that even if he didn't get the part the time that Douglas Turner Ward spent with him was an invaluable experience. On his fourth call back, Giancarlo was told that the NEC would contact him to let him know whether or not he would get the role. He gave them his number at a health food restaurant that he managed and went back to work.

"An hour later," Giancarlo relates, "I got a call from the stage manager saying that rehearsals start tomorrow and that I was Zooman. I was ecstatic."

Giancarlo credits his mother with getting him into show business. His interest began one day while watching a television commercial with his mother and brother. He and his brother felt that they could do commercials so they asked their mother, former opera star Alisa Foster, to introduce them to somebody who could help.

He reflects, "My mother took us to a manager—Ernestine McKinley and a few days later we were called to audition for a Broadway play. After the audition my brother and I were accepted. We were in Shock."

"After doing two shows, my brother Vincent Esposito turned to the violin and is still playing professionally." Says Giancarlo.

The role of Zooman represents a broad departure from Giancarlo's previous roles. Zooman is a tough, street-wise, violent kid who conjures anxious emotions of fear just by telling you what he did that day.

When asked how much of the Zooman character is in him Giancarlo states, "There is some Zooman in all of us. That is what I have to draw out of myself each night that I play the role. Before a show, I shut myself up in the bathroom and begin to assume the feelings and thoughts of Zooman."

In developing the character, Giancarlo said that he used street people as prototypes, especially on the subways.

He reveals, "I saw a lot of Zoomans out there. They didn't have to be loud and obnoxious. You can see it in their eyes—in their faces. They are out there