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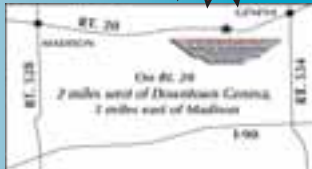
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Cousin Oliver



By Helen Marketti

Many will recognize Robbie Rist in his role as Cousin Oliver on the later episodes of television sitcom, The Brady Bunch. This is only a small fraction of what he has accomplished within the Hollywood industry. Robbie has been involved in entertainment for his entire life.

"I was one of those kids who would put on plays for my dog. I was a born show off," said Robbie. "At some point, I became enamored with the 1930s Universal horror films like Frankenstein, The Mummy and Wolfman. I liked all of those kinds of films. For some reason, I felt I could identify with the Wolfman (laughs) which is kind of crazy for a little kid to get into."

"I finally told my parents that I wanted to be in a horror movie and then it became that I wanted to be in any movie. My parents didn't think I was serious but then I became such a pain in the ass that they finally agreed to take me on an audition. They figured I would become bored with the whole thing but to their surprise I liked it and started getting hired!"

Before landing the role as Cousin Oliver on The Brady Bunch, Robbie had already racked up an impressive resume with acting roles. "I already had done a lot of work by the time I got on the show," he said. "I had worked with Jonathan Winters, John Denver and Mickey Rooney at that point. Before I

got the role as Cousin Oliver, I already had something like 100 commercials under my belt. I have worked with some great television icons like Lorne Greene, Dick Van Patten and David White. (David White played Larry Tate on Bewitched.) I've worked with Paul Lynde who was a comedy genius. To me, he owned TV during the 60s and 70s. Back then, that's when people "looked real" on television. By today's standards, everyone is obsessed with looks and now we just sit around and look at "cute people" on TV. I think our culture has really taken a nose dive."

Robbie continues, "Television is a fantasy land. Each generation had their look and style but when I think of the 90s, what did the 90s look like anyway? It seemed people threw up their hands and ran out of ideas. The 80s were the last generation, in my opinion, that no one cared what they looked like. Now, it seems this hipster culture has hijacked everyone and there's more focus on how someone looks and how cool they are."

In addition to acting, Robbie has done a slew of voice over work. His voice can be heard saying, "Cowabunga Dude!" for Michelangelo of The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. "Yeah that's me," said Robbie. "Apparently, I'm everyone's favorite turtle."



Robbie is thankful that many of the roles he has played have left a lasting impression. "I've been very fortunate to have been involved with many things in movies and television that kind of crawled into people's bloodstreams and stayed there," said Robbie.

"I still get recognized to this day by people on the street. They always remember me as Cousin Oliver on The Brady Bunch. Good God, I am almost fifty years old! I didn't think I looked the same but to many people, I guess I still do."

"I always saw acting as a job so I never got that close or friendly with the other actors I worked with. I found most of my friends when I became involved with music. As far as other actors go, I still keep in touch with Susan

Olsen. (Cindy Brady from The Brady Bunch). She is really cool and we are in touch with some frequency. I'm also friends with Brad



Savage and that's really about it."

Robbie has definite thoughts when talking about childhood actors who have gone off the beaten path of life and took a wrong turn. "I think it goes back to their parents. Every time you hear about a child actor that has gone wrong, just follow their career line backwards to their parents. Most of the time, you will see exactly why that happened," he said. "I've seen it so many times. One of the things I do is that of an "Entertainment Consultant" for young people who want to get into the busi-

ness. So, I will meet with the kids and their parents. One of the first things I ask the kids is if they really are interested in pursuing this

type of career. I want to hear from the kids themselves, not their parents. If the parents are making the kids be there, then that's a completely different story. Sometimes the parents are living vicariously through them. Parent-

ing, parenting, parenting! If you can't count on your own parents to look out for you in this business, whom can you count on? It's usually because of the parents when a kid goes wrong. My mom had the reputation of always looking out for me and being a complete pain in the ass to others. (laughs) She didn't take any crap from directors either. If they wanted to do a scene over and over, she would eventually put her foot down and say that was enough. She kept a look out for me which was great!"

These days, Robbie is involved with many

projects and one of them is that of being a musician. "I have a pretty heavy duty Cleveland connection," he said. "I played with Paul Pope for several years. Some of the best summers of my life, I have spent in Cleveland. I remember spending a lot of time in The Flats. Paul and I were doing stuff like Green Day five years before bands like those were even heard of. Two thumbs up for Cleveland, a lot of great times and great memories."

"I play a lot of instruments and play them well. Right now, I'm going through a romance with bass guitar. My music influences are all over the place. I have always liked the 70s, AM radio and "new wave". I like Elvis Costello and Queen. When I was 14, I saw The Knack about six months before they were signed. I had never seen a band play live before and thought they were so cool. I've always been a "poppy" kind of guy," said Robbie.

"I'm in a ton of bands right now. They don't all play or tour at the same time, so I can play with different ones. I play everything from country to punk. I produce bands, too. Good songs have to affect you in some way. I think songwriters work within themes. Usually, I have to be kind of irritated to start writing a song."

Robbie is involved with a cartoon for chil-

dren that will be coming out on the Disney Junior channel in February of 2012. "I'm really excited about this," said Robbie. "It's called, Doc McStuffins. It's about a little girl who is a doctor for toys and the maladies that the toys have are also things a child could have. It tries to show kids not to be afraid of going to the doctor. It gives kids something to identify with. I'm the voice of a stuffed dragon, called Stuff. It's really cute and funny."

Robbie has been in many different facets of the industry for his entire life and has learned many great lessons along the way. He shares some advice for anyone who wants to pursue a creative career in the arts. "Don't do it because you want to get rich. Being an artist of any kind is like being an astronaut, you'll be free falling sometimes and as long as you understand and accept that, you'll be OK...and don't work for free."

Robbie Rist is on Facebook.

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