

Hereafter

Musical

[ABOUT](#) [ARCHIVE](#) [RANDOM](#) [RSS](#) [SEARCH](#) [TWITTER](#)

1ST DEC 2009

INSPIRED BY DEATH



“INSPIRED BY DEATH”

By Diane Carlton - The Monmouth Journal

LINCROFT — At the age of 50, Vinnie Favale is becoming a modern day Renaissance Man. The Vice President of CBS Late Night Programming, and a resident here, describes himself as “a television person through and through” who counts Howard Stern and David

Letterman as two of his colleagues and comedic icons but also declares himself a “ridiculous fan of musicals.” His passionate and lifelong pursuit of all things music has led him to a creative turning point in which he boldly admits, “I have no idea what I’m doing.” The former Comedy Central executive who currently oversees comedic programming. That includes Late Night with David Letterman, is about to explore his inner Broadway, debuting a five-year, musical project inspired by, of all things, death. Acknowledging his paradoxical leap of faith, Favale said, “The irony of this is that my whole (professional) life has been in comedy.” <!-- more --> “Hereafter” is an original musical drama that Favale will be work shopping on Sunday, Dec. 20 at the Ranney School’s Panther Hall Auditorium in Tinton Falls.

Set as a group reading in the home of world-renowned medium Jason Richards, “Hereafter” depicts the lives of four people and the spirits they are trying to make contact with who have unknowingly been brought together one fateful afternoon. In a production that’s part “A Chorus Line” meets “Rent,” the audience is introduced to its characters — both living and departed — that are stuck at a crossroads and desperate to make contact with their loved ones one last time.

“Hereafter” is a marriage of Favale’s passion for music — “the one constant in my life,” he said — and the age-old search for answers of the eternal unknown. One of five children raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., Favale’s oldest and youngest brothers died less than two years apart when he was in his teens. Youngest brother Frankie Favale, then age 7, died in a tragic accident while the family was vacationing in Italy. The oldest Favale brother, Johnny, then 24, was not with the family in Italy and comforted his family on their return. Johnny made the funeral arrangements and “became everything” to Vinnie. Two years later, Johnny died of cancer. Watching the toll such tragedy took on his family and their enduring strength in the years that followed, he said, “You try to get through it and eventually — you hope — death takes a holiday.” Years later, Favale’s mother-in-law died and with a more mature perspective on life, he began to explore “new age” philosophies and referenced books on a quest to discover “what happens when you die.”

But it was not until nearly 10 years later when the now Lincroft resident read in a local paper about the death of Dennis J. “DJ” Wheeler in 2003 who was killed at the age of 18 in a one-car accident in which he was the passenger. Though Favale never knew Wheeler he said, “It hit me in a strong way,” said Favale. Having experienced similar loss, Favale said the pain was “palpable” when he passed the roadside shrine on Middletown-Lincroft Road one week later, seeing the skid marks left behind and the tree that marked the spot. Bringing back memories of his own loss, Favale wrote the lyrics to a song he called “Nineteen,” which he said was not necessarily about Wheeler, but a story penned from his own viewpoint had he died at that age. Favale said, “If you write it right, it’s about everybody.” Though he never played an instrument and had only toyed with the idea of writing music in the past, Favale said he never had a desire to be anything but the “ultimate consumer” and fan of music and used it as an escape — listening, appreciating, and dissecting music his entire life, even asking himself, “Why am I so moved by this chord?” So when he sang his ideas for “Nineteen” to friends who could translate and transcribe it to music, Favale said, “It turned out beautiful.”

Commuting nearly three hours each day from his Lincroft home to and from his job at CBS — and his regular appearances on the Howard Stern Show (“Vinnie” from CBS for the regular listeners) — Favale recognized that to showcase his music today it needs to be presented in musical theater. Creating characters with different levels of loss and faith, Favale wrote generic song titles which developed into a full-blown musical theater project in two years. Describing the unlikely venture that took on a life of its own, Favale said, “It’s almost like I’m channeling the show — like I’m possessed.” Focusing mostly on music and lyrics to support his inspiration, Favale compared his project to the psychic medium that centers his ensemble creation. “I could conjure up a melody — I can’t even tell you what comes first: music or lyrics — it takes talent around me to make it come to life,” he said. And that talent entered his world in the form of writing and producing partner Frankie Keane, of Weehawken. Looking for a singer for what Favale calls “a pilot for a musical,” Favale and Keane made a connection through the death of her mother when she was a young girl and — comparing her to Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys or the writing talents of The Beatles — feels their talents are destined to be together. “I’ve got gold in this person,” Favale said. “Frankie is my musical soul mate.” An accomplished singer/actress/songwriter herself, Keane soon became a writing partner on the show’s book, a co-producer with Favale on the soundtrack, and has written all of the vocal arrangements helping the songs take on new life. Now completing the third draft, the two will continue work shopping “Hereafter” in 2010 and hope to bring the concert setting showcase, like that of this week’s Ranney performance, to as many people as possible. Immersed in the television world, Favale inevitably turns his current passion into an analogy from a current popular television show — “Glee.” A cutting comedy about the underdog in all of us, Favale compares himself to the show’s hero — a staid high school Spanish teacher who takes on directing the school’s Glee Club in hopes of former glory. Practically giddy with enthusiasm while discussing his musical project, Favale references the show’s hero and says, “I’m that guy.”

Ticket information for Sunday’s show and video clips from “Hereafter” can be viewed at www.hereaftermusical.com. The performance takes place at 8 p.m. Dec. 20 at The Ranney School Panther Auditorium 235 Hope Road in Tinton Falls.