

Zach Braff

Our favorite funny man doctor chats about filming in New Jersey again and what he loves about the Oranges

BY KATHLEEN N. WEBBER

Watching your dad, a trial lawyer, moonlight in community theater is one way to inspire your creative side, but when you're 18 and you get to see Woody Allen and Diane Keaton improvise a scene right before your eyes, that just might be thespian nirvana. Zach Braff played Keaton and Allen's son in *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993), and then went on to study film at Northwestern University in Illinois, where he penned the script for *Garden State* (2004). His role as Dr. J.D. Dorian on *Scrubs*, which debuted in 2001, gave him the clout to have the indie film made. He directed it, starred, and even handpicked songs for the compilation soundtrack album, which won a Grammy. Braff is not done performing in his native state. Here he talks about the new South Orange Performing Arts Center (he sits on its advisory board), movies he's got in the works, and his best buddy, Roscoe.



What are you working on now?

I am going to be directing a movie called *Open Hearts*. It's an adaptation of a Danish movie. It's about a guy who is in a car accident and is paralyzed from the waist down, and how that changes his life. I want to film it in northern New Jersey because I know the area; I had such great luck with the New Jersey film commission when I did *Garden State*.

Are there any movies you're starring in?

I'm in a movie called *The Ex* [which came out March 7]. I play a married guy whose wife (Amanda Peet) has always been the breadwinner, and she comes home one night and says she wants to stay home and be a mother. I go back to work for my father-in-law's (Charles Grodin) New Age-y ad agency in Ohio, and there I meet Jason Bateman. He has won all kinds of ad awards, he is in a wheelchair, and he has a crush on my wife from back in high school. It is a very funny movie.

Do you like acting or directing better?

I prefer directing. Both have their challenges. In directing you have to be a bit of an actor, writer, and photographer. It's a bit of a mind puzzle. Plus, I like being the boss.

Tell us about South Orange and your involvement in its new arts center, SOPAC.

South Orange is enjoying a boom right now. It really is the ultimate place to live. You're 25 minutes from Manhattan, South Mountain Reservation is nearby, the arts are great, and it has great old architecture like the beautiful Victorians. SOPAC is amazing. They've already brought in incredible musicians to play. Clearview Cinemas has promised to keep a couple of screens open for art and independent films — which is so important. I would like to eventually do something there.

When is your filming season for *Scrubs*?

Well, you pretty much sign over seven months of your year to filming. We start working at noon and go 12 to 18 hours a day. I bring my dog Roscoe to the set. So many of the other actors have dogs, and they let them all run around.

Which places do you have to visit when you come home?

I take Roscoe to the South Mountain Reservation for walks. I go to Bagel Chateau in Maplewood for breakfast, Pal's Cabin in West Orange for their mushroom soup, and cheese steaks at Campus Sub in South Orange.

