



Austin Pendleton Biography

***Gus Falk* in “RAISING FLAGG”**

You’ve seen his face in over 70 motion picture and television movies, yet his name remains relatively obscure. *The Dallas Morning News* once admirably observed of Austin Pendleton, “he

takes on roles that would bruise the ego of a thinner-skinned actor” – among them, the “wimpy sad-sack who Barbra Streisand breaks dates with in ‘The Mirror Has Two Faces,’ and the incompetent, stuttering public defender in ‘My Cousin Vinny’.”

As Gus Falk, Flagg’s oldest friend in “Raising Flagg,” Pendleton gives one of his finest screen performances in a career studded with memorable characterizations. Flagg and Gus have been competing at one kind of game or another since childhood, but their feisty relationship finally erupts over something as simple as where Gus’ sheep decide to graze – driving Flagg into a frenzy that gets him the justice he wants, but at a price he isn’t prepared to pay.

“Raising Flagg” marks a reunion for Pendleton and Arkin, who first worked together over 30 years ago on stage in New York. “I’d never say no to Alan Arkin,” Pendleton says of his decision to take the role of Gus. “It’s the fourth or fifth thing I’ve worked with him. He’s one of the great artists – it would be insane to turn it down.

There are certain artists you just want to work with. You have to turn yourself over to the others: to the director, to the actors. Neal Miller [‘Raising Flagg’s’ director] is terrific with actors. He helps you do your work gently; he allows you to find your own way.”

Though best known outside of New York as a character actor in film and television, Pendleton is a major presence in theater as a performer, Tony-nominated director and playwright.

On Broadway alone, he has starred in eight plays and musicals, and directed another five productions that have claimed 10 Tony nominations to date – including the widely-acclaimed revival of “The Little Foxes” with Elizabeth Taylor.

Always busy, Pendleton recently directed the off-Broadway debut of “Raising Flagg” co-star Barbara Dana’s first play, “War in Paramus,” starring Matthew Arkin.

The son of a tool company executive and a community theater actress, Pendleton grew up in Warren, Ohio, with a stutter until well into his 20s. Yet he was determined to act. Indeed, he made his New York stage debut, in 1962, as a stuttering young man in the original Broadway cast of “Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama’s Hung You in the Closet and I’m Feeling Sad”, directed by the legendary Jerome Robbins. Two years later, Robbins cast him in the hugely-successful musical, “Fiddler on the Roof,” and Pendleton’s career was off and running.

In 1970, Pendleton starred in “The Last Sweet Days of Isaac” – for which he received the New York Drama Critics Award, the Outer Circle Critics Award and the “Variety” Pool of Critics Award for best male performance of the year.

His many other stage appearances include the 1967 Broadway revival of “The Little Foxes,” directed by Mike Nichols, and in 1988, “The Diary of Ann Frank” with Linda Lavin and Natalie Portman – which received two Tony Award nominations for Best Revival of a Play.

Few outside New York and Chicago (where he has been a member of the Steppenwolf Theater Company since 1979) are aware of Pendleton’s stature as a leading stage director. On Broadway, his artistic direction has been keenly critical for the musical, “Shelter” in 1973; “Goodtime Charley” with Joel Grey and Ann Reinking in 1975; “John Gabriel Borkman” with E. G. Marshall at Circle in the Square in 1980; “The Little Foxes” with Elizabeth Taylor and Maureen Stapleton in 1981; and “Spoils of War” with Kate Nelligan in 1988.

Pendleton has also worked as a stage director throughout the U.S., including the Kennedy Center and the Williamstown Theatre Festival, where he got his start as an actor.

Although Pendleton didn’t take up playwriting until the age of 50, he has produced three major works to date. The latest, “Orson’s Shadow,” opened to strong

reviews in New York in April 2005. The play was inspired by the real-life clash of egos between Orson Welles and Sir Laurence Olivier during the staging of a play in 1960 that Welles directed. While Pendleton had never met Olivier, he worked with Welles on the set of “Catch-22” in 1970.