

Written by Kyley Warren

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People respond most to authenticity. And as a performer, your perhaps greatest tool is your ability to sincerely connect with an audience in a way that moves them emotionally, inspires a charge to a cause or encourages them to reassess their perceptions of something.

It's a feat that even some of Hollywood's greatest actors and actresses have failed to achieve. The sure sign of a performer whose art is centered on transparent connectivity is the proof that their career can flawlessly span decades. The reality is that if an audience loved you once, they'll continue to love your progression as a performer.

For no one is this truer than Peter Scolari.

After reoccurring roles throughout the 80's and 90's in TV sitcoms like "Bosom Buddies" and "Newhart," Scolari grew especially comfortable with theatrical productions. Over the course of his career, he's starred in massive Broadway hits like "Wicked" and "Hairspray," and has found a sense of freedom in the character resurrection and redemption that is offered through stage performances.

Arguably, Scolari's most career-defining break came with his pivotal role in HBO's pop culture phenomenon, "Girls." He played the role of Lena Dunham's queer and often-conflicted father, and his stunning work ultimately led to him earning an Emmy for Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series.

Scolari's versatility as a performer has allowed him to garner an eclectic range of acting credentials, as well as an unparalleled career in every realm of the entertainment industry, from film to television to theater, and everything else in between.

This fall, Scolari will embody the beloved character of Don Quixote in "Man of La Mancha," a musical adaptation based off of the 1959 teleplay, "I, Don Quixote." While it will be his first time working with the Scottsdale Musical Theater Company, he's certainly no stranger to life on the stage.

As he prepares for this next role, Scolari chatted with us about Broadway, his proudest work, and how former co-stars-turned-friends Bob Newhart and Tom Hanks still inspire him to this day.

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**Arizona Foothills Magazine:** After stints on Broadway, performing in shows like "Hairspray," and "Wicked," you're now tackling a role in the production of "Man of La Mancha." What was it that attracted you to this part? And given the historical context and relevance of the story, did you happen to have a personal connection to the character before signing on?

**Peter Scolari:** No—I mean I'd seen it, but I was a very young man, many years ago. I was very taken with it. And in regard to what attracted me to the role, it's nothing more or less than the artistic director of the company, David Hock. He reached out to me and asked me to do it. The summer months are notoriously slow for many of us, unless you're in a play already in New York or working television and film. I had to put aside some things in order to do this, but I thought the challenge might really make it worth my while.

**AFM:** What first draws you to a role: the character, the script or the people that you'll be working with?

**PS:** Well, I think perhaps the most honest answer is that you really do vet your prospective employers. Whose putting this ambitious thing

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together? Of course, there's two pieces to it, because I'd like to pull off a role, and also see what kind of theater company this is. What kind of history? What kind of subscription audience do they pull in? Is it a theater that does good business?

I knew nothing about Scottsdale and the theater, but my agent said that these guys are just fantastic, and this guy, David Hock, is a real artist. He's also not just the artistic director of the company, but he's also going to be directing it. We've sat down together in New York already, and we had the chance to talk about the play and the music. So, it certainly is an incredible company.

**AFM:** Peter, you're such a versatile performer, with experience working in film, television and theater. As an actor, I imagine that all of these mediums require something a little bit different from you in each role. With that, how does your prep process for a character differ from job to job?

**PS:** A lot of the protocols that come into play for me remain the same. I prepare the material, and some actors can manage to walk onto set with their script. I can't do that [LAUGHS]. Things get very physical for me, very fast. The rhythm of my movement and my gate—I can't do that with a script in my hand. So, I've learned the script...I'm back with a singing coach that I'm very fond of, and together we're working on the music. We have eight or nine days of rehearsal in Scottsdale, followed by 10 performances over the course of a couple weeks, but I'm putting in twice as much time long before I get there.

**AFM:** You have such a diverse collection of TV credits under your belt, with roles in shows like "Bosom Buddies" and "Girls," which even earned you an Outstanding Guest Actor Emmy Award in a Comedy Series. But is there a particular project that you were really proud of and that you wish more people would have seen?

**PS:** In terms of the musical theater world, 20 or more years ago I did a musical called "Stop the World, I Wanna Get Off," which was filmed for this somewhat new Broadway series on Showtime, which didn't last for very long. It's not something that's had much of a shelf life...but I just felt so proud of it. Only the most obscure, musical theater-junkies have ever seen it.

I mean, even "Girls," I wish a lot more people had seen it. It had a good audience for HBO, but it was never like a runaway. There was one year where it was sort of a pop culture phenomenon because of what Lena Dunham was doing with body image, but the audience sort of waned a little bit in the last three seasons, and that's where my character really developed and where I was so challenged. With the help of the directors and the showrunners, I'd say that I produced some of the best work of my career.

**AFM:** In other interviews, you've said that you viewed the great Bob Newhart as a mentor after working with him for so many years on "Newhart." Has there been a piece of advice that he's given you that you've held close or that's been particularly valuable within your career?

**PS:** You would have had to hold Bob down to get him to tell you what to do, or how to behave. Advice was not his thing, because he was always more of a power of example. I'll tell you that the way in which he yielded the power, which was in such a low-key and almost hard-to-spot way, because I saw it over the course of my six and a half years there. I didn't even realize he was running the show until my second or third season there. And I realized when he told executive producers what to do and they did it. The conversation just shifted and it was almost under his breathe. And I thought, 'Look at that, he's the boss.' I mean you'd expect that much, or at least that this iconic sort of star would be respected in that way. So, the grace and the class were not lost on me. Among any advice, his example was what stood paramount among them—be classy, be quiet and don't be a big shot. And he was a huge big shot, like Mary Tyler Moore-level of big shot.

**AFM:** I understand that you still have a pretty good relationship with your former "Bosom Buddies" costar Tom Hanks. Both of you have taken on some pretty remarkable roles. If you could switch film or TV credits with him, what role of his would you like to take on? And vice versa, which role of yours would you like to see him in?

**PS:** I'd love to see him take a spin at "Girls." He played a gay man a year after he did "Forrest Gump," when he won back-to-back Oscars. My character was different in that he came out after 26 years of being in the closet as a married man with a child. He would manage it, I'm sure exceptionally well.

I, less optimistically to be honest with you, believe that one of his most impressive accomplishments over the years was in "Road to Perdition," which was directed by Sam Mendes. He played this hitman who sort of crossed swords with the mob boss, played by Paul Newman. When I see it—and knowing him as I do—I just don't know how it's possible. And I do this for a living, and I don't get how he achieved it. I've even asked him on a couple of occasions: 'How exactly did you achieve these specific things?' And he didn't really answer [LAUGHS]. I'm not sure he knew what to make of the question, because he just did it. His death scene at the end of the film is astonishing. And I'd love to try it, if only to find out that based on inspiration and courage, that I might be able to achieve something that great—not sure I could.

Scolari will star as Don Quixote in "Man of La Mancha" from Sept. 26, to Oct. 6. Tickets range from \$48 to \$58. For more information on the show, visit the Scottsdale Musical Theater Company official [website](#).