

A Windy Welcome

For the first time since *Running Scared*, Jimmy Smits tackles a Chicago winter—and steps on the Steppenwolf stage for the very first time.

| By Jessica Radloff |



Jimmy Smits and popular American cities go together. There was palm-tree-laden *L.A. Law*, the gritty streets of *NYPD Blue* and the political intrigue of D.C. in *The West Wing*. Now, thanks to his upcoming role in Steppenwolf's *The Motherf**ker With the Hat* (debuting Dec. 28 for previews), Smits, 57, reunites with Chicago.

It's been more than 20 years since Smits last worked here, filming *Running Scared* with Gregory Hines and Billy Crystal. "But I still have vivid memories filming outside at 4AM with the wind howling," he says. "I'm used to the cold, but not the wind!"

With no exterior shots in sight, *The Motherf**ker With the Hat* is a nice return to Chicago for the actor. "I'll be in the warm embrace of the Steppenwolf Theatre," he laughs. "All their plays have heart, so I hope I keep that tradition going."

According to Smits, the play deals with "addiction, sobriety, love [and] loyalty in a very raw way." In it, a recovering alcoholic is rediscovering life's joys until he finds another man's hat in the apartment he shares with his girlfriend. Smits plays an addiction recovery sponsor. "My character's point of view about sobriety is very skewed," Smits explains. "He takes advantage of situations."

Conveniently, Smits' research involves justifying certain self-indulgent behavior. When given Chicago restaurant suggestions, Smits jokes, "You've told me about the best burger, doughnuts, pizza and popcorn. It's great because my character justifies everything!"

Another positive? His time in Chicago might lead to a reunion with former co-star and Chicago native Dennis Franz. "He usually spends the holidays in New York," says Smits. "But if he can't make it to Chicago, then somebody from the Franz clan will!"

Smits' Hots

The Museum of Science and Industry, architecture, neighborhoods that still have their ethnicity and culture

Smits' Nots

Well, it's called the Windy City for a reason. When that wind is howling at you, there's no way to deal with it.