



LOOK WHO'S TALKING



SCENE STEALER *Brian Sidney Bembridge helps set the stage for some of Chicago's biggest productions* BY KOREY KARNES PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENDALL KARMANIAN

If 32-year-old Brian Sidney Bembridge walked passed you on the street, you almost certainly wouldn't recognize him. But if you're familiar with Chicago's theater scene, you'll undoubtedly know his work. As the city's most sought-after scenic and lighting designer—he's won a coveted Joseph Jefferson award and three After Dark awards—Bembridge's sets currently grace the stage in Teatro Vista's *Recent Tragic Events* and Uma Productions' *Breakfast Lunch and Dinner*, both at the Chopin Theatre. And his designs will appear in three major openings this month: *Wheatley* at the Victory Gardens Theater, *Three Sisters* at the Straw Dog Theatre Company and *A Man for All Seasons* at the TimeLine Theatre Company. So, what sets him apart from other designers? "I'm not sure," he admits. "I think I'm

known for my 'gutteral' design. My gut tells me what to put on stage, and I always try to give the audience an emotional connection to the story."

Bembridge's career track certainly has been a lot smoother than the plots of most plays he's worked on. After graduating from the North Carolina School of the Arts in 1997, Bembridge moved to Chicago and worked as an assistant for local interior designer Alessandra Branca before breaking into the theater with his first Chicago production, TimeLine's *A Cry of Players*, in 1999. Since then, he's designed more than 100 sets in the Chicago area—and he plans to keep working his typical 80-hour weeks. "The key is to stick with it," he says. "I work with theaters I love and tell stories that are important to me." www.briansidneybembridge.com ■

HOTS: *AVEC*, people who support the arts, Ryan Robinson Photography, gay marriage, Margie's Candies, day trips to Michigan, storefront theater, Cafe Iberico, picnics at Ravinia, my mom and dad, the Dan Flavin retrospective at the MCA **NOTS:** *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Bush's so-called Energy Bill, "Loopies" (businessmen downtown wearing pants that are too short), men in thongs, credit card interest rates, loud people on cell phones