

He's got groove, he's got feeling

Rob Mills dusts off his leather jacket and goes cruisin' for a bruising in his biggest musical role so far, writes Chris Herden



Brisbane is about to smoulder with teenage angst as *Grease* the musical rumbles into town. It takes us to the fabulous fifties, to a place populated by brazen young hellraisers in hot-rods (T-Birds) and wise-cracking girls in bobby-socks (Pink Ladies), burger joints, high school dances, chewing gum, pyjama parties and making-out at the drive-in are all the rage.

Grease made its Broadway debut in 1972 and the 1978 hit movie went on to become the highest grossing cinematic musical of all time. Now, Rob Mills is ready to take the stage as hunky bad-boy Danny Zuko. His shiny black hair is slicked back and his 'hydromatic' custom roadster Greased Lightning is finely tuned, waxed and polished.

Mills, who in 2003 seized the nation's attention during the inaugural season of television talent quest *Australian Idol*, would seem a perfect choice for cool ladies' man Danny. A brief but highly-publicised tryst with celebrity heiress Paris Hilton and the recording of songs such as *Dirty Girl*, *Ms Vanity* and *Up All Night* cemented his

persona as a mischievous womaniser.

"There's still a stigma of me being a wild party-going guy but I was 21 then and I just did what most kids do. *Idol* was a show that branded you, painting a picture of who you are, even when you don't know who you are yourself," Mills, 31, says.

"I've learned not to worry about what other people think about me. I know my dad get's a little bit upset when he reads something about me and I tell him 'dad, it's okay, they don't know me, I've never even met this person'"

Mills is well acquainted with the *Grease* phenomenon as the show gave him his breakthrough musical theatre role. It was in 2005's *Grease - The Arena Spectacular*, co-produced by John Frost, that he landed the part of Rydell High's Johnny Casino.

"Rob wasn't long out of the television show at the time, with his eye on being a pop star, and he fitted into that genre of stadium shows quite well," Frost recalls. "And then, a few years later, he came and auditioned for the role of Fyero

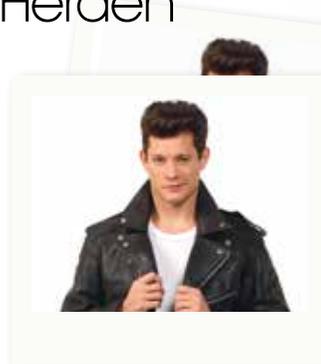
in *Wicked* and he was fantastic - the American producers absolutely loved him."

Mills considers landing the role in *Wicked* the highlight of his career. "For me, the biggest moment was knowing that I can do it...I can be that guy I've seen on the stage on Broadway and on the West End."

When in 2011 the idea for a *Grease* re-launch came about, Frost says "we auditioned a lot of people for Danny Zuko, and Rob came in right at the very end and he just wiped the floor. He's a star, he sells tickets."

Mills relishes the chance to step up to the plate as company top dog; obviously mindful of the responsibility this starring role affords him.

"There's going to be a lot of young kids in the *Grease* ensemble and I've got that responsibility



Rob Mills (above) and as Danny Zuko (left)

to be a figurehead for the company. Having been around the traps for the past couple of years I've seen them perform and they're all magnificent."

Starring alongside Mills is rising newcomer Gretel Scarlett as the sweet and innocent Sandy. Bert Newton, who began his own illustrious career on radio, is perfectly cast as slick veteran disc jockey Vince Fontaine, and *Dancing With The Stars'* Todd McKenney will slip on his dancing shoes to play the twinkle-eyed saviour Teen Angel.

Grease will play at the Lyric Theatre QPAC from 20 August. To book: www.qpac.com.au.

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