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Zach Grenier basking on stage, screen and TV

The busy actor says he's feeling fortunate with a schedule that includes appearing at the Ahmanson in Moisés Kaufman's '33 Variations,' on TV in 'The Good Wife' and shooting Clint Eastwood's upcoming 'J. Edgar.'

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Decades as an actor in theater, TV and movies have taught Zach Grenier that nothing lasts forever. So the 57-year-old actor is enjoying — for now — his triple-threat status.

Grenier is reprising his performance as Beethoven in Moisés Kaufman's "33 Variations" at the Ahmanson Theatre (previous runs were at La Jolla Playhouse and on Broadway). He's also appearing in CBS' "The Good Wife" as attorney David Lee, the family law guru at Alicia Florrick's (Julianna Margulies) firm, and this week began filming director Clint Eastwood's upcoming "J. Edgar."

Juggling the three roles is a formidable challenge. When he's needed in New York for "The Good Wife," he flies east after the two Sunday shows at the Ahmanson, films the TV show all day Monday, and catches a red-eye so he can be back on stage with Jane Fonda on Tuesday night. Eastwood's J. Edgar Hoover biopic, which is filming in Los Angeles, is further complicating the schedule, but Grenier wouldn't have it any other way.

"Being triple-booked is odd," Grenier said during an interview in his dressing room at the Ahmanson. "It's wonderful. It's what any actor would want every month of their lives. Well, within reason. I feel I'm an extremely fortunate actor — this month. In July, I'm going to be sitting there in New York going, 'Nobody cares about me anymore!'"

The run of "33 Variations" is slated to end on March 6, but Grenier, who was nominated for a Tony award in 2009 for his bombastic yet touching portrayal of Beethoven, said that won't end his relationship with the genius composer. In the play, a terminally ill musicologist (Fonda) tries to figure out why Beethoven became so obsessed with a minor waltz that he composed 33 variations of it.

"I don't think this is my last encounter with Beethoven," Grenier said. "It's going to be a life-long fascination with the guy. I keep trying to understand why his music is so loved in the world. People will come to the show and tell me they listen to Beethoven on a regular basis and they do it because there's something spiritual, something very, very private between them and the music. And listening to that, every time I hear the music, I feel it goes deeper and deeper."

The actor said he'd love to portray Beethoven in a story that delved into his childhood and explored his relationship to society when he lost his hearing in his 40s.

"I'm a hopeless romantic or, at least, certainly in my youth I was," Grenier said. "I wore it as a badge almost. I insisted this is the way to live. The romantic spirit is the most human spirit. And that's where I meet him, I think, because he's got a great romantic soul."

During the course of the play, pianist Diane Walsh performs selections from the "Diabelli" Variations that connect the 34 scenes. In one of the play's finest moments, the audience is allowed inside Beethoven's head as he composes and Walsh plays what he is creating.

"I think Moisés is a romantic too and that's why he loves this character so much," Grenier said. "The concept of trying to let the audience in, to be a fly on the wall, while you get to watch and share in the inception of an artistic idea was brilliant on his part. I just love doing it. It's worth the whole play to me to do that scene."

Grenier said he wishes he could talk as much about David Lee as he does about Beethoven. His latest TV character — he's appeared on "Deadwood," "24," and "Touching Evil" — is a self-centered, high-powered attorney in the firm Lockhart, Gardner and Bond. But to say more than "I have some fun with these people" would spoil it, Grenier said.

"The thing about David Lee is that he doesn't want to be a partner," he said. "He has this little fiefdom up in the upper reaches. He's got his little army of people. He wants an office for his second secretary and Bond's [Michael Ealy] office looks good enough for that. Sometimes a character just plops right in your lap. You open your mouth and he's there, and that scares me a little bit — that it's so easy for me — because he's such a creep."

In "J. Edgar," Grenier will play eccentric retired teacher, John Condon, who became an intermediary in the kidnapping of aviator Charles Lindbergh's baby in 1932. It stars Leonardo DiCaprio as Hoover.

"It's a wonderful role!" Grenier almost yells. "I can't believe I got it! He was this educator from the Bronx who thought it was his patriotic duty, because of what Lindbergh contributed to society, to repay him by doing vigilante work. So this very strange man who thought of himself as the mayor of his neighborhood suddenly starts running notes back and forth between the kidnapers. It's a great little arc."

As fun and fulfilling as the three roles are, Grenier said he really can't wait to get home to New Jersey to his wife of nearly 30 years and their "menagerie of aging animals." He's seen his wife once — on Valentine's Day — since the end of January.

"I really want to get back," Grenier said. "I don't know how much time I have left with my dog, Hector, because he's getting old, and I really miss my wife. We are just one in terms of our understanding of the world. That's what happens. You grow together if you make it. I just gotta get back to my wife."

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