Theater understudy paid not to perform

NEW YORK (AP) — For much of his career in Broadway musicals, James Brennan has been paid not to perform.

You could find his name in tiny type in the Playbill, usually beneath a sentence solemnly proclaiming, "Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance."

From "Good News" to "So Long, 147th Street" to "I Love My Wife" to "Little Me" to "Singin' in the Rain" to "Me and My Girl," Brennan has "stood by" or "covered" roles, terms used to describe that unsung hero of live performance — the understudy.

Now, in a reaffirmation of classic Broadway folklore, the understudy has become the star. Brennan has taken over the leading role in "Me and My Girl," the long-running British musical about a cockney scamp who inherits a title and money but almost loses his girlfriend because of his new-found wealth.

"The day of my first performance here in New York, my wife drove me by the marquee, and I looked at it," he says. "I had a double feeling. All at once, I was saying, 'I can't believe it.' But I also thought to myself, 'Yeah, it looks just like everybody else's name did up there.' "

The 38-year-old Brennan has been part of the "Me and My Girl" company since the show opened in 1986. He was the standby for its original star, Robert Lindsay, and then for Lindsay's replacement, Jim Dale.

"It was the best job in New York," Brennan says. "I could come in to work and check in at half hour (before curtain time) and then go to the theater or go to a restaurant or talk with a friend or read a book or do a crossword puzzle — and I did all that."

During Lindsay's nine-month run, Brennan never went on for the star, but he played the role for about six weeks during Dale's 20-month engagement. Replacing a big name can be unnerving for a performer who must face the wrath of disappointed theatergoers expecting to see someone else.

Brennan originally took the job with "Me and My Girl" because he had heard the lead role was terrific.

"I also heard that Bob Lindsay was magic," he adds, "I thought I could learn something from him, which, in fact, was the case."

Last fall, Brennan replaced Tim Curry in the national touring company of the show, playing three months around the country before coming back to the starring role in New York.

"Because we have good producers, they tried to find someone with a box-office name," he says. "They didn't find anybody who fit all the requirements of the role and still had box-office impact."

So Brennan was chosen for the demanding part. Now he has thrown himself into a regimen — a lot of rest and a lot of food so he'll have enough strength to get through the marathon workout. But it's something he has worked for all his professional career.

Born and raised in Newark, N.J., he remembers discovering theater programs that an aunt had brought back across the Hudson River from Manhattan. And he recalls lobbying to see either "The Music Man" or "Gypsy." He didn't get to either one, but the theater bug had bitten.

In high school, Brennan appeared in a musical every year. The director, Robert Hayes, also ran a summer theater in Beach Haven on the Jersey shore.

Brennan majored in theater at Rutgers University and after graduating went out on the road with a long national tour of "No, No, Nanette," starring June Allyson and later Virginia Mayo.

The director was Donald Saddler who later cast Brennan in the chorus of a revival of the 1927 college musical "Good News." Since then, he has never stopped working in the theater. His stints have included roles in a revue "Rodgers and Hart" and in "42nd Street," two shows where he didn't have to understudy anyone.

College logos, mascots bring in big business for retail merchandisers

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) — American universities once publicized themselves discreetly on pennants and T-shirts sold in local campus stores. Now they're doing it for lucrative royalties on items ranging from fishing lures to toilet seats, sold at some of the nation's biggest retailers.

The explosion in collegiate merchandise reflects a rising demand for products bearing hawkeyes, buckeyes, lions, tigers, bears and other school symbols, a partial consequence of the enormous television exposure collegiate sports teams now get.

Estimated annual retail sales of such items exceeds $1 billion.

"It's not just in college bookstores anymore. It's in K mart, Sears and Penney's," said Kim Allan, manager of university licensing programs at Michigan State.

Collegiate merchandise sales have doubled in the last five years and now nearly equal combined sales of National Football League and major league baseball products, said Bill Battle, president and owner of Atlanta-based Collegiate Concepts Inc.

Collegiate Concepts and International Collegiate Enterprises of Los Angeles handle the licensing arrangement for 100 schools through a joint venture.

Universities license products bearing their names or logos, known as marks, and receive royalties in return.

Battle said soft goods such as T-shirts, sweatshirts and caps account for between 80 percent and 85 percent of the collegiate merchandise, but novelty items have flourished.

In 1981, the University of Georgia licensed a local discount retail chain to sell a Bulldog tarantula. The spider had red and black markings matching the school's colors and sported a tiny felt Bulldog "cap."

Penn State University has licensed a Nittany Lion swimming pool liner; Iowa has approved a Hawkeye fishing lure; Nebraska has "Go Big Red" boxer shorts; and Michigan State has a Spartan toilet seat.

The University of California at Los Angeles began the first major licensing program in 1974.

Many other universities followed suit in the early 1980s to get marketing control over their names and logos. Some images had started appearing on products that either were too embarrasing or posed a liability threat.

Missionary family spends 4 generations in SE Asia, surviving despite adversity

CHIANG MAI, Thailand (AP) — From feudal Tibet to hill tribe villages in Thailand, an American family has offered medicine, fruit trees, primer readers and the Bible to impoverished Asians for nearly 70 years.

Members of the Morse missionary clan also rescued downed pilots in World War II, suffered torture at the hands of Chinese revolutionaries and hid from Burma's military rulers for six years in a jungle valley.

Along the way they picked up a dozen languages and about that many diseases in a four-generation odyssey across a vast, wild swath of Asia.

Today, the Morse family has grown to 75 members. More than half live in northern Thailand, a tolerant haven for many Western missionaries forced by political upheavals to uproot from other corners of Asia.

While trying to spread Christianity, the Morses carry out basic development work with groups like the Lisu tribe and attempt to help the tribes cope with rapid economic and social changes sweeping the hills.

More than 400 hill tribe children — Christian, Buddhist and animist — live in a Morse-run hostel when they come down from their villages for schooling in this northern hub.

"Since we grew up like them in very basic conditions, we can act as liaisons between where they have been and where they are going," 40-year-old David Morse says.

"We hope to be a moderating influence. We hope that they don't jump from the jungle into the 21st century without being ready."

The work, David adds, is in some ways more complex than the stark life-or-death situations that faced his grandfather and family patriarch, Justin Russell Morse, when he and his wife, Gertrude, left their native Oklahoma for Tibet.

While today's Morses shop in Chiang Mai supermarkets, family chronicles say J. Russell had to take along a five-month supply of candles on the journey to Tibet in 1921.

The trip took four months, with Gertrude clutching an infant son while being carried along mountain ledges in a sedan chair shouldered by opium-smoking coolies.

"Today a lot of missionaries regard what they do as a job they can quit. They're softies by comparison," says Ron, another grandchild. "Papa Morse's generation went out for life."

J. Russell's sons recalled that the family put up with the vermin, desolation and banditry of Tibet but found the medieval, Buddhist world impenetrable to their message.

In 1927, they left for the tri-border area of Tibet, Burma and China, a region of dank jungles, remote tribes and towns razed by civil war.

They also parted with the United Christian Missionary Society and have since remained a one-family missionary outfit dependent on support from individual churches in the United States and Canada.

During World War II, the Morses, in touch with the Allied command, recommended flight paths through the rugged borderlands, urged tribespeople to aid downed pilots and themselves rescued several airmen.

J. Russell and two of his sons later were decorated by the U.S. military.

J. Russell remained in China through the 1949 victory of Mao Tse-tung's Communists but was arrested in 1951, jailed and tortured.

Fifteen months later, he was released without explanation and deported to Hong Kong, arriving with $1.70 in his pocket.

The family regrouped in Putao, northern Burma, where diseases and famine were ravaging the Lisu and Rawang, with authorities unable to offer much assistance.

The Morses say that besides setting up a clinic, J. Russell and family members laid out new, sanitation-conscious villages and planned irrigation canals.

A literacy drive was started and son Robert, now a well-regarded linguist, worked on setting five tribal languages into written form where none had previously existed.

A fruit industry, which still thrives today, was initiated, with J. Russell experimenting with a variety of trees. He trained a corps of grafters, presenting successful ones with pocket knives that became local status symbols.

The Morses and some of their colleagues like to describe those days as the golden age of missionaries in Asia despite the hardships and frequent bouts of everything from dengue fever to the plague.

Then, the lack of resources or interest in the hinterlands by governments turned the Morses into doctors, teachers, builders, farmers and sometimes even de facto government officials.

Following a coup in 1962 by strongman Gen. Ne Win, missionaries were ordered to leave Burma. Instead, the now-extended Morse family and more than 5,000 tribespeople fled into a no-man's land along the Burmese-Indian border.

In a Robinson Crusoe-type existence, they cleared the jungle floor for fields, built houses with virtually no tools and hunted monkeys and other game for food.

David fabricated an electric generator from a downed Allied aircraft, lubricating the machine with bacon rind.

Burmese troops finally broke into their "Hidden Valley," as a book about their life described it.

Jailed in Mandalay, the younger Morses, who spoke better Lisu than English, struggled with doorknobs and had to be taught how to use bathrooms.

Northern Thailand proved a kind of trail's end for the Morses as it has for other missionaries expelled from China, Burma, Vietnam and Laos.

Thai authorities take a live-and-let-live attitude, and the area is populated by half a million ethnic minorities, many belonging to tribes the missionaries had worked with in other countries.

In a quiet, old-style compound of teak houses and towering trees, the Morses hold informal family councils and David produces hymns from self-designed computer programs.

The Morses include nurses, preachers, doctors and housewives-turned-accountants; midwestern American types, Asian spouses and a fourth generation of toddlers growing up in Asia.

Gertrude has died but J. Russell, now 91 years old, lives in retirement in Tulsa, Okla.

"Papa Morse wishes he could still be out here. He has his heart in the work and prays for everybody," says Helen, a daughter-in-law.

"He likes to remember the fruit trees of Putao."

People-watching key to acting

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Timothy Daly believes that if you're going to be an actor you also have to be a people watcher.

"I watch people, I listen to people, I make up stories about people," says Daly, who stars in the new CBS series "Almost Grown."

"I live in New York City and what's so wonderful is that if you have to research a character all you have to do is walk out the door."

He recalls having a role as a blind man once and found a blind man on the streets.

"I followed him around for a while," he says. "He didn't know I was there so he wasn't self-conscious."

"Almost Grown" is a drama that takes Norman Foley (Daly) and Suzie Long Foley (Eve Gordon) through three decades of courtship, marriage and divorce. They travel back and forth through their lives, as though in a time machine triggered by the music of a particular era. Their relationship, attitudes and roles vary with the times.

Foley is program director for a radio station, so there is constant music to trigger the flashbacks.

"It's interesting that when we go back in time the characters remember it with a different perspective," he says. "He may remember a time as happy, she may remember it as sad. The story is usually told from my point of view, but sometimes it's Eve's or sometimes it's Albert Machlin's, who plays Eve's brother."

Daly says he was approached about the series by David Chase, one of the executive producers. They had previously worked together on an episode of "Alfred Hitchcock Presents."

"At first I was very skeptical because of the different ages I had to play," Daly says. "All the people I've seen in miniseries who put shoe polish in their hair. How was I going to be accepted as a 40-year-old?"

It's the second series for Daly. Six years ago he played a doctor in "Ryan's Four," which lasted only a few weeks on ABC. He was in the miniseries "I'll Take Manhattan" and in January starred in the CBS movie "Red Earth, White Earth." His feature films include "Made in Heaven" and the upcoming "Love or Money" and "Spellbinder."

Daly grew up in suburban Rockland County, northwest of New York City. His father was actor James Daly and his sister is Tyne Daly, formerly of "Cagney & Lacey." He has two other sisters who he says were "spared from acting careers."

"Thank God I wasn't a professional kid," he says. "It allowed me to have my life and little bit of innocence. One of the things that's really important for an actor is to live. That's what actors do, reflect life. If you spend your life on a sound stage you don't get a clear picture of what's going on in the world."

Artist remembers hostage Anderson with continuing series of portraits

THE WOODLANDS (AP) — As a warm breeze carries the breath of spring to the serenity of her suburban Houston home, Maureen Seeba surrounds herself with the horror and anguish of a conflict half a world away.

The thoughts of Seeba, 32, are with Terry Anderson, who marked the fourth anniversary of the day he was abducted in west Beirut on March 16.

The chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press is among nine Americans held hostage in Lebanon.

Although she never has met or spoken with Anderson, the professional artist and mother of two each day tries to paint a portrait of the 41-year-old captive AP reporter.

"They're easy to forget about when you live like this — with a good life, and your kids are at home, and you have enough food to eat, and you just have to decide where you want to go each day," Seeba says.

She focused her artistic interest on Anderson after she saw the newsman's plea to President Reagan in a tape released by his captors last Oct. 31.

"It was just very heartbreaking," she says. "I think Reagan made an announcement that Terry was reading a text or script and that wasn't Terry. Well, I didn't know Mr. Anderson and it seemed to me he wasn't reading a script at all.

"He's been over there four years and I have to ask myself, 'What have I been doing the past four years?' because I really haven't been that aware of him."

So in between her normal depictions of flowers, boats and people, she began painting likenesses of Anderson — haunting portraits that chronicle his ordeal. Nearly all are character studies of his face. Some show him with a beard. Others are clean-shaven. Some are in a single color. Others are multi-hued.

"I think the face can show a lot of emotion," she says.

She has a couple dozen paintings and has thrown out maybe 25 or 30 she didn't like. Her favorite is a yellow portrait showing a nearly emotionless Anderson.

"I'm sure at this point he's about drained of any expression," she says. "The yellow is like a nuclear flash. It's so intense. But it also could signify the yellow ribbons that are not hanging in everyone's doorways. I guess that's why I like it."

She said she has not contacted any members of Anderson's family, including his sister, Peggy Say, an outspoken advocate for his release. "I'm afraid that poor woman is just bombarded with mail from strangers," Seeba says.

Her images of Anderson are based in part on photos Anderson's captives have released to news agencies. Cable News Network sent her a copy of the videotape of Anderson.

"I'd be feeling pretty hopeless if I'd been sitting there four years chained to a bed and when you read the newspaper you can't find hardly anything about him," she says. "If nothing else, because I'm someone who doesn't know him, by doing at least one painting of him every day, even if nobody ever sees it, he's being remembered.

"He's not getting out, but he is being remembered."

Seeba is upset that her interest in Anderson is not shared by others. Her attempts to arrange a showing of her Anderson portraits have been rebuffed by managers of public buildings in Houston where art generally is exhibited.

"They all say the same thing," she says. "They say it's just too controversial and they don't want to offend anybody."

Friends and neighbors also are put off somewhat by the paintings, some of which are displayed throughout her studio on the second floor of her home north of Houston.

"I get kind of mixed reactions," she says. "One of my neighbors said, 'Well, he shouldn't have been there in the first place and it's his fault he got kidnapped.' But that's how some people are.

"I think it's natural to develop that attitude when there's nothing you can do about the situation."

Even her husband, Jochen, was troubled by a three-picture display of Anderson in their living room.

Advice for gardeners

NEW YORK (AP) — Some annuals, perennials and vegetables are easier than others to grow from seeds outdoors.

Family Circle magazine, which had a children's greenhouse and garden at the recent New York Flower Show, offers these suggestions:

Easy annuals (plants that grow, flower and die in one season) are basil, cosmos, marigolds, morning glories, nasturtiums, strawflowers, sunflowers, verbena, zinnias.

Easy perennials (plants that grow and flower each spring or summer from roots that live through winter) are blanket flower, columbine, flax, hollyhocks, Shasta daisy.

Vegetables such as carrots, beets, radishes and onions can be sown right in the garden and are known as root vegetables because the part that is to be eaten grows underground. Vegetables such as green beans, cucumbers, peas and zucchini grow very fast, so they can be sown outdoors, too.

Composer shredded symphony, conductor performs, records it

ASSOCIATED PRESS

American classical music isn't as well-known as it should be, in America or abroad, says conductor Andrew Schenck.

"There's a lot of substantial music out there that deserves for us to take another listen, call our own and be proud of." He adds that some of it, which has been out of fashion, is now back in style.

Schenck has made a new "another-listen, back-in-style" recording, with the New Zealand Symphony. It's of Samuel Barber's "Second Symphony," which was commissioned by the Army Air Force and premiered by the Boston Symphony in 1944.

There's a pretty dramatic reason it hasn't been heard lately — its composer tore it up.

"It's a splendidly crafted symphony," Schenck says. "It's a major piece by one of America's giants.

"As the century ends, we can look back and see somewhere in the middle of it we had a real symphonic golden age of American composers — Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris, William Schuman. I think their music needs a vast re-examining and re-recording. We've got the technology and orchestras that can do it."

But what happened to Barber and his "Second Symphony"? Schenck says:

"Barber's publisher told me that about 20 years after the symphony was written he said to Barber, 'All of your works have lasted so well. But we can't seem to get the "Second Symphony" off the ground.'

"Barber replied: 'The reason is simple. It's not a good work. Let's go back to your office and destroy it.' They did so. They tore the parts up personally."

Schenck, who is 48, made his first recording in 1984. It was an all-Barber record with the London Symphony, with Ted Joselson playing Barber's "Piano Concerto." Joselson organized that recording after he and Schenck had an exciting collaboration on the concerto while Schenck was guest conducting the Pasadena, Calif., Symphony Orchestra.

Schenck says: "I thought the logical thing to do was follow that with another Barber project, even though I consider myself a non-specialist. As I talked with people about what repertoire to do, the story of the 'Second Symphony' came up. It piqued my curiosity."

Schenck delved into the history and found good reviews. He says: "Barber was a corporal in the Air Force. He had flown around, apparently, and soaked up inspiration for the symphony at various Air Force bases.

"There was speculation about what he was trying to say related to the Air Force. The most intriguing was the electronic signal generator created for the second movement by Bell Labs. After the premiere, he revised the piece. He took the generator out of there. He wasn't terribly comfortable with the speculation that this part of the symphony was supposed to be describing an air raid.

"He must have felt if the symphony was too linked with the military, somehow it would denigrate its artistic merit. He wanted it to be accepted as a work of art in its own right.

"Interestingly, after the symphony was withdrawn, the second movement was published separately with the title 'Night Flight.' He did something else interesting. He lifted a portion from the beginning of the symphony and stuck it into his opera 'Antony and Cleopatra.' He wrote a vocal text over the orchestra part. I was astonished when I heard it for the first time."

Schenck continues: "Our perceptions change over time. Twelve-tone and chance music were in style in the early '60s. Among the musical literati at that time, descriptive music was taboo.

"I think people now are thinking it is not such a terrible thing to write descriptive pieces with major chords and melodies. The trend right now is the neo-romantic style.

"Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony just came out with a disc of Barber's three essays for orchestra. It was never recorded before. All of this is coming back."

Schenck never met Barber, who died in 1981. He corresponded with attorneys for Barber's estate, who gave permission for him to record the "Second Symphony."

Schenck says: "I had bought a score of the work in the early 1960s. My original thought was I would have to have parts (for each musician) made from my own score. Then fate intervened. (Music publishers) G. Schirmer located a set of parts at its London branch."

The conductor had been engaged by the New Zealand Symphony for a month of concerts and 20 hours of recording time. So, for Stradivari Classics, they made the recording of the symphony, which Barber once wrote that the Boston Symphony found difficult. Schenck says that the New Zealand Symphony did a magnificent job.

"I was bombarding them. We also did Barber's 'First Symphony' in concert. It's a very different piece, much shorter, in one movement." Schenck says, "I'm excited about doing American music, particularly in other parts of the world."