

P.D.

TAKES CENTER STAGE

Why is a hip-hop mogul starring in one of American drama's most searing and serious plays? What will he bring to the role, and what will the role bring to him?

“You can do anything you put your mind to.”

IDDY

R STAGE IN A RAISIN IN THE SUN

By Carli Entin

SEAN COMBS (ALSO KNOWN AS PUFF DADDY, Puffy, and P. Diddy) has more jobs than he does nicknames: producer, rapper, clothes designer, marathon runner, and all-around hip-hop hero. Now, Diddy has taken on yet another role: that of Broadway actor. Diddy plays the role of Walter Lee Younger in a revival of the 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Some critics have suggested that Diddy knows diddly about acting. After all, the multimillionaire has had no formal training and little acting experience. (He had small roles in the 2001 movies *Made* and *Monster's Ball*). The part he plays is intense and intricate—Walter Lee is a struggling chauffeur who, along with his family, dreams of escaping devastating poverty in 1950s Chicago—and the play is more than three hours long. The show, which began on April 26, is set to run for 15 weeks. Diddy is responsible for eight performances each week.

Is he up to the challenge? The show's producers think so. Though they admit they've taken a gamble on the rapper turned actor, they were convinced after two successful auditions that Diddy could play the part. "Sean considers this to be a career-altering opportunity," producer Vivek J. Tiwary said, adding, "He's also performed fabulously at his audi-

tions." Diddy reasons, "The only thing I can do is give it my all, then wait and see." He hopes to put his own special stamp on the role, stating, "I'm going to play it my way."

That level of dedication and ambition has served P. Diddy all his life. While the man who runs Bad Boy Records was a millionaire by the time he was 19, his early years were filled with struggles that will likely help him relate to his character in *Raisin*. Diddy's father was killed when Diddy was a toddler, forcing his working mother to raise him alone.

Today, along with his business ventures, Diddy works hard to help families like the one portrayed in the play rise out of poverty. Last November, he ran the New York City Marathon, raising \$1 million along the way for his children's charity, Daddy's House. He also raised money for New York City public schools. "Every child needs a high-quality education and proper health care," he said.

Diddy's current marathon, playing to a crowded audience of paying theatergoers, could leave him flat on his face—or bowing to rapturous applause. If his past success is any indication, the theater may very well have a new star—one who travels through life with the message, "You can do anything you put your mind to." ■

They Made the Move

These performers have also shifted genres, with mixed results:

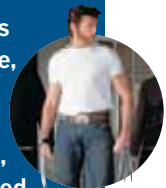
> Actor **Mark Wahlberg** (*The Italian Job*, *Planet of the Apes*) started out as rap singer Marky Mark. His backup rappers made up the Funky Bunch.

> **X-Men's Wolverine**, actor **Hugh Jackman**, has starred in stage musicals like *Oklahoma* and *The Boy From Oz*.

> Before *Bringing Down the House* and *Chicago*, **Queen Latifah** was a rap star.

> Pop singer **Toni Braxton** appeared on Broadway in *Aida*.

> Rapper **Mos Def** appeared on Broadway in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Top Dog/Underdog*.



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