

For more than 40 years, Scott Robertson has appeared on the stage and screen. On Broadway he played Herr Schultz in the long-running production of *Cabaret* and appeared with Jerry Lewis in *Damn Yankees* on Broadway and London's West End. His other Broadway credits include: *Grease*, *The Music Man* and *The Pajama Game*. He's also appeared in plays at prestigious venues including: The Kennedy Center, Roundabout Theater, Lincoln Center, Playwrights Horizons and in regional theaters. TV and movie fans may remember him in the recent HBO version of *Mildred Pierce*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *In and Out*, *Law & Order*, *Spin City* and *All My Children*.

### When were you diagnosed with TS?

This is wild. I was one of those people diagnosed in my mid-thirties at 35. Years ago a neurologist had mentioned it in passing, but I wasn't diagnosed until my friends thought I had a brain tumor and I went to check things out.

### Do you think that your TS has had an impact on your career?

I think it has, at times. I had a negative experience at Lincoln Center when I was understudying standing by for the two leading roles in the show. After the second or third day, the stage manager said I was being vocal during rehearsals. It was very minimal and it was the perfect opportunity to say I had TS, but I didn't because I thought they might let me go. Finally after telling a few people word got around and it was OK. The hardest thing for me is just sitting quietly and listening. I'm much better jumping around on stage.

I was concerned that maybe that director would be hesitant about hiring me. But she picked me over hundreds of other actors. I feel that sometimes TS might be in the decision-making, but I don't know how much of an impact it has on me getting hired. And I do get hired. I've been in over 250 shows in the last 40 years and I've done TV and movies, too.

Sometimes it's hardest in new a situation, when I'm nervous about it. Like on a film set with Russell Crowe, sitting next to him for eight hours doing a scene. Sometimes a soundman will tell me not to make extra noises and tell me not to clear my throat. I now let the sound people know that I have TS so they turn off my mike and turn it on when I have dialog.

I'm most likely to have symptoms when I'm off stage. I have to be very conscious back stage and I try to shake off my tics right before I go on for my entrance. I'm confident when I'm on stage. The most comfortable place in my life is on stage. It's much easier for me to sing or do a scene before an audience than to sit and watch a play. I have to take medication to sit in an audience for two or three hours and I have to concentrate on what I'm seeing, breathe and hang in there. It's about

suppression. When I've played judges on *Law & Order* I go into a zone where I can be quiet.

I did a play, *The Black Monk*, with Austin Pendleton. He has a severe stutter and like my TS it disappears on stage.

### How did your family and friends react to your undiagnosed TS while you were growing up?

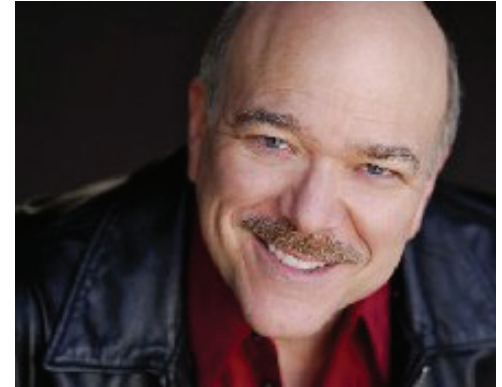
When was a kid I had physical tics that I was very aware of and nervous about. My mom took me to the chiropractor for my head tics. My family never really pointed out anything about my ticcing when I was kid. When my vocal tics started, first with a subtle humming and then a tongue clicking, my family started talking about it. They would say, "You're making those noises. You must be nervous or anxious." But I wasn't. I just had TS. It was just misinterpreted as anxiety. It was sort of a revelation when I got diagnosed.

High school was very uncomfortable. My father was sick and he died. He was a great guy and we did community theater together. I remember being sent out of the class for laughing or for not being able to stop laughing. It was something I just couldn't stop. Was it TS?

Theater in high school and theater camp, acting and memorizing scripts became the focus and thrust of my life. As far as my TS, it kind of waned in those years when I went to college and then went to start my career in New York and landed a part in the national tour of *Grease* at 19. John Travolta was in the cast in a smaller role. I wound up doing *Grease* on Broadway when the star broke his nose and I also had seven years of *Godspell* and *Grease* in regional theaters.

I remember vocal tics in my early 20s. One sounded like I was chewing gum, a tongue clicking sound. I remember being told to "throw out the gum" and directors yelling at the whole cast to "throw out the gum."

I never understood it, but there is this remarkable kind of left brain, right brain thing that happens. Once I get into the work—singing, monologues—I jump into the performance and the TS is suppressed. Backstage I become more symptomatic.



### What do you think of the media's image of people with TS?

Treat Williams is my cousin and he is in that wonderful Hallmark movie *Front of the Class*. And there are many more wonderful examples, like James Durbin, who are explaining what TS really is. Once it's understood, once it's in the mainstream, it won't bother people.

Coprolalia is still associated with TS and comedians like Bill Maher will make jokes about it in passing. They just toss it off; use it as a joke. That's always going to happen. The media makes fun of it, but awareness is happening.

### Do you have any advice for aspiring performers with TS?

I would say it's all possible. You can do anything with TS. You can be fearful or nervous, but the ultimate thing is to jump in and do it. Do your best to be prepared and then see how it feels.

Show business is a really hard business. It's not about becoming a star. It's a tough business, but I would support anybody not letting TS hold them back. I'm proof you can have a career and do what you love. I treat auditions as performances and that's something that I love to do. I jump in and let the chips fall where they will.

### Please tell us a little about your current theatrical projects.

I just finished a three-month run of the Broadway production of *Cabaret* on Long Island, playing Herr Schultz. I also graduated from SUNY in June. I had gone back to finish my degree in Performance Art. It took me two years. I created a piece exploring TS. It's amazing; a wild piece. People were deeply moved. I love expressing myself and bringing awareness of TS in a theatrical way to people who may not have thought about it a lot. I'm jazzed up about it and it was great to get my BA. ▣