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## Singing came first for soap star

By John Pitcher

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Ron Raines' passion has always been musical theater.

Still, he knows he'll always be remembered as a TV soap opera star.

"More people see me on TV during one afternoon than in every musical I've ever performed in, combined," Raines said in a recent phone interview.

Raines, who stars as Alan Spaulding on the long-running soap opera "Guiding Light," opens Opera Omaha's 2009-10 season Saturday at the Holland Performing Arts Center.

He'll present a concert called "Night of American Song," singing tunes from the "Great American Songbook" with pianist and popular Broadway music director Don Pippin.

The concert is part of Opera Omaha's new "American Genius" concert series, celebrating the music of Broadway and Tin Pan Alley.

Raines is a natural choice to open the series.

He has an extensive Broadway resume, having performed over the years in such musicals as "Chicago," "South Pacific," "The King and I," "Brigadoon," "Oklahoma," "Carousel" and "Guys and Dolls," to name a few.

But he also has connections to Omaha and its opera company.

He made his opera debut in Omaha, performing in Opera Omaha's 1975 production of "La Traviata."

Raines had just graduated from Oklahoma City University and was singing his first professional part — the baritone role of Baron Douphol.

"I remember the Orpheum Theater had just been renovated," Raines said. "It was beautiful."

After performing in Omaha, Raines spent years on the road touring in Broadway productions.

In 1994, he auditioned for a part in a touring production of "The Sound of Music" and the role of Alan Spaulding on "Guiding Light."

He was offered both parts on the same the day and picked the soap opera.

"'Guiding Light' allowed me to get off the road and stay home with my family," he said.

The longest-running soap opera on TV, "Guiding Light" is scheduled to go off the air later this month.

What's Raines going to do? "Do more singing, I guess," he said.

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