

# ROBERT PICARDO Sees Through Miller's Looking Glass

By Tom Provenzano

**R**OBERT PICARDO is one of the most recognizable actors of his generation. After graduating from Yale Drama School just over three decades ago, he leapt into theatre, soon landing lead roles in Broadway's *Gemini* with Danny Aiello and *Tribute* with Jack Lemmon.

Having become an established stage star, Picardo moved into television with alacrity starring in sitcoms (*The Wonder Years*), hour dramas (*China Beach*) and ultimately as "Doctor" on *Star Trek: Voyager*. Though his screen work has given him enormous notoriety and a healthy income, he has never been away from the stage for too long.

He explains, "After you do several TV guest shots and don't vary the program with something challenging, you just feel hungry. You feel like you are sleepwalking and need to slap yourself."

His most recent foray into the theatre is Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* at the Victory Theatre. When the offer first came, Picardo was instantly interested because he had studied acting under

John Leyne at the Little Victory during an exciting formative time. He is also a great fan of Miller. "The play didn't let me down. It turned out to be just as complex and challenging as I expected. Director Shira Dubrovner has been totally committed. It's a nurturing place with Maria Gobetti producing and her husband Tom Ormeny acting opposite me. It is a tiny theatre but an exciting experience to have the audience so close."

When working in theatre, Picardo's thoughts drift back to his youthful brushes with mid-20th century acting techniques. He recalls an important workshop with Estelle Parsons that shaped his approach ever after. "Estelle was asked if she was a 'method actress.' She said, 'No. I call myself a text actress. I feel all the clues are in the

text. If I keep reading it and studying it, that's how my choices are raised and formed.'

"I have emotional scenes in the play and can't say I have been using Strasberg's affective memory. I seem to just focus on what the stakes are for that character in the moment and project

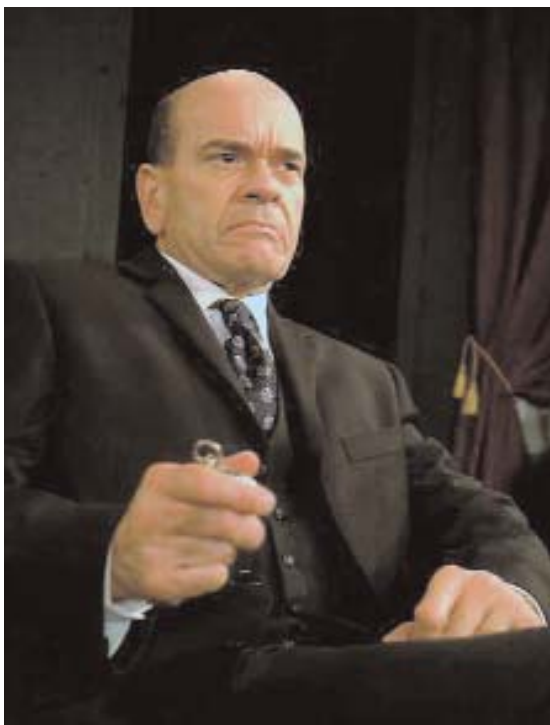
myself into the circumstances enough that the emotional transformations happen. It's more because of the character and writing than bringing a personal experience to the play.

"Arthur Miller gives you so many clues in the way the language is broken up. You can feel the emotional sense by the rhythm of the text; by the ellipses and dashes, starting and restarting of sentences, interrupted speech, the way characters express everything. I never forgot what Estelle Parsons said 30 years ago. It really made sense to me as an actor."

He also took seriously some fascinatingly simple advice from another great actor. "I was on a panel with Raul Julia years ago and he was asked the question, 'How do you cry on cue?' He

surprised me by saying, 'Any way you can accomplish what the text requires is okay. If you need onions in the wings to accomplish it, fine.' I thought how great that he can say that."

With his stage hunger alleviated for awhile, Picardo is ready for his return to television and season three of *Stargate Atlantis*. During all of this is he happily surrounded by his two daughters and wife Linda, with whom he shares a passion for houses. While they share three private homes that she has renovated, Picardo is also involved in housing for the less fortunate through a commitment to Habitat for Humanity, which he recently joined as a member of the Advisory Board of the San Gabriel Valley chapter of that organization. ■



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## BROKEN GLASS

Plays Fri.-Sat., 8 pm;  
Sun., 4 pm; ends Dec. 3  
Tickets: \$20-\$28

The Victory Theatre Center  
3326 W. Victory Blvd., Burbank  
818.841.5421 or  
www.thevictorytheatrecenter.org