

BY NOAH COWAN

While six men in tutus dance in the attic upstairs,

Stephen Spinella sits on a musty brown couch on the second-floor landing. It's a momentous day on the set of *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, Fine Line's movie adaptation of Terrence McNally's 1994 Broadway hit and Tony Award-winning drama: the filming of the climactic ballet rehearsal scene. Spinella's character, Perry, is suspicious of anything that's in-your-face gay and refuses to participate in the ballet, which his friend Gregory is choreographing for an AIDS benefit. Instead of doing pirouettes, then, Spinella is dancing around the subject of *Love! Valour!*'s place in the pantheon of writings about gay lives.

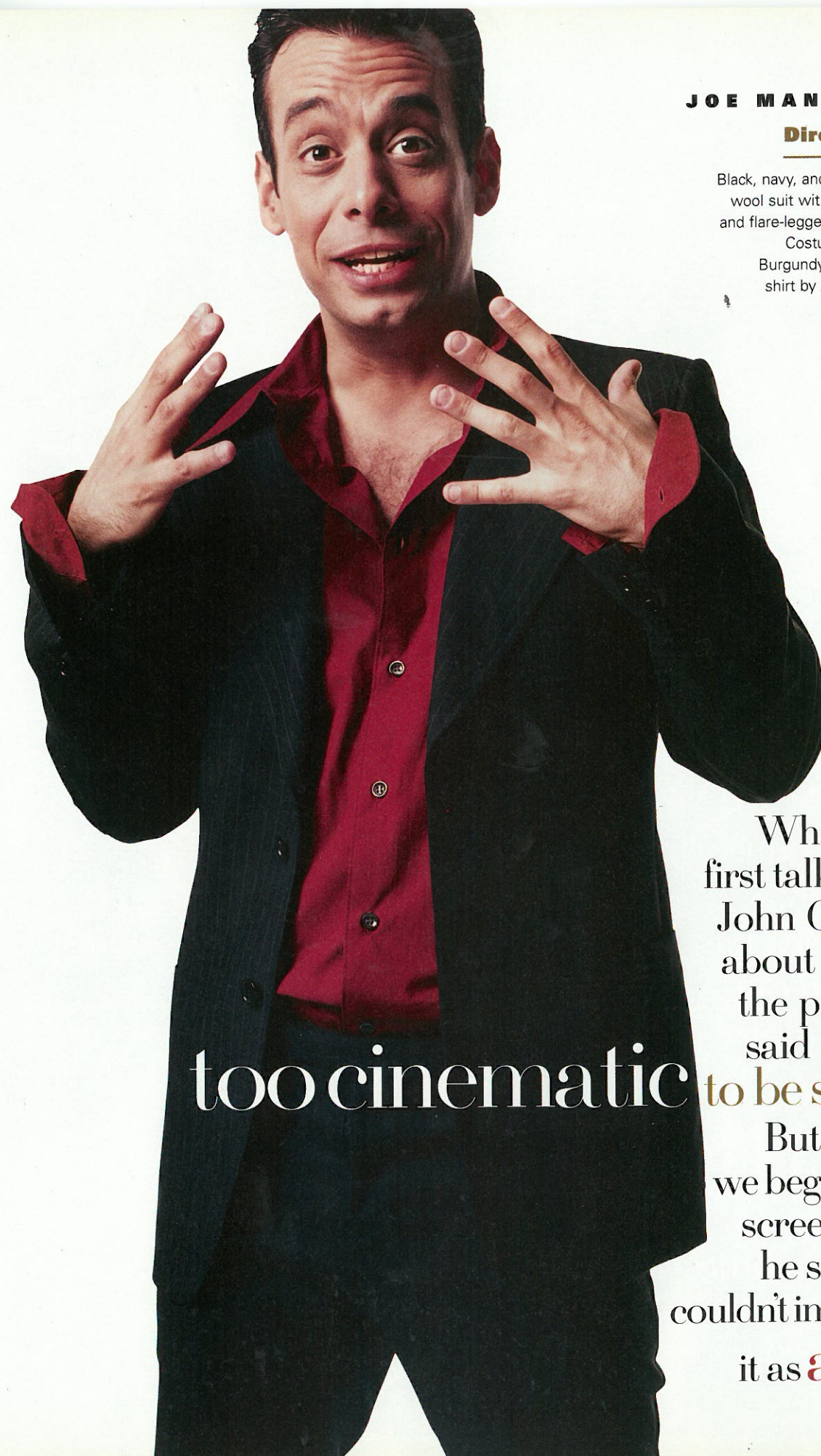
"I think it's more about dramas between characters and less about the drama of being a gay man of a particular generation," the actor says over the din of 12 thumping feet and a recording of *Swan Lake*. A two-time Tony winner for his role as Prior Walter in both parts of Tony Kushner's stage epic *Angels in America*, Spinella has been down this road before. It's the perpetual dilemma of "gay theater": Is this tale a universal expression of human striving and survival, or a hermetic tribute to a certain generation of well-off, white gay men, a last hurrah for those who came of age not long after Stonewall and were hit first by AIDS? "AIDS certainly plays a role here, but more as a disability to be

dealt with by human beings than as a political focus," Spinella says. "We recognize characters in this film that are applicable to a lot of periods in history."

Upstairs, the six other cast members are locked arm-in-arm in a deadpan chorus line, leaping across the dance studio for take after take. Even Jason Alexander, who plays perpetual comedian Buzz, looks deadly serious, concentrating on the steps. Next to Alexander, reprising his Tony-winning double role as British twins John and James Jeckyll—one a manipulative misanthrope, the other a giddy free spirit weakened by AIDS—lanky John Glover purposefully spins out of the line... and into the cameraman's lap.

"Cut!" yells Joe Mantello. *Love! Valour!*'s original stage director and half of New York theater's leading gay couple with his partner, playwright Jon Robin Baitz, Mantello is directing his first film here at Pointe Thibideau, the beautiful Montreal-area mansion that poses as the upstate New York home in McNally's play. Due out in May, the film, like the play, takes place during three long summer weekends at Gregory's country home, where the houseguests include two men with AIDS, a volatile long-term couple, an acerbic old friend, and a sexy dancer with the hots for Gregory's younger blind (*continued on page 143*)

Noah Cowan has contributed to *Filmmaker* and *Time Out New York*.



JOE MANTELLO

Director

Black, navy, and gray striped wool suit with fitted jacket and flare-legged trousers by Costume Homme. Burgundy cotton fitted shirt by Alberto Biani.

too cinematic to be staged.

But when we began the screenplay, he said he couldn't imagine it as a film!

ATTILA DORY/FINE LINE (BALLET). GROOMING BY JOHN CARISO FOR 78 GRAND STREET (MANTELLO). PAGES 78-79: GROOMING BY MARGARET KIMURA FOR CLOUTIER