

## Santiago takes a leap in one-man show

'It's terrifying,' said Santiago about being in a one-man show for the first time. 'I feel like I'm a baby being thrown in bath water being told to swim, but I am happy to try.'

**Jillian Nadiak**  
BSP Reporter

When Matthew Santiago, 24, of Stone Ridge was flown to Los Angeles in the summer of 2013 to film a commercial for Gillette due to his skills in the art of the speed bag, he didn't know it would have such an incredible impact on his life.



Santiago

"I really got into theatre for all of the wrong reasons to be completely honest," said Santiago, personal trainer at the Ridge Gym of Stone Ridge. "I felt very coddled and well cared for. I was babied out there. They put me up in the nicest hotel in Beverly Hills and drove me everywhere. It was a ridiculous experience." He decided that he loved the lifestyle and wanted to go to Los Angeles and become an actor, admitting with a laugh that the past idea was "extremely superficial."

However, Santiago needed to go back to school first. While attending SUNY Ulster as an individual studies major, he decided to take an "Intro to Acting" course and grew to realize that he really loved the art for its creativity and not just because it could lead to a ritzy lifestyle as a "famous LA superstar actor."

"It's so simple, but when it comes down to it, it's all about how well you can tell a story and captivate your audience. Essentially, that's what acting is," Santiago said. "It's extraordinarily educational as well. You do research on everything. When I was in "The Grapes of Wrath" I had to do research on the Great Depression that I never would have done otherwise. I think the best actors have a vast knowledge of everything: history, vocabulary..."

Now, having done two productions at SUNY Ulster and beginning his fourth semester, Santiago is starring in a production of "Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)" by Will Eno, a one-man show portraying "a story of pain, loss, and love," as director Stephen Balantzian put it.



Stone Ridge personal trainer Matthew Santiago rehearses for his one-man show on the stage of Quimby Theater at SUNY Ulster. Photo by Raine Grayson.

Santiago originally began working on the show as part of an independent study. He didn't realize how much of a task it would be. When he told Professor Balantzian that he couldn't do it with the time constraint the class had, Balantzian told him that they would put it off.

Unknowingly to Santiago, his professor decided to put it up as a production instead. When the college accepted

the proposal, Balantzian gave Santiago the great opportunity to have his own show.

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Having spent eight months working with the script before starting rehearsals, Santiago has had a lot of time to really get to know the character. He said that he has looked the script over at least once a day since June. Some days he has spent more time than others, but he has never gone a day without getting to know the show a little bit more. "We've been able to talk more deeply about the complexities of this extraordinary play and character," said director Balantzian.

Raine Grayson, the stage director of the show and former SUNY Ulster student, said that Santiago is a very dedicated actor. "He comes into rehearsal with a vibrant picture of the character in his head," he said. "No word goes unnoticed, no stone is unturned. When he's working on a piece of text, every crevice of the script gets special attention. However, he still opens himself up and is ready to learn. He is always hungry and ready for more, more, more."

Santiago said that doing this show is a huge accomplishment for himself. "Straight out of high school, I was very depressed and anxiety ridden," he said. "I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. Coming out of that hole, and having accomplished a lot of things and making a lot of friends; I feel very established in my life and it feels great."

He said that as you get older, you always have lessons that you have in front of you, but you have to identify them yourself. "You have to accept them and learn from them." In his own life, depression lead to developing skills in speed bag training which lead to a commercial, which inevitably lead to his return to school and love of theatre. "You have to let those things happen. If you're not open to those changes then they won't happen. This is exactly what Thom Pain is all about."

"Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)" will be showing on Feb. 27 and 28 at 7:30 p.m. at SUNY Ulster in the Quimby Theater located at 491 Cottekill Road, Stone Ridge, New York 12484. Cost to the performance is free for students. There is suggested donation of \$10 for general admission. For more information, Matthew Santiago can be reached at 845-750-2154, or by email [mateosanti123@gmail.com](mailto:mateosanti123@gmail.com) or call SUNY Ulster at 845-688-1589. Learn more about Santiago's speed bag training at his website [www.matt-santiago.com](http://www.matt-santiago.com). **BSP**

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