

The Show *Must Go On*



HOW HOLLYWOOD LEGEND BEN VEREEN STAYS BALANCED

by Emily Saso

While 62-year-old Vereen knew he wasn't feeling quite like himself, he never would have guessed that he had diabetes until his doctor hit all the right notes. "The doctor asked me 'do you find yourself urinating a lot? Dry mouth? Are you feeling lazy?' And I said yes to every question." After a blood test, Vereen was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes and was placed on insulin. "My doctor also got me eating the proper foods and exercising more."

While his eating habits have never been too far off track, Vereen admits to having had food vices that he has recently overcome. "I used to have cravings for *Snickers* bars and *Butterfingers*," he laughs. "Now I actually crave fruits and vegetables. I eat more of those and I watch my carbs — that sort of thing."

Although Vereen is careful to reveal his own diet plan, he does have a few favourites like cinnamon oatmeal and juice at breakfast, followed by a salad with loads of protein at lunch. "I don't really like saying what I eat though, because then people think, 'if that's what he does then I should do that too.' You have to do what's right for you."

As a well-rounded performer with a busy schedule, Vereen manages to take time for himself by always considering what he needs to be happy. "You just take the time to exercise and eat right and do the things that are right for your life. You are not your job. You have to do what's right for you. You take the time to balance it all, just like you take the time to breathe."

With several new projects on the horizon, including a *Hallmark* TV movie, *Accidental Friendship*, a feature film called *Mama, I Want to Sing*, a packed lecture and concert schedule, as well as mentoring young Hollywood A-listers like Usher, Vereen is back to living life the only way he knows how: to the fullest.

"I love life and I really live each moment," he says. "I wake up every morning feeling grateful — grateful that I get another day to get it right." ▼

With a singing, dancing and acting career that has spanned decades and earned him numerous awards including a *Tony*, Ben Vereen is a true triple threat. His resumé gushes a lifetime of noteworthy roles in film (*All That Jazz*), television (*Roots*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Grey's Anatomy*) and Broadway (*Fosse's Pippin*). With such accolades and credits to his name, it's ironic that the role Vereen is playing today — perhaps his greatest of all — came as a complete shock.

"Around Christmas of last year, I was diagnosed with diabetes," says Vereen in his legendary deep and soulful tone. "When I found out, I said that I wasn't going to hide this under a rock. I wanted people to know that I had it. People think it's mostly folks who are obese that get it. But I've been exercising and dancing all my life. If it happened to me it can happen to anyone."

A man with dreadlocks, wearing a dark suit, a light blue shirt, and a patterned tie, is smiling broadly. He is holding a string of pearls in his right hand. The background is a textured, stone-like wall.

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