

THE WASHINGTON POST

## THE RELIABLE SOURCE

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2002 C3

By Lloyd Grove

### A Stutterer Who Is Out and Proud

■ When he was a student a dozen years ago at Washington's Duke Ellington School of the Arts, **Taro Alexander** tried hard to hide his stuttering. Last night the 29-year-old actor, son of former Living Stage Theatre Company director **Robert Alexander**, accepted an award for launching a theater company for teenagers who stutter.

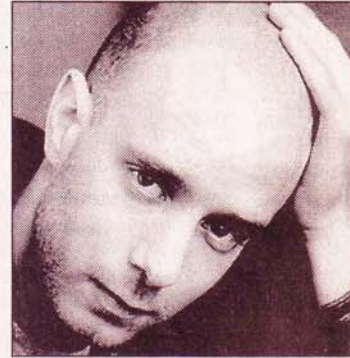
"For most of my life I kind of lived in fear of stuttering," Alexander told us when we asked about his award from the National Council on Communicative Disorders. "It was the thing I was most ashamed of as a kid, because I spent so much time trying to avoid people finding out."

Alexander, who still stutters, was in a national road company of **Neil Simon's** "Lost in Yonkers," has performed in the hit musical "Stomp" and has acted in the NBC series "Law & Order." But now he no longer tries to conceal his stuttering. "It is actually a very common thing that most people who

stutter don't stutter when they act or sing or speak in a chorus," he said. "Actors such as **James Earl Jones**, for example—he not only had a stutter, but he was a mute from ages 10 to 14 . . . **Bruce Willis** also stutters."

Alexander said he started stuttering at age 5, but as a teenager discovered that he spoke clearly onstage. He loved acting and moved to New York City at 19, a week after his high school graduation in 1991. Ten years later, he is following in his dad's footsteps, using theater as a form of social outreach. Alexander created the Our Time Theatre Company, which is supported by New York's Naked Angels company. His father's Living Stage program is a venue for the disadvantaged.

"I found out that there is a need for people out there who stutter to have a place to go to meet people who talk as they do," Taro Alexander said, "and a place to go to feel completely safe to express their feelings."



COURTESY TARO ALEXANDER

Conquering fear: Taro Alexander.

With Barbara E. Martinez