

THE PERFORMANCE

Oscar Nunez, 'The Proposal'



Lawrence K. Ho / Los Angeles Times

Oscar Nunez puts on many hats in "The Proposal."

By Michael Ordoña

June 18, 2009

He is so not Oscar Martinez. And he sure as heck ain't Ramone.

If you closed your eyes and listened to Oscar Nuñez go off on L.A. for its sports fans, smog or optimistically named drainage systems, you wouldn't hear the quiet, reserved accountant he plays on "The Office" or what passes for a Latin lover in the tiny Alaskan town in his new movie, "The Proposal" -- you'd hear a veteran of the New York comedy scene.

"Dude, I didn't have a car when I first moved out here. I'm standing on the corner, I'm looking at the air, I'm thinking, 'This is what I'm breathing. I can see it. It's like soup,'" he says with the cadence of a stand-up. After ripping local fans for cutting out of games early to beat traffic, he adds, "There's a thing called 'the L.A.

River' -- I'm like, 'Whaaat?' That's a river? It's a cement canal that, by the way, empties out right into the ocean. Don't you have a filtering system? What is wrong with you people?"

The Cuban American actor is very loose, awaiting room service in a suite at the Four Seasons hotel, razzing his publicist. He explains that after doing on-camera interviews for "The Proposal" all the day before, this one is more casual -- mere print and radio. He just may be settling into the L.A. vibe after only 16 years in town.

Nuñez admits, bluntly, what turned him around on the city was "money. Acting work. I always had good friends. But working changes everything. Any city is good if you -- Paris could be wonderful or sucky, depending on if you're homeless or. . . ."

And he knows about struggling to find the right work: When asked to list his previous occupations, he says, "It would be faster to tell you the jobs I didn't do."

That's probably the only point of reference he shares with his jack-of-all-trades character in the new Sandra Bullock-Ryan Reynolds romantic comedy "The Proposal." His mysterious, heavily accented Ramone has a habit of popping up unexpectedly doing any of his many jobs around town. Director Anne Fletcher, a "huge fan" of Nuñez from Comedy Central's "Halfway Home," said she secretly asked Bullock to do a spit-take on the actor during their characters' first meeting.

Nuñez wasn't even fazed. "He doesn't break, he comes up with, 'It's OK, it's wash and wear,' which ends up in the movie," Fletcher said. "It's so in character, the crew and cast laughed for about 15 minutes because of his commitment."

Also the town's resident exotic dancer, Ramone's most-lasting impression is made at the bar where he brandishes his highly touted sensual wares for Bullock's benefit -- with circa-1980s moves vaguely misremembered from the likes of "Flashdance."

Of the actor's frothy frolic, Fletcher -- a dancer and choreographer -- said, "Oscar has it in him to be able to dance but not so cleanly and crisply so he looks like the real deal. Ramone went to Chippendale's in the '80s and said, 'I'm bringing this back to Alaska and giving it to the ladies.' But you never are uncomfortable or creeped out; he does it with pure, genuine heart that only Oscar can bring to it."

To a comic actor known for his improv skills, the notion of locking down his manly moves came as a surprise.

"Anne was like, 'We have a day for choreography.' And I'm like, 'Whaaat? I don't need that.' And my girlfriend's like, 'Dude, of course you do. This is a big scene,

you can't just go in and wing it. This isn't like some student film.' And sure enough, it helped a lot. You do it over and over again, you have to do the same things," he said, sheepishly.

The risqué business wasn't made any easier by it being scheduled for the actor's first day of shooting, before he'd really even met his costars.

It was " 'Hi,' open the robe and start dancing," he says, laughing. "I met Mary Steenburgen that day; Betty White and Sandra Bullock. All in the morning. I'm like, 'Wow, I'm getting to meet these ladies . . . and here we go.' But it was great."

calendar@latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

[Article licensing and reprint options](#)

Copyright 2009 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)