Jim Ford ’04 is on fire—sometimes literally

Maybe you recall Jim Ford ’04 from basketball games in the early 2000s. He was the especially audacious Howie the Hawk who leaped off the bleachers to stir up fans.

“I was Howie the Hawk for two full years, almost three, from around 2000,” Ford, a Hartt School alumnus, says. “It was great. I was going to basketball games, having the time of my life. Eventually, though, I was let go. I was jumping off bleachers and things like that. I was taking Howie to the next level. But I had a good run.”

Ford is still having a good run by taking things to the next level. Now, he’s doing it as an actor and stuntman in movies and on television. Maybe you’ve seen him eating a Snickers bar in a TV commercial with basketball Hall-of-Famer Patrick Ewing that began running during March Madness.

After earning his BFA in actor training, Ford took his athletic abilities and performance skills to New York City to pursue his craft.

“Hartt was great with all the classical training, studying in England, and things like that, but what I really wanted to do was action movies,” Ford says. “As a kid, I was always playing sports. I played baseball, basketball, football, soccer, skateboarding, BMX, snowboarding. I would build ramps in the backyard. My mother will tell you that I was the one who always wanted to build the ramps and jumps higher.”

“When I arrived in New York, I didn’t work at any other job. I had made up my mind that I would take a while to get this acting thing going; there wouldn’t be a lot of money in the beginning. It was tough. I just knocked on door after door after door, sending out my picture and signing up with agents and managers.”

Ford’s persistence paid off quickly. “I was hired for commercials right off the bat,” he says. And he landed a prized job as the stunt double for Oscar-nominated actor Edward Norton, largely, Ford says, because he is 6 feet 1 inch like Norton. Not to mention the fact that he also resembles Norton. (Check out the fight scene between Norton and Colin Farrell in the 2008 release Pride and Glory for a good look at Ford’s work.)

Between projects recently, Ford explained in a telephone interview from his home in New York that he’s “having a blast. I just finished filming Leaves of Grass in New Orleans. Ed Norton plays twin brothers—one is a college professor, the other is a criminal. . . . There are stunt guys out there who would work their whole lives before getting to the point of being the stunt double for an actor of Ed Norton’s stature. I had been acting—just straight acting—for just two to three years. Making a living as a stunt double came out of nowhere, but once it happened and I had legitimate stunts on my résumé, things just started snowballing.”

Ford refined his athletic acting at the International Stunt School in Seattle, Wash., the summer before his third year at Hartt. His stunt skills include falls, car crashes, fire scenes, and, of course, fighting. He has appeared in commercials for Intel, Toyota, Sam Adams beer, and the New York Lotto. His big-screen credits include Pride and Glory, I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry, Across the Universe, and The Maiden Heist. His television credits: Gossip Girl, The Sopranos, Law & Order, CSI: NY, Ugly Betty, and five episodes of the HBO miniseries John Adams.

Ford aspires to be more than a stunt double, however. Ultimately, he wants to star in action films doing his own stunts. “I’m an all-around athletic stunt guy,” Ford says, “and it’s a bonus to have real acting training from Hartt.”

Editor’s note: As we go to press, Ford has a speaking part in the movie Salt, which stars Angelina Jolie.