

Star in the Making: Senior maps out future goals, ambitions of performing professionally

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photo editor

The stage is dark.

The voices from the house begin to die down as the music starts to play.

Performers stand on the wings, waiting for their cues.

The curtain is lifted.

The show begins.

Senior **Andrew Thompson** said he involuntarily joined the theater department his freshman year.

"My parents actually forced me to do theater," he said. "My mom said I had charisma [and] thought one day I was going to be a star."

Thompson said the challenge of memorizing scripts originally kept him away from the department.

"I think [my] biggest fear going into theater [was] memorizing lines and the songs," he said. "It's like [memorizing] a monologue from Shakespeare, but normal conversation."

Because of his outgoing personality, Thompson said he was able to land a role in a Blue Valley production during his freshman year.

"The first play I was cast in was 'The Brothers' Grimm Spectacularthon,'" he said. "I was the Frog King. It was an interesting experience."

During his audition, Thompson said he was extremely nervous.

"I'm told the difference between an actor and an amateur is that the actor throws up before the audition and the amateur hurls during the audition," he said. "If that is the test, then I'm destined to be a professional."

Once he was a part of the theater department, Thompson said he was quickly introduced to choir.

"I was plucked from a bit stage appearance by [choir teacher] Marsha Moeller," he said. "She changed my schedule, added choir and got me the coaching I needed. I was surprised to see such a diverse group of people in choir. There were dancers, cheerleaders, football players, actors, baseball players and even weight lifters. I found my voice and my friends that changed my school experience and my life."

After this, Thompson said he quickly fell in love with the experience and began performing in musicals such as "Beauty and the Beast," "Crazy for You" and "Guys and Dolls."

"I like musicals [more than plays]," Thompson said. "They seem more vibrant [because I think] singing is another form of expression. Singing in musical theater, for me, is like when you don't have the right words to say."

After high school, Thompson said he plans to continue his acting career by attending an arts college in New York to study musical theater and film.

"I applied to several colleges in New York, [but] I will be attending The American Musical and Dramatic Academy," he said. "I only applied to schools in New York [because] I feel at my best when I'm there. We have a saying in our family that our favorite car is the one that stops when we hail it from the curb."

Thompson said his parents were skeptical when he first told them of his plans to become a professional actor.

"When I told parents I planned to major in entertainment, they went bonkers," he said. "I think they hoped it would just be a school activity. They were worried about me going into the field, but I told them I have a foolproof back up plan — my brother Alex's couch."

After three years, Thompson said his parents finally believed in his commitment.

"Now they are confident ones, and I am the scared one," he said. "I can't imagine doing anything else but entertainment."

Thompson said his parents have played a huge part in his success.

"My dad is my coach, and my mom is my finance and operations person," he said. "A successful actor told me that being an actor is like owning a company. You are the product, but you have to have a CEO, CRO, legal team, etc. to succeed. I don't need my parents to stand in front of me and fight my battles, but I sure am grateful they are beside me."

As opposed to a traditional college, Thompson said there are different steps to be accepted into an arts college.

"There are two gauntlets to admission," he said. "One is to be accepted into the University academically and then to be accepted into the college of performing arts based on an audition [sent in] consisting of singing, acting and dancing."

Thompson said he understands the difficulty of his career choice, and he will have to work hard after college.

"I am realistic," he said. "I'll probably be

waiting tables by night and auditioning by day. I'll tell you tonight's specials."

After a successful audition for the Coterie Theater this year, Thompson said he will be a part of a professional production preparing him for college.

"I am going to be doing 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' this upcoming summer," he said. "It's actually my first paying job. I am an ensemble [member]."

Thompson said the Coterie Theater is a well-known and respected establishment in the Kansas City area.

"Everyone in theater [business] knows the Coterie Theater," he said. "They conduct master classes that are invaluable."

Although the job requires a demanding schedule, Thompson said he looks forward to the experience.

"Rehearsals start the first week of June [and go] all the way through early July," he said. "[They] will generally start around 5 or 6 [p.m.] and [end around] 10 [p.m.]. We do that every day for the whole week."

Since the entertainment field is so competitive, Thompson said it is important to have industry connections.

"My brother's friend's dad is the producer of 'Kung Fu Panda,' and he said he would connect me," he said. "During an audition, I want to say 60 percent of the time is based off connections, the other 30 percent is your look [and] 10 percent is your talent."

Thompson said the best guidance he has ever received was to never give up.

"There are professional actors who audition and audition," he said. "Being in the theater business, people will say you're stupid, you're ugly, you're overweight, you're not right for the role, [but] you have to keep a positive attitude. You smile, [you] nod, you do what they say, you give your best performance and then you get out of there, and you don't ever look back. You don't regret anything."

Thompson said his favorite part about performing is the anticipation of a show.

"During a production, standing in the wings in the dark, waiting for my cue to enter, I look around see the tech crew, actors, prop manager, costumers, choreographers, directors, stage managers, musicians — so many people who have come together [to create the show]," he said. "It makes me feel like I am a member of the world's largest family."