



Alumnus heads to Broadway — again

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Did you know Shenandoah will soon have an alumnus treading the boards of the Neil Simon Theatre on Broadway in New York City?

Aaron Galligan-Stierle '02 recently finished playing the role of auto tycoon Henry Ford in a limited-engagement production of "Ragtime: The Musical" at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theatre. When the production was picked up and moved to Broadway, a few changes in the cast were made, but Galligan-Stierle will be reprising the role of Henry Ford.

Galligan-Stierle recently took time out of his very busy schedule — specifically between a press event for "Ragtime" in Philadelphia and the first day of "Ragtime" rehearsals — to return to Shenandoah Sept. 15 to share his professional experience with theatre students and faculty members.

First, he dropped in on Jonathan Flom's "Preparation for the Profession" class, which prepares theatre majors by teaching good business skills.

Associate Professor of Theatre Flom first met Galligan-Stierle while they were both working on their master's degrees at Penn State.

"I'm absolutely thrilled to have been able to connect our students with Aaron," said Flom. "He brought valuable information regarding very current trends in auditioning, and people really seemed to listen because he was where they are just a few years ago. His energy and enthusiasm is infectious and he is so genuinely likable. It's no wonder he continuously works as an actor in New York."

"You know everything Aaron is doing is working for him, because he's about to be on Broadway — again," said senior musical theatre major Angela Winslow. She's in Flom's preparation class and had the chance to perform two song selections for Galligan-Stierle in an audition workshop later the same day.

Galligan-Stierle's first appearance on Broadway was in the 2007-08 company of "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas! The Musical" in which he was Papa Who. "Ragtime" is his second Broadway credit.

Along with a number of other credits ranging from tours to festivals, he has done a number of shows while a student at Shenandoah University and with Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre.

I sat down with Galligan-Stierle to pick his brain about the way he lives his life and how far he has gone since graduating from Shenandoah in 2002. In the conservatory's "green room," he immediately began scanning the photos of past SSMT shows looking for himself and friends.

"This is a bit surreal," he said, taking in a view of a room from his undergraduate studies almost a decade ago.

"I was a crazy person when I was here," he recalled. "I did everything, between being in every show I could possibly be in, being in every directing project I could be in. I was designing lights, I was choreographing pieces, I was writing music, I took music composition classes, I took dance composition classes, I wrote for the newspaper. I did everything."

When asked if he has any regrets from his college years, he said, "To be perfectly honest, I don't think I have one."

Galligan-Stierle left Shenandoah with skills he learned here that are still paying off, a fact reflected in his current success.

"Definitely the idea that working hard pays off," he said. "Being nice to people pays off. Saying yes to every project is a really good way to learn how to do things even if you can't do them," he added.

"Someone would say, 'Can you tap dance?' and I'd say 'Yes,' and they'd say, 'Good.' Then, they'd cast me in a show. Next thing I knew I was staying up until three in the morning for two weeks in a row, learning how to tap dance!"

"Aaron was everywhere on campus, doing everything," said Cathy Kuehner, managing editor of *The SUN*. "One day, I suggested to him that he get more sleep. He said, 'I'll sleep later. Right now I want to take advantage of everything this school has to offer.'"

In fact, Galligan-Stierle even wrote for the campus newspaper, originating the theatre column.

Years later, nothing has changed.

"One of the things I have figured out that has been very useful to me is to keep my hands in a lot of pots at the same time, so I have a lot of different things brewing and I don't know which ones are gonna pop," Galligan-Stierle said.

He has many plans for his future including a film company he and his best friend just started, and he wants to direct theatre one day.

"In the meantime, why not tell great stories on the greatest stage in the world? As much as I can, I want to do more shows on Broadway, make a living and, hopefully, be able to have an enjoyable life that way."

Galligan-Stierle never seems to get burned out. Rather, he takes on more projects and to fill his schedule with things he loves.

"We are very, very blessed to be able to do what we do," he said of the acting profession. "We are very lucky we are surrounded by passionate people, who have such gifts. They don't even care whether or not they get paid a lot of money to share, they just want to share their gifts."

"When surrounded by that, the only way you should really live your life is with joy, to acknowledge what's around you, to be thankful for what you have and to be genuinely hopeful you and the people around you — by doing what we do — will lift spirits."

Galligan-Stierle gave theatre students and faculty a great gift by coming back to campus to share his experiences, and he left students with these words of wisdom:

"You have extraordinary resources around you. I'm not just talking about faculty. Be good to your fellow students. I guarantee they will be the first line and the first chance for you to get work. They're in a cast, and somebody breaks their leg, and they call their friend. That happens all the time."

"You need an agent and your friend picks up the phone and says 'My friend Aaron would be really good at this agency.' Those relationships are so important, so be good to each other. If for no other reason, being good comes around in the real world."

Galligan-Stierle has started rehearsals for the Broadway production of "Ragtime," which is choreographed and directed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge. Performances start on Oct. 23 with opening night set for Nov. 15.

For more information about the production, visit www.Broadway.com/shows/Ragtime, and visit www.AaronGS.com.



SUN Photos by CATHY KUEHNER
Actor Aaron Galligan-Stierle