

Leap at the Chance

Theatre senior **Connor Hullender**, a lifelong fan of theatre, finds community at Dreyfoos

Blocking his living room like a stage, five-year-old theatre senior **Connor Hullender** directed his parents in an at-home production of “Happy Feet.” Recognizing his passion, his parents signed him up for his first theatre show the following year.

“I would walk around the house and come up with stories in my head, wanting to play them out,” Hullender said. “In that sense, I always knew that theatre is what I enjoyed doing.”

In middle school, in addition to being part of the Bak Middle School theatre department, he was also a member of the Performing Arts Academy of Jupiter (PAAJ). During PAAJ's production of “The Drowsy Chaperone,” he starred as the wacky European Adolfo and met one of his closest friends, Dreyfoos alum J.J. Korkin.

When he auditioned for Dreyfoos that year, he did not make it in. Neither his resolve nor “I Am Adolfo” would leave him, though. He studied acting at G-Star School of the Arts during his freshman year.

“(G-Star) was a good experience, but I did recognize that it wasn't quite the place for me. I felt the need to go somewhere with a little more drive,” Hullender said.

Looking back on his first audition, Hullender said he did not choose the right song to represent who he is. He needed to do a song that was more reflective of his confidence the second time around, so he performed “I Am Adolfo.” He got accepted into Dreyfoos in his sophomore year.

“All of (my friends) were so hyped to have me, and that made me really happy,” Hullender said. “It was proof to me that this is where I belonged for the rest of my high school career. These are the people I want to spend my time with.”

While acting at Dreyfoos, Hullender continued to perform with Korkin, including productions of “Songs for a New World” and “Theory of Relativity” at Palm Beach Drama Works. Their final show together was the Dreyfoos production of “The Drowsy Chaperone,” and they both kept the same roles that they played at PAAJ: Adolfo and the Drowsy Chaperone.

“The first thing I remember about (Korkin) ... was after I first sang through the Adolfo song, she came up to me like ‘I am so excited to do this with you,’” Hullender said. “So it was a full circle moment for us.”

In his final year of high school, Hullender auditioned for and got the role of Harry Potter in the play “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child.” In the play, Potter had to reckon with the fact that the past should remain the past, a theme that Hullender could relate to. Theatre senior Sher Wiedrich, one of the show’s stage managers, worked alongside Hullender to bring Harry Potter to life.

“He is great to work with. During rehearsal, he would come up to me and ask ‘Are you ok? Do you need notes or anything?’” Wiedrich said. “Even though he’s a main character, it never felt like he was overpowering.”

One of the directors of “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child,” theatre teacher Kirstina Leljedal, cited his range and open-mindedness among the reasons he was well-suited for the role of Harry Potter. Hullender put in the initial work to embody the character, but had to be open to change as the directors shaped the actors into their roles.

“I think that it's crazy that he didn't get in in the first place, because there was never one day of rehearsal that I ever doubted his ability to lead a room,” Leljedal said. “He creates a character from the inside out, and it's every part of his body from his fingertips to the top of his head.”

Hullender found comfort in the collaboration, having not only to build rapport with the other actors but also with the lights, directors, and prop managers.

“We all have a love for each other because we respect what we do,” Hullender said. “The process of creating and playing with each other in theatre is magical.”