



Light The Lights

College Students Believe They Have What it Takes to Make it Big

Story by Mandy Bee Layout by Hannah Datz

Shakespeare once said it best: "All the world's a stage, and we are merely players."

Jessica Searight has been abiding by this sentiment for her entire life.

Searight, 20, has been dreaming of Broadway since she was in diapers.

"I've never had

any other goals...even as a kid, I'd put on plays for anyone who'd watch," the 21-year-old said.

Searight has manifested this dream into a theater major at Temple University. She claims that more than 30 of her weekly hours are spent in preparation for what she hopes will one day be her debut on Broadway.

Searight is representative of a class of students who are chasing one of the world's dying arts.

According to a survey conducted by Forbidden Broadway, an organization

that attempts to keep theater in the mainstream by use of its comedic blogging,

Broadway attendance is lower than ever. In fact, ticket sales have dropped over 20 percent in the past five years.

So why do students like Searight continue to chase the dream?

“What am I gonna do? Give up my dream because I’m afraid? There’s always waiting tables.”

“Theater is the most beautiful form of art,” said Searight. “Anyone who can be someone else on stage is a true artist, and I don’t want to see that beauty die off.”

Searight has performed in numerous shows throughout the Philadelphia area, with notable roles in Temple’s *Les Misérables* and *Damn Yankees*.

“I’m lucky to be in the second-biggest theater city in the country,” said Searight. “Opportunities are everywhere; you just have

to work towards them.”

But it is not just Philadelphia students who have their sights set on Broadway. Smaller colleges have seen a rise in not only theater participation, but also in students who want to major in theater.

Jeff Lanigan is one of these students.

Lanigan, a 22-year-old musical theater/scenic design major from Ursinus College, believes that he will one day fully realize his Broadway ambitions.

“As weird as it sounds, [majoring in theater] is all about being realistic,” said Lanigan as he opened a computer folder holding his professional head shots.

“It’s not about what you know, it’s about who you know ... and being a theater major is all about making connections early on. That’s the only way

you’ll ever be successful.”

Lanigan fulfills this requirement by attending constant auditions. Here, he carries his portfolio and business cards. He has a videotaped montage of his best performances. He can sing any genre of any music on cue ... in several languages.

“You can never be too prepared,” said Lanigan.

When confronted with the reality that theater majors have one of the highest failure rates in career-finding, Lanigan remains what he calls “cautiously optimistic.”

“What am I gonna do? Give up my dream because I’m afraid? There’s always waiting tables,” said Lanigan with a grin.

La Salle University, which has been devoid of a major in theater for nearly 20 years, remains full of theater interest, as well as many students who plan to take their act-

ing careers to a professional level.

Doug Phelan, student producer and president of La Salle’s student-run theater organization, the Masque, continues to have faith in a theater-lover’s success through their experiences at La Salle.

“Interest in theater continues to grow each year,” Phelan said. “Without much advertising, the Masque always has extremely talented people who are willing to give a lot of time to their attempts for Broadway.”

One such student is Pam Woodward. Despite her double major in chemistry and biochemistry, Woodward has high hopes of one day appearing on Broadway.

“I’m going to start auditioning as soon as I graduate,” Woodward, a senior, said. “Theater is my first priority. My majors are a nice fallback, though.”

And she’s well on her way. With leads

in the Masque’s past three shows (*Into the Woods*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and *Urinetown*), Woodward has shown that you don’t need a major in theater to be well rounded in numerous performance arts.

For students interested in theater, an acceptance of rejection must be ready. At least that is what Joe Laub says.

Joseph P. Laub, Jr. has been working with up-and-coming actors and actresses for nearly 15 years. He is director and creator of The Actors’ Group, a Northeast Philadelphia acting company that works with young actors.

Laub has seen four of his pupils on stage on Broadway.

“[Seeing them on stage] were some of my proudest moments,” the 55-year-old government worker said.

“Theater is my first priority. My majors are a nice fallback though.”

“After years of determination and hard work, they finally did it.”

For Laub, he says that the key to success in theater is constant diligence and a lot of patience.

“Even when it’s looking grim, you just gotta remember to never give up,” said Laub.



Doug Phelan kisses his leading lady in La Salle University’s *Arsenic and Old Lace*.



The abundantly charming princes of La Salle’s *Into the Woods* finish their duet.