

After 'Pippin,' Young Actor prepares for leap to college

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While delivering a monologue at her college theater audition for Shenandoah University in Virginia, Camilla Calderon was moved to tears. For a moment, she became a girl in group therapy dealing with what it meant to be adopted and feel no connection to her mother. She dug into the words written by playwright Amy Beth Arkawy in "Rage Amongst Yourselves."

Then Calderon was asked to read it again, and change the way in which she presented the lines. Eventually she reached a place within herself that she never thought possible. She walked out of the room transformed, and later when she received her acceptance letter, she was over the moon.

"I felt a strong connection with everyone I met there," says Calderon, a Tallahassee 2018 Best and Brightest Award recipient who is wrapping up her final season with the Young Actors Theatre this June in their production of "Pippin."

Though she's taken the stage in numerous musical theater productions, the ambitious 18-year-old will move full steam ahead as a student actress, trading in song and dance for dramatic and comedic plays while enrolled at the Shenandoah Conservatory.

Born in Columbia, Calderon believes her lively family instilled in her a penchant for theatrics as her parents always encouraged her to be her own person. When she was old enough to talk and walk, her abundance of energy landed her in theater classes. She was one of 20 Annies in a kindergarten production of "Annie," and officially joined YAT's student company in seventh grade.

She recalls sitting in the audience at YAT's production of "Thoroughly Modern Millie" as a fourth-grader, spellbound by the rapid-fire tap numbers. She had never seen anything like it, and resolved to choose theater as her path, as she enthusiastically greeted the cast after the show.

"I thought all those teenagers at the time were superstars that had come to YAT to show me a Broadway production," laughs Calderon.

She says her time spent at YAT has given her an incredible amount of resil-



Camilla Calderon as Ursula in YAT's "Little Mermaid." CAMILLA CALDERSON

ience as she's explored and identified her strengths and weaknesses year after year. She's discovered how much she enjoys physical and stage comedy, and looks up to stand-up comics like John Mulaney for inspiration. However, she admits that sometimes her "director's brain" gets in the way of allowing others to call the shots in rehearsals.

Helping along this journey has been YAT Artistic Director and mentor Robert Stuart, who she credits for shaping her sense of humor. She's grateful for the guidance of Executive Director Tina Williams, who she likens to the matriarch of the familial environment at YAT. Every audition process within the company has been a vital to bolstering her self-esteem.

"In a space where you're growing, and you're a teenager and insecure, going into an audition room and knowing that people genuinely want you to do well is really nice," says Calderon. "You need that push when you're younger to have that confidence level."

Calderon has loved every minute of her senior year season. To prepare for each role, she prioritizes staying healthy and cares for her vocal cords by inhaling steam before shows and getting plenty of rest. She painted herself purple and maneuvered in a twenty-pound tenta-

pled skirt for her commanding part as Ursula in "The Little Mermaid." In "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," she valued the ability to share the stage with a smaller ensemble and work together as a team.

This year in Chiles High School's theater program, Calderon says she discovered how to take a script and turn it into a standalone piece. She appreciated the chance to dig her teeth into modern plays and one acts. She also took a student-directed piece to the annual statewide thespians festival each year and was grateful for the opportunity to take workshops from Broadway actors. Regardless of the style, she says having a good attitude about whatever she's working on is key.

"The only way you learn that you've made a mistake is by doing it," states Calderon. "I have definitely gone through a show experience where I came out feeling negatively toward a show that I genuinely would have liked if I had just gone back and had a positive attitude from the beginning. Even if you're in the back of the ensemble in a jellyfish costume, your perspective can change the whole show for you."

She admires Stephen Schwartz' "Pippin" because of how the ensemble is creatively and intelligently engaged on-

If you go

What: Pippin

When: 7:30 p.m. June 22-24, June 28-July 1, as well as 2 p.m. on June 24 and July 1

Where: Young Actors Theatre, 609 Glenview Drive

Cost: \$14 for children (12 and under); \$16 for students; \$18 for seniors; \$20 for adults

Contact: For more information, call 850-386-6602 or visit <https://www.youngactorstheatre.com/>.

stage for the entire show. She is a huge supporter of her friends' successes, and loves the feeling of the whole cast surrounding each other, where everyone is valued, seen, and heard no matter the role. Calderon will play Bertha, Pippin's "crazy old grandma" who attempts to teach him a lesson through a laugh-out-loud sing-along.

Calderon appreciates the layers in the musical, which touches on political and religious commentary while wrapped up inside the dressings of colorful costuming, lighting, and Bob Fosse dance moves. Her favorite part of rehearsal is sitzprobe day when they sing through the whole show for the first time with the band as "Pippin" will have live music. The show opens June 22 and will serve as Calderon's finale at YAT.

She feels fortunate to have a group of talented friends that have helped her to learn and grow, and can't wait to dive into a new adventure with the Miesner acting technique at Shenandoah. Calderon says her background not only shaped her character, but how she will carry herself forward into this next, exciting phase.

"I think there is no better form of communication than theater because it makes you see the world's problems in a light that you can connect with," says Calderon. "Theater gives anyone a voice, all you have to do is find a stage."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).