

TCC's 'I Love You' is a perfect theater debut

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In Tallahassee Community College's upcoming production of the musical comedy, "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change," actor Gerald Davis goes through an entire relationship in eight minutes or less.

Davis switches in and out of different characters in the six-person production just as quickly. It's part of the charm of the Tony Award-Winning musical, which cycles through the rollercoaster ride that is first loves, first dates, marriages, babies, in-laws and growing old together.

"I'm in 11 scenes and in each scene every single character is different," says Davis. "Our director [M. Derek Nieves] tells us to use our backstage time to click into our next character. You have to stay present in your current character, then as you're changing, start thinking in context of what your next character is going to be like."

Davis plays all sides of the dating spectrum — from a young man who is a "nervous ball of energy" about asking out a girl, to someone who is breaking up with his girlfriend because he fears adulthood. The Jekyll-Hyde-like transitions are just one challenge of the show. For Davis, this musical will serve as his debut in the musical theater genre.

A self-professed "band kid" throughout middle and high school, Davis played the trumpet for eight years. He's never forgotten his first performance playing Kool & The Gang's party hit "Celebration," and how comfortable the instrument felt in his hands.

He was always a part of his church's choir and started singing in the men's chorus before graduating high school.

Being backstage at TCC has been an entirely novel experience.

"One night the stage manager said to be in places by 7:30 and everyone said 'Thank you, 7:30' all in perfect unison," recalls Davis. "I was like, 'what is this?' I'm trying to keep up with the lingo."

Davis says professor Eva Nielson has given him invaluable advice and guidance when it comes to being a thespian. In choir and band, he was used to striving for uniformity in a group setting. Now, he says he's learned how to choose his own path in a performance by bringing his background and story into his artistry.

"I love to bring in the African American queer male experience," says Davis. "I want to show other people that they can do it as well."

Davis' journey in the arts hasn't always been smooth. He was halfway through his freshman year at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. In that moment, Davis decided he wanted to audition for Florida State University's vocal performance major. He and a group of friends made the pilgrimage to Tallahassee, brimming with excitement and nervous jitters.

Though Davis wasn't accepted into the program, it strengthened his resolve to continue pushing himself as a performer. He spent the time in lockdown mesmerized by livestreams from Broadway and dove into plays and dramas like "Sweat" by Lynn Nottage and "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker. He is drawn to raw, real stories that examine strength in the face of adversity.

"I realized that in this industry you're going to hear a lot of 'no,' and it won't be the make or break of you," says Davis. "It's just another experience on your back, so when this happens again you can learn from it."

Davis decided to transfer to TCC and



Gerald Davis performs in Tallahassee Community College's upcoming production of the musical comedy, "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change." PROVIDED

If you go

What: "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change" A Musical Comedy

When: Live-Streamed Performances 8 p.m. on April 9, 10, 16, 17, On-Demand Video April 11-18

Cost: \$10

Contact: For more information, call 850-201-9882 or visit broadwayondemand.com

make the leap into musical theater. He felt comfortable in the world of auditioning for choirs, which focus on a singer's ability to sight read music and perform a prepared piece. His audition for the upcoming musical threw a curveball his way with the additional requirement to recite a monologue.

The director asked him to project to the last seat in the auditorium. Davis, who has a naturally ebullient voice, had never been asked to speak louder before and was delighted to meet the challenge. When it comes to using these skills in his performance, Davis says he relies on his music knowledge to enhance a character.

In one scene where he is impatiently waiting in a mall, he adds a "growl" to his singing voice to portray anger or a "sigh" for frustration. He says these embellishments can help to bring each character to life.

"I want to take people out of their normal reality and put them into a world where they don't have to think about anything," says Davis.

Though he is green to theater, Davis has no stage fright whatsoever. TCC's production will feature both an On-Demand option for those who cannot tune in for the livestreams, but actors were also allowed to invite two guests to sit in the audience during filming. While Davis is excited to see his parents seated among the masked faces, he is also looking forward to performing for strangers again.

"I like to perform into the unknown and not have people expect what they know of me already," says Davis. "In quarantine last year, I noticed how much I missed and loved being onstage. I could be doing anything. I could be juggling, talking, playing an instrument, singing...I just want to be onstage and give a show for people."

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).