

Staged for Success

Pitch perfect theatre and dance grad gets “The Call”

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BRIANNE KENNEDY ON STAGE AT UNH COMMENCEMENT 2015 TO SING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Brianne Kennedy '15 carried a sunflower and a smartphone when she took the stage to sing the national anthem at UNH's commencement earlier this month. She brought the smartphone because it stored her starting pitch. The sunflower was in honor of a lost friend, “the sunshine of our friend group,” Kennedy says. When she reached the lectern, she looked out and saw many other sunflowers. “It was a very surreal,” she says. “I felt her presence.”

A less accomplished performer might have become lost in emotion, but Kennedy held it together, delivering a beautiful rendition of a song she has sung many times before. Near the end, a chorus of graduates joined in.

The Montclair, New Jersey, native is no stranger to the stage; she's been performing since childhood. As a theatre and dance major at UNH, she performed in "Hair," "Avenue Q," "Anything Goes" and "Next to Normal," among many other shows, and she played Roxy Hart in this spring's production of "Chicago."



KENNEDY WILL JOIN THE CAST OF "ANNIE" ON ITS NATIONAL TOUR STARTING IN SEPTEMBER.

She's graduated, but she won't stop performing anytime soon. In July, Kennedy will begin rehearsing in New York for her role in the national tour of "Annie."

It's the first giant leap in Kennedy's theatrical career, and she remembers exactly where she was when she got the call to join the cast. "I was in Union Court at the MUB grading papers," she says. Kennedy was a teaching assistant in the introduction to theatre and dance class this past semester. "I knew that if I were to get a call it would come that day. I kept looking at my phone. Then I put it face down next to me. Then I heard it vibrate and thought 'Oh, it's probably just a text,' But it was a call, and it was coming from a New York area code."

She was in shock then, and she says "It's still sinking in."

When she hung up, the first thing she did was text her parents and close friends. Then she packed up and left Union Court quickly. “I was smiling so much, I knew I would start crying — I needed to get out of public.” So she walked towards the place theatre and dance majors call home – the Paul Creative Arts Center. “The second I got inside I started bawling,” she says, which was followed by “a lot of screaming” from her excited classmates.

Brianne Kennedy’s most memorable classes at UNH, in her words:

1. The dance classes – they’ve been awesome
2. Acting II with David Kaye
3. Directing with David Kaye (Everything with David Kaye was awesome.)
4. Dialect class with Deb Kinghorn
5. Mythology
6. The history of business and the economy with Kim Clark – she’s a great teacher

The first professor she told was John Berst, her director for many shows. “Then I ran into David Kaye’s office. He was in a meeting, but I just ran in and interrupted and told him.”

Kennedy says it all started with an open casting call. She saw it; put in for an appointment; got an appointment, then an audition, then kept auditioning all the way to the final round. She says the auditioning classes she took at UNH really helped. “It made me so much more prepared. I knew what to wear, what to sing, how to present myself.”

Kennedy will be in the show’s ensemble and she’s the understudy for the part of Lily St. Regis. The tour starts in Seattle in September and will cross the country until July 2016.

Although she’s excited to be going on to a grand adventure, Kennedy says leaving UNH is bittersweet. “The professors are so there for you. They’ll help you. They want you to do well. This is one of the harder things about leaving – the community that I’m leaving and the family I’ve had to fall back on. They give you the tools and it’s what you make of it — that’s one of the great things about the UNH theatre and dance department. I feel so lucky that I got to get my education here. I’m very fortunate to have gone through this department at this school.”

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