

KeizerCommunity

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Thomas exits stage for film school

By **DEREK WILEY**
Of the Keizertimes

Ashton Thomas, the son of middle school choir and drama teachers, has spent as much time in the Ken Collins Theater as any McNary student over the past four years, acting in plays or musicals and singing in the choir.

But in college, Thomas has decided to step off stage to go to film school at Azusa Pacific University in Los Angeles.

Thomas said the decision has surprised many in the community who have praised his work after performances like Gomez in *The Addams Family* musical earlier this year.

"I was flattered but at the same time I feel like going as anything else but film would be, I don't want to say I couldn't do it but you have to have a certain mindset and drive for that sort of thing," Thomas said. "I don't think I would be able to keep up with the rest of the world out there.

"Not to say that I don't love it (theatre) and I don't really enjoy doing it more of just a hobby or for fun sort of thing, I do. I feel like film is a lot more comfortable and I still get the same artistic benefits and I still get to reap those rewards without necessarily having to compete in such a hard, dense, fast-paced musical theatre world. Behind the camera you can just show up,



KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley

Ashton Thomas was on the Ken Collins Theater stage as Gomez Addams one last time during the Golden Onions.

work hard and just be artistic."

McNary drama director Dallas Myers, who presented Thomas with one of three outstanding senior actor awards at the Golden Onions, wishes he would continue theatre but knows Thomas will excel in whatever he does.

"I know you're going into film and I'll continue to shake

my head for as long as I live but you'll add life on the other side of the camera I'm sure every day of the week," Myers said.

"You are a gift to this stage. A dynamic, transformative actor and a professional in every sense of the word, unbelievable, and can do anything on stage and anything that I ask

him to do, he'll do it. Every single time you grow and you transform yourself."

Myers used the example of Gomez and Lumiere from *Beauty and the Beast*, as similar characters that Thomas was able to make different.

"They were so different and so wonderful and rich and full body and that is something that professional actors would die for," Myers said.

While Thomas grew up acting, singing and dancing at Children's Educational Theatre in Salem and in the annual cabaret at Whiteaker Middle School, his interest in film began as a sophomore at McNary when he took his first media productions class with Jason Heimerdinger.

"Right away Heimerdinger and me just connected," Thomas said.

"I would spend hours every night just watching film tutorials and Youtube things so that was my first clue that I was going to do film because I wasn't spending hours watching musical performances or new choir songs. It was all about film for me."

At McNary, Thomas has worked on the Celtic Network News program and produced the senior film at the end of the year.

"I've found I like the production side a lot more, rather than sitting back at the computer," Thomas said. "I love being out with the camera ac-

tually filming things and then editing it."

At the senior awards banquet, he was named one of two Media Productions Students of the Year.

"Ashton appreciates taking the time to make something look beautiful rather than just pointing a camera and hitting record," Heimerdinger said.

Thomas was also paid to produce two commercials for the Salem-Keizer school district. In March, he directed a short film, *APEX*, for McNary's One Act Festival.

When looking at colleges, Thomas applied to three film schools in Los Angeles and was accepted into Azusa and Biola.

The decision ultimately came down to money. Along with a \$64,000 academic scholarship, Thomas is receiving a \$20,000 grant and \$12,000 cinema and arts scholarship from Azusa.

"This is the first time they're doing a cinema arts scholarship of any caliber at all," Thomas said.

"I was actually very surprised."

While on campus, Thomas also auditioned for the Azusa choir.

John Sutton, director of choral activities, was so impressed that he offered Thomas a \$15,000 scholarship per year if he changed to a music major.

Instead, Thomas is getting \$4,000, the cap for non-music

majors.

"He (Sutton) really, really liked me and he had some very nice things to say," Thomas said. "I was very blessed by that. It definitely had me rethinking a couple of things.

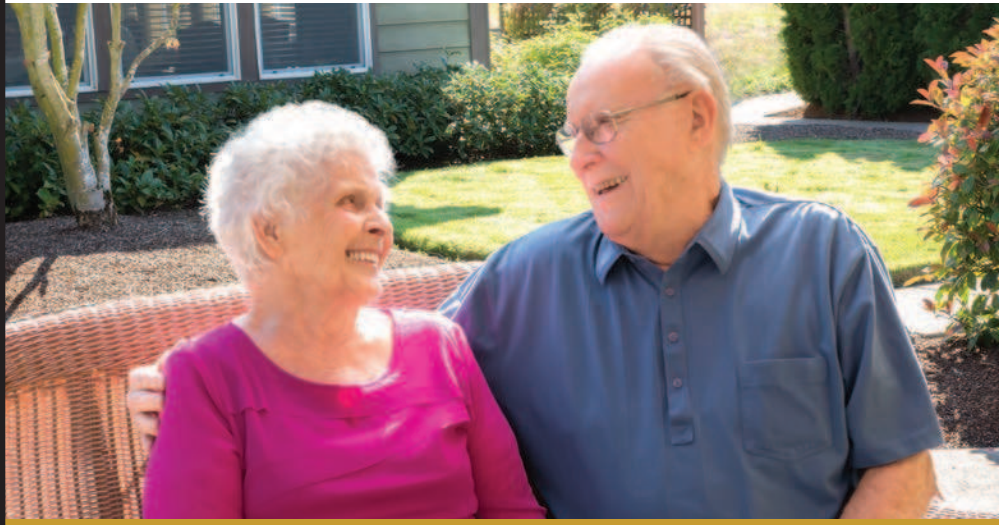
"I do love choral music, especially this year with the new choir teacher (Joshua Rist) here. He's really made that decision hard to not be a music major. I will be performing in one of their choirs because the way scheduling works out, it would be too hard to do more than one. It's a great deal. I get paid to sing in a choir."

Thomas is thankful for McNary, which allowed him to be a part of so many things while helping figure out what he wanted to do with his future.

"I think being in such a great place for the arts, such a great school that does it all so well has provided me with a lot of great opportunities to be a part of everything without overextending," Thomas said.

"I've always had time for everything and I've always been able to feel like I'm committed to everything, and I feel like it's helped me sort out what I want to do with my future, which is all I can ever ask for."

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