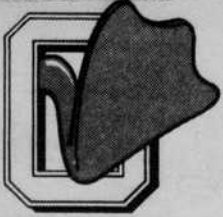


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Tim Kupsick Photographer

Sarah Turnquist is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree after six years of studying theater arts and music. Although friends and family members have expressed concern about her choosing theater arts as a major, Turnquist said being happy is more important than what she earns.

Making change, not money

Sarah Turnquist is optimistic about her degree in theatre arts, although she realizes she may be a 'starving artist'

By Sheldon Traver
 Freelance Reporter

After six years, senior Sarah Turnquist is graduating. Turnquist, a theater arts major, graduates this year with a Bachelor of Arts degree and a smile. She doesn't have solid career plans and has been asked by non-theater majors why she would choose a major such as theater.

"I did a lot of theater in high school," Turnquist said.

She said she knows the job outlook is grim for those pursuing a career in theater.

Senior theater arts major Michael Miranda, who has worked with Turnquist for three years, agreed that theater arts can be a tough degree to have.

"It can be really tough to find work," Miranda said. "It is one of the only disciplines where it's OK to discriminate. You'll hear 'you're too young for this part, you're not pretty enough,' and it can be tough to swallow."

Turnquist said earning a degree where she might make more money but would not be happy was out of the question.

"It is important to focus on yourself with a growth and work ethic, but it is so much more fun to focus on other people," Turnquist said.

Her love of acting drew her to the University, although she started in the School of Music. Her father sings with the Eugene Opera, and her mother teaches journalism at Cottage Grove High School.

"I have over 100 credits of music, mostly centered around vocal performance," Turnquist said, adding that it wasn't until a favorite vocal instructor left that she decided to switch majors. "I realized I didn't want to be an opera singer."

Her dad was supportive of her career choice, but her mom has had more difficulty accepting her decision.

"My mom is very supportive, but she wonders how I'm going to be able to support myself," Turnquist said.

Her first theatrical performance was in a family production of "Oliver!" when she was 11 years old. While in high school, she worked on a variety of productions and was cast in nearly every play or musical.

"When I first started, I didn't get cast in anything for a year, which was really difficult coming out of high school," Turnquist said.

She took the year and allowed herself to grow as a person and an actress.

"At first she wasn't finding a lot of success," Miranda said. "Her self-identity has become stronger."

She said she drew inspiration from not only her creative parents but also from Professor John Schmor.

"He really challenges you to stop relying on your defaults," Turnquist said.

She also noted one of his favorite sayings, "Stop being dumb." She said once she realized she had value as an artist, things became easier.

She said she hopes to make changes in her world through her work. She plans to someday produce work that will not only educate people but also create social awareness and bring political issues to the stage.

Turnquist has written and directed plays for and worked with children's theater, and has traveled to London twice to develop her skills in theater and to assist others.

"The greatest part of this department is the family," Turnquist said. "These are people you travel with, laugh with and cry with."

Friends said Turnquist is open and likes to bounce ideas for plays or creative arts off people.

"The stuff she connects to comes out of left field," junior theater arts major Danielle Kardum said.

Miranda described her as a high-energy person.

"She's very typical of a theater major, she's very theatrical," he said, adding that it is not uncommon to develop strong bonds because of the amount of time theater arts students spend together, which is often seven or eight hours per day.

After graduating, Turnquist plans to take some time off school and work. She will be performing with Mad Ducking Theatre this summer as well as acting in Shakespeare in the Park, which offers free performances for Eugene residents.

She plans to attend graduate school. Although she feels fortunate to have had many scholarships, including a presidential scholarship that paid for her first four years of college, she knows she will have to repay the approximately \$13,000 she owes for her last two years' worth of loans.

However, Turnquist said she is not afraid of financial problems.

"I would rather make change than money," she said. "I'm OK being a starving artist."

Sheldon Traver is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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