

Community Voices

Film acting in Florence

How 2 area youth caught the Hollywood bug and brought it home

BY CHANTELE MEYER
Siuslaw News

When Florence residents think about opportunities for youth acting in the area, they think of Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops (CROW) and its six years of mainstage musicals, or Last Resort Player's years of including youth in musicals and plays spanning all ages. However, when they think of acting, 16-year-old Hope Garcia and 7-year-old Jonah Vollmar think of the big screen.

Both youth have worked with CROW, and both have filmed with studios based in the Northwest, but there, the similarities end.

HOPE GARCIA: FULL CIRCLE

For Hope, being on stage is a hereditary trait. Her great-grandmother was a radio actress in World War II, and she has relatives who sing, write songs and act.

She thought about acting for the first time while she was still living in Idaho, where she lived with her family until they moved to Florence a year ago.

"In 2013, I remember being in the car and seeing a billboard. I don't know what inspired me, but I said, 'Mom, I think I want to do some acting,'" she said.

Rosa Garcia, Hope's mother, said, "She just decided she wanted to try it all of a sudden. As soon as she had an appointment with an agent, they signed her on the spot. ... She did her first commercial and she just loved it. She loves being in front of a camera and acting."

Hope was the main character in the upcoming short film "Missing Indigenous," premiering in March at Filmopalooza, a film festival in France.

Director Laronn Katchia said, "We make all our stories impactful, and Hope knew just how to represent that. We needed her to be able to sing and act without talking, and she was extremely professional."

Katchia described "Missing Indigenous" as "crazy intense and surreal," and said that Hope's singing and acting fit the feel of the short work about native women who disappear at a high rate.

"I wasn't aware of what was happening until I got on set," Hope said. "It's definitely one of the most important roles I've done. I'm honored to be representing that."

Katchia said Hope's acting elicited chills in the theater when they

showed "Missing Indigenous."

Hope now has her own IMDb page detailing several of the independent films she worked on, though she has also done commercials.

But the Internet Movie Database doesn't show all the work Hope puts in.

For one, many sets are in Portland or on location, requiring a several-hour commute.

For another, acting takes a lot of practice, especially for a teenager busy with settling into a new town and getting ready for the school year.

"Hope is really shy and quiet," Rosa said.

Acting has been a way for Hope to cope with situations and come out of her shell.

"Even if she's going to do a report in front of her class, Hope pretends it's a script and she nails it," Rosa said.

Hope is drawn toward drama, regularly playing serious roles in her handful of films.

"Every role has been intense — except for the Sonic commercial I did first, when I just got to drink a really good milkshake," she said. "I feel like I can play that the best, which is why I do want the challenge of a happy, giddy character so I can get the feel for it."

Rosa said that actors need "to be able to do it all," so Hope studies with Portland-based actor and producer Brian Sutherland and takes classes that include humor and romance.

She also works locally with CROW. This summer, she helped with Song and Dance Camp as a teen helper, and she will appear onstage this weekend in the one-act shows the Advanced Acting Program is performing.

"I enjoy stage acting with CROW," Hope said. "It's really fun. I like working on set a lot, too."

She described stage acting as being in the moment, while a film or commercial allows herself to see the final product afterwards.

"It's cool to see that and know I put my hard work and heart into that. I could watch it over and over," she said. "It's really awesome, performing either way."

This school year, Hope will also take video production, though Siuslaw High School does not have a theater class.

"I'm so excited for you," Diane, Hope's aunt, said to her. "I turn 70 this year, so this is pretty neat to see

this big, full circle of the next generation."

JONAH VOLLMAR: LOVE AND THE LIMELIGHT

For Jonah, he took to acting out of his family's love of performing. His parents, Scott and Mary Jo Vollmar, encouraged his sister, 13-year-old Nyah, to follow her dreams of singing. To gain exposure, they signed her up with an agent.

As Scott brought the entire family of four kids up to Portland, he got the chance to place Jonah in front of the camera, though Jonah had been unwilling to try.

"He tricked me by telling me we were just taking pictures (at a shoot), but it was actually an audition," Jonah said. "I actually liked it, so I started doing it more."

Scott said, "He went in there and hammed it up and did awesome. I told him after the fact that it was an audition."

Here in Florence, Jonah has worked with CROW as a telegrapher for 2016's "Shrek the Musical" and this year's "The Addams Family Musical," appearing onstage before the show to welcome the audience in, and again at intermission to welcome the audience back.

Jonah also joined Last Resort Players' "Pirates of Penzance" in November.

"I bugged him for about nine months about being in Pirates," Scott said.

Director Leah Goodwin had initially brought up the idea of Jonah playing a character called "Pirate Pete," and while the adults loved it, Jonah had no hesitation in saying, "No."

"About three weeks before opening night, Jonah changed his mind," Scott said. "He actually showed up for tech week and rehearsed then. ... Leah was going to have him just be a walk-on, but he ended up going out for four different scenes."



COURTESY PHOTOS

Hope Garcia (left) and Jonah Vollmar (right) are two local actors who have performed both on stage and in front of a camera.

People in the audience could easily pick up his clear young voice singing along with the merry grown-up pirates.

Last Resort Players led to a brief cameo as the changeling boy in Eugene Ballet's Florence Events Center performance of "Midsummer Night's Dream."

"People recognized him from 'Pirates,' so it was fun to get him back on stage," Scott said.

Soon, Jonah went from doing a satirical commercial about a "Trump" truck, to playing the child version of a lead character in Portland's "The Librarians" to flying to Michigan to be part of a short film called "Year One."

Jonah played the role of Chhay, a Cambodian boy caught up with his brother in the genocide of 1975-79.

"They made a call for a 6-year-old Asian boy, so I sent them his picture," Scott said. "They contacted us the next day for a Skype interview."

Scott and Jonah had to learn the character's lines in Khmer, the lan-

guage of Cambodia. Using Google translate, they focused on pronunciation first and memorizing lines.

"It was a lot of acting, and only six lines, but he still had to learn them, and in another language," Scott said.

The Vollmars were able to send in Jonah's 30-second audition tape that same day.

"When the director called us back, he was amazed at how quickly Jonah was able to pick this up and send a video in. He said Jonah was the only kid to do it in a week."

To further prepare for the role, the Vollmars enrolled Jonah and some other CROW kids in an Acting for Kids and Teens class.

"He went to the first three days of an acting class with Katie O'Grady, and we lined up a private lesson with her to help him act it out and prepare for his role."

O'Grady operates Acting for Kids and Teens and is a coach and actor.

Scott was grateful for O'Grady's

help, and encouraged her to come to Florence to work with local youth, which she will on Saturday, Aug. 26.


"We have made multiple six-hour round trips to Portland to benefit from Katie's coaching and expertise, and it's been well worth it," he said. "So to have her come to Florence, which means we don't have to be in the car for six hours, well, to say the least I am ecstatic."

O'Grady will teach youth the basics of auditioning for film from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The session will be \$75. Registration is online at ActingForKidsandTeens.com.

According to CROW Artistic Director Melanie Heard, O'Grady specializes in "kids who want to broaden their horizons" to include film and TV acting techniques.

"This style of acting is very different than live theater acting techniques," she said. "This is a truly outstanding opportunity for our local young actors."

For more information, visit



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