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Pine-Richland grad Jake Pedersen joins national tour of 'Wicked'



SHIRLEY MCMARLIN | Monday, March 21, 2022 3:39 p.m.



COURTESY OF JAKE PEDERSEN

Pine-Richland High School graduate Jake Pedersen is playing Boq in the national touring company of the Broadway musical "Wicked."

Jake Pedersen is following the yellow brick road to musical theater success.

The 2017 Pine-Richland High School graduate recently joined the cast of the national Broadway touring company of "Wicked."

Pedersen, 23, is playing the part of Boq in the musical, which retells the story of "The Wizard of Oz" with the characters of Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, and Glinda, the Good Witch, at the forefront.

Boq is a young resident of Munchkinland who knew the two witches in college.

"The character himself is a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed Munchkin boy who has his heart on his sleeve and is excited to go to school and learn and fall in love," Pedersen said.

Without giving the plot away, Pedersen said his character goes through a journey in the second act and, with his fellow Munchkins, experiences oppression.

"He's open to everything, so I feel like, in that regard, I can relate to the character," Pedersen said. "I'm able to relate to wearing your heart on your sleeve, being open to everything and seeing the good in people. The challenge would probably be in not allowing that happiness to take over the whole character.

"You still have to give him depth and make sure he's not just naïve and doesn't have backbone," he said.

"Wicked" is Pedersen's second national musical tour. He previously had a 12-week stint in the cast of "Escape to Margaritaville," based on the music of singer/songwriter Jimmy Buffett.

Pedersen grew up in Gibsonia. His parents are Dan and Susie Pedersen and he has a twin brother, Luke, and a younger brother, Danny.

He got his start on stage in a sixth-grade production of "Les Miserables" at Eden Hall Upper Elementary School, in which he played the street urchin Gavroche.

"Sixth grade was the catalyst," he said.

From there, he went on to study and perform with Jeter Backyard Theater, a Gibsonia theater for students from kindergarten through high school. He also studied with Pittsburgh CLO Academy of Musical Theater.

Throughout high school, he performed in musicals, culminating his senior year with the starring role of Joseph in "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

For that role, Pedersen won Best Actor honors from the Gene Kelly Awards, which are given out yearly by Pittsburgh CLO and the University of Pittsburgh. He also was nominated for a National High School Musical Theatre Awards, more commonly known as the Jimmy Awards.

"He was absolutely delightful," said Sarah McGraw Krushinski, who began directing Pine-Richland's musicals in Pedersen's senior year. "He was very handsome, very skilled; he took direction well. Actors who can take direction are going to work."

In addition to his performing talent, she said, he also was kind to and supportive of his fellow actors.



"I saw his future. You don't need a crystal ball, you can just tell who's going to make it," she continued. "Jake was just one of those people."

Pedersen is a 2021 graduate of Penn State University with a bachelor of fine arts degree in musical theater. Following graduation, he moved to New York City.

His resume includes roles in "Newsies" at the New London Barn Playhouse in New Hampshire, "Writing Kevin Taylor at Meadowbrook Theatre in Michigan and "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" at Totem Pole Playhouse in Fayetteville, Franklin County.

Pedersen's "Wicked" contract runs through February. The closest the tour will come to Pittsburgh during that time is for a May 18-June 5 run in Columbus, Ohio.

"After graduating college, I always wanted to be on national tours and on Broadway, too," he said. "For me, this is like a dream come true."

He hopes to make theater his life's work.

"The goal is Broadway, yes, but also to be able to do what I love and sustain a lifestyle in the arts, in some way or form — teaching or performing, I don't know — we'll see what comes my way," he said. "Ultimately, I do want a family and someplace to settle down, but we'll get there when we get there.

"Right now, I'm having a wild time and enjoying the ride."

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