

Colby



Colby Magazine

Volume 104
Issue 1 *Summer 2015*

Article 8

July 2015

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Recommended Citation

(2015) "Art Forms: Actor Brendan Leonard Explores the Shared Space of Theater and Dance," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 104 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol104/iss1/8>

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Actor Brendan Leonard explores the shared space of theater and dance

ArtForms

Brendan Leonard '16, facing camera, works with fellow students in the final dress rehearsal before his CLAS debut.

Brendan Leonard '16 had his first acting role in the fourth grade. He played Daddy Warbucks in the school play *Annie*. He got a lot of laughs, but not for the right reasons. "I came out and I was this little chubby kid with a bald cap on and my first line was just, 'Hello, everybody,'" he said. "The audience laughed because I looked funny."

Leonard didn't care why he got the laughs, though, because the response felt great. In fact, it was the start of what the theater and dance major hopes will be a career in theater. Last year he spent a semester at the Headlong Performance Institute in Philadelphia and interned at the Public Theater in New York, famous for staging Shakespeare in the Park and launching the musical *A Chorus Line*. Since completing his internship, Leonard has continued to work for the Public Theater (and its former literary manager Elizabeth Frankel '01), reading scripts and deciding whether they deserve further consideration or a pass.

Following that role as Daddy Warbucks, Leonard performed at the North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly, Mass., and competed in the Massachusetts High School Drama Festival as a student at St. John's Preparatory School. He knew he wanted to make theater his career, but Colby changed his idea of what that meant.

"Colby is where I started to really think about theater as an art form and incorporate dance into it," he said, noting the significance of Colby having a joint Theater and Dance Department. Leonard found that his experience working on Colby productions that crossed categories presented new possibilities for exploration. *Crazy Lonely Yellow*, a dance piece that melded kinetics and dramatics, and the guidance of Assistant Professor of Theater and Dance Annie Kloppenberg, were key. "That work made me realize what can happen when those two worlds really come together."

This year Leonard has taken ideas from the classroom and from his internship and tested them out at Colby. He developed an experimental performance piece—staged at the Colby Liberal Arts Symposium April 30—by working with his cast on their earliest childhood memories and exploring possibilities to make something culturally meaningful. This summer he's in Dublin, Ireland, at the Gaiety School of Acting, immersing himself in the works of Irish playwrights including Samuel Beckett, George Bernard Shaw, and Sean O'Casey.

He says those experiences are about preparing for more than just a career—they're about exploring new ways to create art and to engage with the people and communities who experience it. "What I'm trying to do at Colby is just trust that I have the ability to come up with some new ideas for making performance," Leonard said. "If I put myself in the right place, the rest will hopefully follow." —Jacob McCarthy