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Welcome to BROADWAY

The Sound Inside costar Will Hochman '14 talks about chasing your dream—and ending up on stage with Mary-Louise Parker

*Will Hochman '14 made his Broadway debut last month in the New York Times critic's pick *The Sound Inside* with Tony Award-winning co-star Mary-Louise Parker. Hochman first appeared in the two-person play, about the relationship between a Yale creative writing professor and her student, last year at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. Freelance journalist Abukar Adan '17 sat down with Hochman in his dressing room at Studio 54 to discuss his debut, his time at Colby, and his journey to the big stage.*

Let's begin with your Broadway debut. Walk me through that first preview performance. How cool was that? Stressful? Exciting?

I'm about to open the door to the office and my heart is pounding. It's a packed house. I'd later find out it's like 90 percent full or something. The beauty of this is that I don't get to decide whether I'm ready or not. She says her line and I open the door and say my line, "Can I talk to you, Professor Baird?"

At that point you just do your job. I just breathe and say the lines and listen to Mary-Louise, and she listens to me and we tell the story. We do the play and the lights come down. I find her downstage in the lights and we squeeze each other's hands and we

smile. She gives me this look. I don't know exactly what the look is, but it's something like, "Welcome to Broadway, kid!"

We give each other this wild look. That bow is one of the more surreal moments of my life. You imagine a thing and build toward that thing. Then it's real. Like that is a thing that happened.

How would you describe the show?

It's a show about reading and writing and the creative process. The subconscious and the unconscious. But more than anything, it's probably a show about loneliness, about trying to make connections with other people, and about how you make connections when you're lonely. It explores some dark themes, but what I think the show does well is pushing against that, right? Like finding the moments of humor, finding time to laugh.

How do you keep the show fresh, night after night, for months on end?

This is my longest run. Before this, the longest I've done I think is eight weeks. So, we'll find out.

How'd you do it this past week?

We're always changing little things here and there. Little moments. "Turn this way instead of that way, put your backpack there." Those are nuancing moments. If my job is to live the thing truthfully, then, in the truth of it, I shouldn't know what's coming next. So it should theoretically be fresh.

The Sound Inside was written by one of your favorite playwrights, Adam Rapp. And it was directed by Tony Award-winner David Cromer. What's it like to work with them?

It's funny. You said that, and my first thought was I just really like working with these people. It's such a treat to spend time with them. They have a way of looking at the world and a way of talking about the world that I just think is so inspiring and so specific. I think the script is brilliant.

How collaborative was the process?

Something I love about theater is that it is inherently collaborative. I come from a team-sports background. I played basketball my whole life, baseball my whole life, and I played on the squash team at Colby, which is ultimately a solo sport but you do it as a team. And what I love about this is it's like we're a basketball team. You know what I mean?

Yeah.

Acting feels a little bit like we're playing tennis, but we're playing together. So I hit a shot at you and you hit it back. We go back and forth. And there have been times in the very beginning when I was doing unpaid off-off-Broadway for nobody in the audience where I'd hit a big shot. I'd have a lot of things that I'm bringing to the table and I feel like the shot would go by the person I was doing a scene with.

And what's it like to work with Mary-Louise Parker?

Doing this play with Mary-Louise Parker feels like I'm playing with Serena Williams. No matter what I do, bam, she hits it right back. No matter what. It's like the most beautiful collaborative thing to be on stage with her because we're both tapped in together. It's been fresh every night because we're both living truthfully in the thing.

I understand you got involved in theater late in your Colby career. In fact, you were an economics major. What first drew you to acting?

I'm sitting in my dorm my sophomore year and I'm like, one day I am going to die. Before I die, I see myself being an actor, an artist, and a storyteller. I can either continue to be afraid, get a degree in economics, then a finance job, and work for a couple of years. And then when I'm like 25, having saved a little bit of money, then I can try it. Or I can try it now.

*As soon as I had that thought, I left my dorm, walked over to **Runnals**, and signed up. I didn't even look at what play it was. So, I auditioned for the play and I am over the moon. It feels like a perfect jump shot.*

So you got a part?

*I got cast for the lead in **The Long Christmas Ride Home** by Paula Vogel and [Assistant Professor of Theater and Dance] Todd Coulter, who was directing. Then I read the play and I get really scared. I've never acted before, and I thought I was doing like Romeo and Juliet or something. But I had to have sex with a puppet on stage and kiss a guy on stage. I wasn't ready. I didn't know how to juggle any of that, so I turned it down.*

Junior fall rolls around. I go to Salamanca, Spain. I reflect on this whole experience, and I come back from Spain with just the fire of like, "No, no. Not doing that anymore. I am making decisions out of love, and confidence and honesty and truth." Like, listen to the sound inside you.

That's when you became very active in the department. You took part in a couple of shows, including the faculty-directed production **Runnals XXX, right?**

*Yes, it was **Runnals XXX**, **Trifles**, and a play called **Art** by Yasmina Reza, which I did with **Powder and Wig**, which is student run. I give Colby kudos for creating a place where a kid from Brooklyn who always wanted to be an actor, who thinks he's going to double major in international relations and Spanish, can wind up majoring in economics, play on the squash team, and yet still walk into the Theater Department and wind up doing a play with the student-run theater club senior spring. Shout-out to Colby, man, and liberal arts. Like, that's the beauty of it.*

How did your professors and your Colby experience shape your acting career?

Those are people who were able to see the thing that I was stumbling in the darkness toward, that I was just like clawing over myself to try to reach towards. Bess [Welden] and Lynne [Conner] and Todd [Coulter] are people who gave me the keys to doors.

As you know, the vast majority of aspiring actors don't make it to Broadway. Did you believe you'd make it? Do you feel like you're living the dream?

I'm from Brooklyn, so I didn't have to look for an apartment. I just moved home. That afforded a certain amount of flexibility and comfort, where I can go out into the jungle of New York and try to figure this all out. That made taking the risk less risky. I really thought I'd be here, for better or worse. Call it blind confidence, call it a vocation. I don't know.

How did you get your feet wet?

I was voraciously hungry to just do it all. So I read all the books on acting. I mean, many of them, not all of them. I read all the books I could get my hands on, created an account on backstage.com, actorsaccess.com, got headshots. There's no formula for this. There's no clear ladder.

What advice would you give an aspiring actor? Or 20-year-old Will?

Spend time alone and ask really hard questions of yourself. It sounds corny, but it's true. Listen to the sound inside.