

STAGING CLEVELAND

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

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**TV and Radio Are Allies
for the Theater Industry**

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GET UP AND MOVE

As soon as you hear Leilani Barrett's rich baritone voice, you know that he was destined to be a Shakespearian actor and do commercial work on the side. Many Cleveland theater actors such as Barrett also work in film, television and commercials for TV or radio or corporate use to increase their income.

Barrett got into acting as a young boy, after wandering into Shaw High School near his East Cleveland house one day and watching some of their play rehearsals. When they needed a boy, he ended up getting cast in a show, and that was the start of a successful theater career. Next, he broke into break dancing in the street and began studying African dance and taking dance classes by the time he was 9 years old.

"I was one of those kids who couldn't sit still," Barrett observes. "So, the best thing for me to do was get up and move."

Get up and move he did. While attending the Cleveland School of the Arts, he joined The Yard, the student dance program founded by Cleveland Arts Prize winner Bill Wade, now artistic director of Inlet Dance Company. While attending CSA, Barrett was recruited by WEWS TV-5 to perform on-camera hosting duties for the "Fast Forward" program. He also appeared on WVIZ TV-25 and was hired by the David & Lee Talent Agency (now Docherty Talent & Modeling Agency) to appear in several industrial videos.

His theater and performing arts aspirations led him to enroll at The Ohio State University. During his freshman year, however, the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company performed at OSU. He was smitten with their engaging multimedia show.

At the end of a post-show discussion, the confident 19-year-old notified Mr. Jones that he would be coming to New York to audition for him. He did. He left OSU and became a member of an acclaimed professional modern dance company, and for the next few years performed all over the US and the world.

Barrett then came back to Cleveland for 10 years, acting at a variety of theaters, teaching all over town, and doing commercial work. To pursue more film and television gigs, he lived and worked in Los Angeles and Cincinnati for more than a decade. Two years ago, he returned to Cleveland, and in that time has performed in eight plays, 15 commercials, five new play readings, and two podcasts.

"The sad truth is, you have to prioritize at times," says Barrett, who decided to step back from dance so that he had more time for acting and other projects. "I began doing more commercial and print modeling work, so I knew I couldn't be in a dance company and do that effectively."

Pursuing a diverse range of professional activities while earning supplemental income from commercial work suits the hyper-busy Barrett just fine. Like many theater professionals here, he knows, as a recent CPAC study concluded: “There are supporting industries that employ individuals from the theater sector; Television and Radio sectors were also included because strong sectors may help expand job opportunities for on-stage or technical talent, and sustain their theater careers with steady work.”

Barrett also treasures the fact that he’s already booked more film projects in Cleveland than he did living in LA for four years. Still, he’d love to earn more income from his booming, highly trained voice.

“I love doing plays and Shakespeare, but I would run away in a heartbeat if someone called me and said, ‘We want you to do a voice for our next video game,’” he confesses. “That is the dream I still chase.”

THEATER WAS THE BEST THERAPY

Playing the narrator in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 8th grade at Wadsworth Middle School was Rachel Anderson’s first experience with live performance, and she knew it wouldn’t be her last.

“I fell in love with theater so hard, it really didn’t make sense to do anything else,” she reveals.

Blessed with a gorgeous singing voice, Anderson chose to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Music at the University of Akron. She began performing with community theaters and had side jobs while finishing her degree. She wasn’t making enough money to live off of, so she continued to work odd jobs.

Four years ago, she ended up separating from her husband. The bad news was, in the custody agreement for their children, she lost half of her time with her two darling daughters. But the good news was, she gained more time to pursue her performance career. “I needed a form of distraction,” she says. “And theater was the best therapy I could find.”

She also had more time to start exploring commercial work to augment her income stream. While playing a lead role in the musical *Jekyll and Hyde* at Olmsted Performing Arts, Anderson was cast by the casting director, Angela Boehms, in a low-budget Screen Actors Guild film. Boehms also recommended that she get an agent and work through The Talent Group. The agency signed her, and last year she started getting a regular stream of commercial modeling and acting assignments.

Fortunately, her day job at LKQ Corp. in Akron gives her the flexibility to drive up to Cleveland for an audition or do a commercial shoot, so she feels fortunate that she can do both. But her talent and professionalism contributed a lot to her win-win situation.

“When you produce good work, they’ll put you into more auditions because they know you are a dependable performer,” Anderson explains. “So after I booked that first piece of work and did well, The Talent Group made sure I became nice and busy last year, and made a nice bit of side money from that work.”