

# ALUMNUS LANDS ROLE ON BROADWAY

Nick Burroughs barely had time to breathe during his last semester at the Capstone. In addition to choreographing a piece for Dance Alabama! and finishing finals, he was also shuttling between Alabama and New York, auditioning numerous times for the lead role in the national production of the Tony Award-winning musical *Kinky Boots*.

After seven callbacks, Burroughs was crushed when the part was cast with another actor. But while waiting for what he thought was his final flight home from New York City, he received a phone call from his agent that turned disappointment into joy.

"My agent said, 'You're not going on the *Kinky Boots* national tour because they want you on Broadway as the understudy for Tony Award-winning Billy Porter,'" Burroughs said. "I could not believe her. I was losing my mind. I was hysterical in the airport."

Burroughs got his first break into Broadway theatre through UA's New York Showcase, produced by the Department of Theatre and Dance. Held each spring, the showcase provides seniors and graduate students in the acting and musical theatre programs the chance to perform before an audience of agents and

theatre companies looking for new talent.

"The musical theatre program is designed to prepare us to be working actors in New York," Burroughs said. "All the classes that we take – acting classes, voice lessons, different genres of dance – are preparing us for the profession. I often tell my friends who are still in college that being on Broadway is the same as being part of theatre communities at educational institutions. Right now, at this stage of my career, I'm a freshman learning and growing every day, and soon I'll be a sophomore. You live in New York what you learned at UA."

Musical theatre wasn't always part of Burroughs' career plan. He grew up with a love for singing but an even bigger love for running track. He always assumed he would go to college on a track scholarship. But on the first day of his freshman year of high school, he auditioned for the school play on a whim. His performance landed him a callback and ultimately a supporting role.

With the help of a "no quitting what you start" rule in his family, Burroughs stuck with theatre that first semester, and he fell in love with acting.

"Track wasn't starting until the second semester, so I asked my theatre teacher if I could do both," Burroughs recalled. "My teacher said, 'Let me ask you something: Do you want a scholarship for track or a scholarship for musical theatre? Because if you stick with us, I can get you one for musical theatre.'"

He stuck with it and four years later won the scholarship.

Today, Burroughs can be found at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre six nights a week performing in *Kinky Boots*, which tells the story of a struggling shoe fac-



Department of Theatre and Dance alumnus Nick Burroughs landed his dream role in Broadway's *Kinky Boots* through UA's New York Showcase.

tory owner who partners with a drag queen named Lola to save his business. Burroughs plays an Angel, part of the ensemble, and when Porter is unavailable, Burroughs steps into the lead role of Lola. For him, looking at a packed audience of fans is the greatest feeling.

Prior to landing his dream role on Broadway, Burroughs performed in and choreographed various local and national productions, many of which received awards and honors. His Birmingham performance of Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, for instance, won a Broadway World Award for Best Local Actor in a Musical. That show stands out for Burroughs because he worked with the same directors with whom he worked in high school, but in a professional setting.

"I feel like every show I've ever done has been a learning experience," he said. "I learned so much from the faculty at UA. Every experience I had in college prepared me for Broadway."

Burroughs continues to hone his craft. He is training to perfect his performance as Lola with renowned vocal coach Liz Caplan. Caplan has worked with Tony and Emmy award-winning actors, including Amanda Seyfried in preparation for her role in *Les Misérables*.

But Burroughs' most memorable moment on Broadway includes a different celebrity.

"*Kinky Boots* won an award for the most money raised by a Broadway show for Broadway Equity Fights AIDS, and Hugh Jackman hugged me on stage when we received the award," he said. "I couldn't believe Hugh Jackman hugged me on a Broadway stage."

Burroughs is happy to be living his dream as a Broadway actor. He holds a permanent contract with *Kinky Boots* until he finds greener pastures or the show closes.

But he is already contemplating new career goals.

"I want to choreograph on Broadway and do television and film," Burroughs said. "I would love to create and star in a production on Broadway."

For students interested in pursuing careers in musical theatre, Burroughs offers some advice.

"Work as hard as you can," he said. "Don't just say, 'I'm going to do my best,' but eat, sleep, dream, and love what you do. Go into this field because you want it, not because you have to. Honestly, you can't get anywhere in this business without breathing this business." •

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– Nick Burroughs