

Christian and his giant goals - 8-year-old Colleyville boy perseveres, earns lead the role in a children's play

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Eight-year-old Christian Genco knows a little something about persistence.

Three times he auditioned for children's theater plays, and three times he was unsuccessful. He tried a fourth time in January, hoping to finally land even a small a part in the spring production of James and the Giant Peach.

He won the lead role.

The play opens March 31 at the Creative Arts Theatre & School, one of 60 theaters in the United States that feature young actors and technicians.

Based on the popular children's novel by Roald Dahl, the play tells of the adventures of an English boy who climbs into an enormous peach, which rolls down a hill and floats across the Atlantic Ocean to New York City. James is joined by several friends, including a spider, a centipede, a lady bug and an earthworm.

The production, which will be performed seven times, is being directed by Margaret Crawford, who also directed the CATS productions of Sleeping Beauty, The Canterville Ghost, and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

"This show is a particular challenge," Crawford said in a news release. "We have chosen to use puppets for some characters so the show will have a different look. The set is minimal. We feel there will be some magical moments created with the puppets."

Christian said he hasn't read the Dahl's book but that he had the entire movie version memorized before the audition.

"I watched the movie about 500 times," he said. "I practiced the British accent."

Evening rehearsals for the play can stretch to three hours, and because Christian is in almost every scene, he's sometimes exhausted afterward. But the audience is sure to have fun watching the show, he said.

"I think it's interesting and full of action. Probably 75 percent of the play is action. I have no chance to sit down," Christian said. "I think people will like the rhino. I don't want to give away everything, but the rhino can eat people up. And at the end of the show, it turns into something else, but I can't say what."

The oldest of three children, Christian attends musical theater classes at CATS in central Arlington, tap-dance lessons in a boys-only class at the Grapevine Community Activities Center and an all-male gymnastics class at Cartwheels Gymnastics Club in Bedford.

Christian is teaching himself to play Beethoven's Fur Elise on a keyboard in his living room.

He likes to entertain his sisters with magic tricks and original puppet shows.

And he has invented a new geometric shape, configured with triangles and squares, which he calls a "trapepezel."

Christian is homeschooled, and learning in the family's Colleyville home is an all-day endeavor.

Parents Natalie and Frank Genco work hard to keep their son's mind busy, playing chess and stumping each other with riddles and mind-bending problems.

"I give him lots of puzzles. He's very smart. He has a great memory. At a very young age, 2 or 3, he was learning the names of all the presidents," said Frank Genco, an emergency room physician. "He can do all the planets. He can recite the continents, the names of the oceans, all the countries in Africa - in fact, all the countries in the world. And he can tell you the elements, in alphabetical order."

Having an extraordinary memory made learning lines for the play simple, Christian said.

That trait is sure to come in handy if he achieves his career goal.

"I want to be a film producer or an actor," Christian said. "That way, I could make up my own stories. I wouldn't have to follow what other people have written. I could be a leader, not a follower."

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CHART(S): FYI Children's Play

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