

Meet Me In The Greenroom

By
J. A. Di Bello

Meet: **Gabriella Pérez - Actor, Singer, Dancer, Choreographer...**
Call Me **Gabby**

Those who read this column with an identifiable degree of regularity are fully aware of the treacherous path that accompanies the journey of the performing artist. It is a career choice charted by talent, governed by determination and rewarded by perspiration. The most precious laurels are reserved for those who master the variables.

The path taken by **Gabriella Pérez**, a young, bright, attractive, articulate young woman gracefully stretches from Rochester, New York to the **Forestburgh Playhouse** to New York City and on to the 2014 Broadway Roadshow, *Anything Goes*. While hoofing along a course filled with valuable learning experiences, it should be mentioned: each could not have been more thoroughly and masterfully designed.

Gabby's formative years were encircled by an enviable plethora of music, dance and performance. She was surrounded by music. Her dad loves the opera, plays guitar and piano, while mom swoons to James Brown and does sing-alongs with cherished recordings. To add pizzazz and an additional level of familiarity to those precious, formative years, her whole family loves to sing, just for the fun of it. And just for good measure, her aunt is a ballerina and her cousin a director. **Wow!**

But just a big "Wow!" doesn't produce talent. Talent needs to be nurtured through the transfer of skills by dedicated, knowledgeable teachers. Ms. Pérez was enrolled in the prestigious Garth Fagan Dance School in Rochester. As an aside, Garth Fagan is a Tony Award winner: Best Choreography, Disney's *Lion King*.

Adolescence is a developmental period frequently characterized by scatterbrained behavior and the tendency to be disorganized while displaying a total lack of concentration. Fortunately this affliction did not affect Gabby. With supportive parents, her skills were developing as she encountered her first ever audition. She had

a call back, she landed the part, and at that point she had crossed the Rubicon! "I kind of immersed myself in theatre," she says, "and never saw myself doing anything else."

Ms. Pérez auditioned for the musical *Annie* and was selected for the lead role. It was her first experience of carrying a show and she relished the responsibility. "My parents came to see every show, and I got to meet some wonderful mentors." Gabby now possessed the all important element of determination, as she began to tackle her voice, dance and acting lessons with a new awareness of her purpose.

To broaden her horizons further she became involved with the GeVa (The Genesee Valley Arts Foundation) a regional equity theatre. During her senior year, she was able to intern at GeVa, where with hands-on experience she was exposed to a real professional theatre with equity contracts, stage management, etc. Gabby's quick summation of her experience at GeVa: "I learned what was expected of a professional actor, and I loved it."

A determined Gabriella auditioned for admission and was accepted at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. "Tisch was the best thing that ever happened to me. I had an incredible college experience earning my BFA in Drama. I had the most amazing faculty, almost all of whom are still working directors and performers." Tisch stresses the "value and power of the ensemble," as students have their "...core acting, speech and movement classes together."

"Tisch taught me how to actually do theatre 'the right way.' I learned various acting methods, met Broadway choreographers, learned original choreography, took tap lessons, learned Brazilian capoeira, etc. My mind was opened to so many new concepts and methods, and I got incredible training in areas I already loved (ballet, acrobatics, piano, etc.). I felt like every day I left a studio, my mind was blown in some way. Tisch changed my life. It gave me the tools to feel like I actually



know how to approach a role or to create my own work. College was the first time I began to explore choreography with a passion."

Working at the Forestburgh Playhouse was another positive element in the development of Gabby's professional career. Her drive and determination placed her at the Playhouse for three consecutive seasons. It was a fast-paced environment. Working as a performer and a choreographer on the main stage, the cabaret and the children's theatre, while rehearsing for the next main stage production forced Gabby to make acting changes and at times, "listen to my gut."

Of that experience she specifically recalls her own Anita in *West Side Story*. "Working on Anita in *West Side Story* a few summers ago was an incredible experience for me. The choreography and emotional journey of that show was an absolute gift." Apparently, that role and that performance reached others, too. A critical commentator for the *Catskill Chronicle* stated unequivocally, "The passionate Anita, brilliantly portrayed by Gabriella Pérez is in a class all her own. Her ability as an actor and vocalist brings to the stage the anger as well as the compassion of a hormone fueled Anita, ready to erupt at any moment. Her delivery of the sardonic hymn

America is priceless..." In summation, Gabby is quick to add, "Working at Forestburgh was a professional outlet for all the tools that I learned in school. I got to practically apply lessons I learned at Tisch on an actual stage and for a real paycheck, like a professional!"

The talent, which is not given but nurtured, the determination, which must be proven, and the resulting and continuing perspiration unite to form a powerful triumvirate. Gabriella Pérez is ready and armed. While finishing her senior year at Tisch, in a show and immersed in callbacks, she submitted to a casting company and was immediately asked to do sides for the role of Erma, as in the iconic Cole Porter musical *Anything Goes*. She did her dance; she did her tap; she did her song, including sight-singing harmonies and sides for the role of Hope. Gabriella was prepared for the emotional and physical exhaustion, callbacks that result in 10-12 hour days, in one room and then to another, and the waiting, waiting. Then the call: "I did a silent happy dance while I was on the phone! I'm understudying Hope and Erma, and dancing as an Angel in the ensemble, so it'll be a lesson in how to prepare a show when I'm learning 3 roles..."

The legendary crown of laurels is Gabriella's, as she concludes this part of her journey with a reflective, heartfelt comment. "It's really exciting to graduate college with a job offer already solidified; it was very reassuring!"

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