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“That was the hardest and simplest decision in my life”: a Bristol graduate’s road to the New York stage

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Sabrina Garnier spoke to the IR graduate treading the boards in the greatest city on Earth.

Shortly after graduating with a Master of Science degree in International Relations from the University of Bristol, Kian Kavousi jumped onto the next plane to New York with the goal to pursue his career as an actor.

For two years, the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute became the door he opened the most frequently, where he trained to become the performer he has always longed to be. In Spring 2015, Kian graduated from his acting school and after several theatre plays and film projects, he landed his first

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graduated from his acting school, and after several theatre plays and film projects, he landed his first role in a major Off-Broadway play called “Defendant Maurice Chevalier” which won a writers award and had its debut in February 2016.

It takes place in France, 1945. Condemned to death for collaboration with the Nazis, popular French singer Maurice Chevalier tells his side of the story to his accusers. Torn between the propaganda wars of the Nazis, the Collaborators and even the Resistance, Maurice Chevalier struggles to thread the thin line between performer and patriot.

In this play, Kian was cast to play two different characters. Tickets for the play were sold, among other places, at Tks in Times Square, and the play was performed at the historic American Theatre Of Actors, which has given rise to the beginning of many great performers including Robert DeNiro, Kevin Spacey and Bruce Willis, among others. “Acting was never my plan B,” said Kian. “I was always acting and always continued doing what I was most passionate about.”

During his interview, Kian shares with us his acting experience, being cast in a major theatre play Off-Broadway, his preparation in playing two roles in one performance, and most importantly how Bristol University impacted his carrier path.



Kian trained at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute

How did you pursue your hobby for acting while studying a masters degree in International Relations?

“When I decided to achieve my Masters of Science Degree in International Relations, I did not have much time to follow up with my acting due to the fact that I spent my days and nights in the library studying and robbing the vending machines.

“However, I never stopped training. I observed a lot. I saw how people in the library for instance were working while their thoughts were hammering against the wall of their heads.

“Their postures, behaviours and expressions changed almost every fifteen seconds. In the evenings when we all went out and everyone relaxed for bit I saw how completely different people they were once the pressure was off their shoulders.

“The Interactions and communications changed based on the internal situations they we living with and I learned how subtle changes, small or large, can have such an impact on the person watching them.

“I also read a lot. Anything. From plays all the way to an exciting thriller or a drama novel because I love to keep my imagination going. Also, I tried to find the time to see a few plays during my free time. Basically I never lost sight of where I was going.”



His teachers described him as a talented child with a vivid personality

Did your masters degree influence your acting skills?

“It certainly did. What has to be clear for a performer is that everything you do or experience in your life nourishes your being as an actor and opens new ways of understanding things.

“I have always been eager to experience other cultures and explore the unknown. The trips through Southeast Asia, Europe and many places in the US affected my understanding and influenced the way I think in many ways.

“They kindled my curiosity to pursue a Master of Science degree in International Relations at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom; a degree that is largely based on research and preparation.

“While I was working under time pressure, whether it was due to a presentation or a paper that I had to write, I started to understand the complex structures of human behaviour and thinking process on a new, more advanced level of combined academics and sociology.

To drama students: “Take classes, practice for yourself, read a lot and hold on to your dreams”

“Why do people do what they do? What motivates them and triggers their intentions? And what would I do to achieve what I want?”

“Acting teachers always give students a lot of support; spending hours analyzing characters sociology, physiology and psychology, and now I was lucky enough to have first hand experience while studying International Relations.

“I started being both sides of the coin from a political view as well as an entity of society. I used it all in acting. The intellectual understanding of society, status, background is just as important as the embodiment of characters and whether you approach it in acting from the outside to the inside or the other way around, you need a free mind in any direction that absorbs and puts information together.

“The result was, I ended up too much in my head and not be able to act, not able to bring everything out. It took me a while to unite the intellectual way with the performance aspect but thanks to the University of Bristol I could add all this to my backpack of tools.



Throughout his teenage years, Kian performed in community theatres and school plays where he played various roles.

How did your academic background help you work and structure the social behaviour of both of your characters during your preparation, what challenges did you encounter?

“It was very challenging. I love playing different characters because I am interested in who they are and why they do what they do, and honestly it is always exciting for me to be, see and live like other people.

“But no matter how transformable I was, these two roles gave me sleepless nights. The problem was that I had to find a way to tell each individual story, create their evolution, bring depth to their inner life and physicalize them while jumping back and forth between both of the characters throughout the play.

“My first role was a tough guy called Double Meter. His scary behaviour and mentality made him threatening. The scenes with him always had something unpredictable.

“At first glance, Double Meter would appear to be the rough guy who does not take initiatives based on logical thinking and facts due to his position and power but subconsciously hides behind his vulnerability, pain and anger.

“The second character on the other hand, named Laporte, is the exact opposite. He is very subtle and smart and operates from his brain. Everything is controlled, from how he reads the paper all the way to how he walks, talks and gestures.

“Both roles were key figures and completed each other and helped to tell the story of Maurice Chevalier. At some point, I stopped and went back five steps. I found different inner motivations and justifications for the characters.

“Based on the historical knowledge that I gained from the University of Bristol, I was able to analyze the social background of both of the roles I played, as it was required to deliver an accurate portrayal of characters from the II World War period.

“I learn how to do a social analysis and it helped me to work on the greater depth of my character. After doing the historical and social research on the personages I played, I then searched for their transition points and tried different acting techniques and exercises to build the characters.

“And eventually after some time of preparation I had both characters ready to put up on their feet.”



He was cast as the lead Joe in a stage adaptation of “Some Like It Hot”

What are your current plans?

“After I finished performing on my Off-Broadway show, I have been working together with the actress Gigi Kremer on several projects, including short films and stage performances.

“Interesting to mention, Gigi Kremer also studied at the University of Bristol and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. She also took acting classes at the Bristol Acting Academy for two years.

“While studying at Bristol, she was cast as Woyzeck’s sister in the production of Woyzeck, by Georg Büchner. This performance was running for an entire week at the Wickham Theatre.

“In May we are participating in shooting for the official international 72 hour Shootout Film Festival in Manhattan.

“Parallel to that, Gigi and I are cast and scheduled for shootings in various short films that will be submitted to diverse festivals, including the film “Paper Thin”, which was screened at the “First Run Film Festival” in New York. The director of this project, Dan L. Nguyen Phan, just recently had her previous film be screened at the Cannes Short Film Corner Festival.”



He landed his first role in a major Off-Broadway play called “Defendant Maurice Chevalier” which debuted in February

Do you have any advice for Drama students?

“Well, there is a lot but I believe the more diverse an actor’s knowledge and experience is, the richer and more versatile his performance will be. My intention as an actor is always to deliver a vivid, energetic and truthful performance through a combination of my own experiences, various techniques and hard work.

“My goal is to explore the characters in the given genre, bring the passion, sensitivity and depth of them to life; take them on a journey and tell a story. One of my teachers always said “never bore me” which pushed me to be focused.

“Later, I realized that it was the concentration that made it look not boring. So, I believe that a full and good human being can be a good actor as well. See a lot, do a lot, travel a lot, educate yourself a lot, work hard a lot and don’t you ever give up.

“Be at the right place at the right time but with the craft ready in your pocket. Take classes, practice for yourself, read a lot and hold on to your dreams, because they are what keep us alive and push us forward.”

What do you think of Kian’s story? Are you an aspiring actor? Let us know in the comments below or tweet us @EpigramFeatures.

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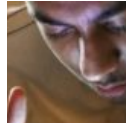
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