

Tisch senior works behind the scenes and beyond her years

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When she was only 15, Tisch senior Rachel Helson raised \$12,000 producing a benefit show. Four years later, she's an associate producer of the Broadway musical "[title of show]," all while continuing her full-time studies at Tisch.

On the surface, everything about "[title of show]," the set, costumes, actors and orchestra, is minimal. However, its message is anything but. The show is an inspiring and relatable story about turning a seemingly impossible dream (running a successful show on Broadway) into a reality. It seems only fitting that this should be Helson's first commercial production.

"I had to ask for suits for Christmas last year," Helson said over breakfast at the Westway Diner. "When I walk into meetings, I want them to forget I'm 19."

Helson's story started amidst family tragedy. With four aunts diagnosed with breast cancer, she felt compelled to do something to raise money for Susan

G. Komen for the Cure, an organization dedicated to breast cancer research. And so began the "Rocky Horror Show" benefit, the first of three shows Helson has produced. Using equity and non-equity actors for the benefit, Helson founded a non-profit called "Acting for a Cure" and attacked the show with philanthropic passion that eventually landed it in New York.

"I had no idea what I was doing, but I pretended like I did," the Kentucky native admitted.

The effervescent go-getter swears by humility and seeking out the right mentors. When she first thought about bringing her "Rocky Horror" benefit to New York, Helson recalls Tisch press officer Richard Pierce asking, "How big do you want to go?"

Her answer? Broadway.

Helson had already secured the Roundabout Theatre Company's American Airlines Theater for the performance after being "rejected, rejected, rejected" by every other Broadway theater owner.

Kevin Cahoon, a Tisch alum and "Rocky Horror" Broadway revival cast member from 2000 to 2002, helped Helson pull casting together after more than 200 agents rejected her.

But just days before the show, Helson's narrator, the show's lead, backed out. Finding a replacement at such short notice seemed hopeless until cast member David Burtka convinced his friend Neil Patrick Harris to take the red-eye from L.A. the night before the show's opening to cover the role.



CHRISTINE LOCKERBY

WUNDERKIND: Rachel Helson, center, was 15 when she produced her first show, a 'Rocky Horror' tribute. She is now an associate producer on "[title of the show]."

Pulling the whole project together took one scattered day at a time, but “raising \$50,000 for the Komen Foundation made it totally worth it,” Helson said.

From her smashing success with “Rocky Horror” came several offers from other Broadway shows. Helson approached producer Annette Niemtow and Eve Ellis, who were interested in her work with the Komen Foundation. She needed their advice on crunching some real Broadway numbers.

“[They] discovered I was ready for commercial producing,” Helson said.

Eager to learn even more about producing on the Great White Way, Helson attended a panel for the Broadway League, an organization for producers. A standout on the panel was Roy Miller, producer of “The Drowsy Chaperone.” Helson remembers thinking to herself, “I’ll see if he’ll have coffee with me.”

Not only did Miller agree to meet with her, he invited her to work on a show he was producing called “[title of show].” The production, which began as an off-Broadway play in 2006, moved to Broadway’s Lyceum Theatre in July 2008.

“I was very lucky. He helped me get my foot in the door,” Helson said. “This has been an invaluable learning experience. I can’t believe the people I get to sit around a table with.”

Balancing her career and her schoolwork hasn’t been the easiest task for Helson.

“Truth be told, I did skip some of my summer classes,” she said. Helson also took a semester off from studio classes during her sophomore year, choosing instead to work on “[title of show]” while focusing on her academic classes. Her work during that time involved writing letters to investors for the show, developing professional relationships with them and scheduling meetings.

Helson will continue her work on “[title of show]” until Oct. 12 when it stages its final performance at the Lyceum Theatre. At that point, she plans to continue doing what got her where she is today: philanthropy.

“Feeding and educating children is the next thing I want to get involved with,” Helson said. “I may sound starry-eyed, young and naive, but I’ve found people are generally nice.” She is in the process of writing a book on youth in philanthropy and has raised nearly \$100,000 for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation with the help of volunteer actors, crew members and corporate sponsors.

“[Being young] is a powerful tool that I don’t think people utilize enough,” she said.

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