ARTS

"Tonight we are young / So let's set the world on fire / We can burn brighter than the sun"
WE ARE YOUNG FUN.

From Broadway to sketch comedy, child star broadens horizons

BY JOANNE HWANG
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

When Alyssa Marvin '29 watched her first Broadway show, "Annie," at four years old, she felt an irresistible urge to act.

The impulse has held for her ever since. Marvin has toured internationally with "Annie" and nationally with the musical "School of Rock," and filmed Hulu's "Not Suitable for Work" during her first semester at Yale. On campus, Marvin is a theater major and member of the sketch comedy group Red Hot Poker, the improv group The Purple Crayon and the Yale Dramatic Association.

"I started acting professionally when I was six, where I did an off-Broadway play, and that was my first sort of introduction to what it means to be a professional actor," Marvin told the News. "I think it was something that was always kind of a part of me."

After booking that role, Marvin got an agent, which she said has opened many doors for her. She attended acting classes, dance classes and voice lessons, and performed in a string of tours and productions.

By eighth grade, she was playing in an off-Broadway run of "Trevor: The Musical." By her freshman year of high school, she'd booked "Grey House" and the Tony Award-winning "Appropriate" on Broadway. She starred in a Sundance-selected film, "Run Amok," while finishing high school and preparing to enroll at Yale.

Marvin said the realities of the acting industry have affected her approach to the field.

"As I've grown up, my mindset has definitely shifted," Marvin said. "Understanding the difficulties of rejection is more apparent now, which makes the love stronger because you have to work through that."

According to Marvin, most of her opportunities run through the same channel: her agent. Marvin's agent sends auditions for roles that suit her and helps coordinate submissions once the actress sends self-tapes back.

Though their audition processes share similarities, Marvin said Broadway and film differ in terms of the preparation time actors dedicate to each. On Broadway, Marvin said she rehearsed for several weeks before beginning recurring performances on stage. With film, she said she'd arrive, rehearse for 30 minutes, record the scene and move on to the next without repeating what she had done.

Marvin filmed "Not Suitable for Work," which premiered this summer, during her first semester at Yale — while commuting between auditions, set and classes. She said she chose the University because of its arts community.

"Even people who aren't interested in the arts will come to the shows at Yale or to go see comedy," Marvin said. "It's just embedded in the culture in a way."

Her castmates and friends said they have noticed what her professional training adds to a rehearsal room.

Harry Lowitz '28, a fellow member of Red Hot Poker and The Purple Crayon, said that in Marvin's audition for the sketch comedy group, she built a whole narrative as a special agent "sniping" the alphabet with nothing but the letters A through Z.

"We were all kind of amazed at her," Lowitz said. "You can tell it in her sketches, her improv, in her line readings. She comes at it in a heavily trained and experienced way, and it really heightens our comedy."

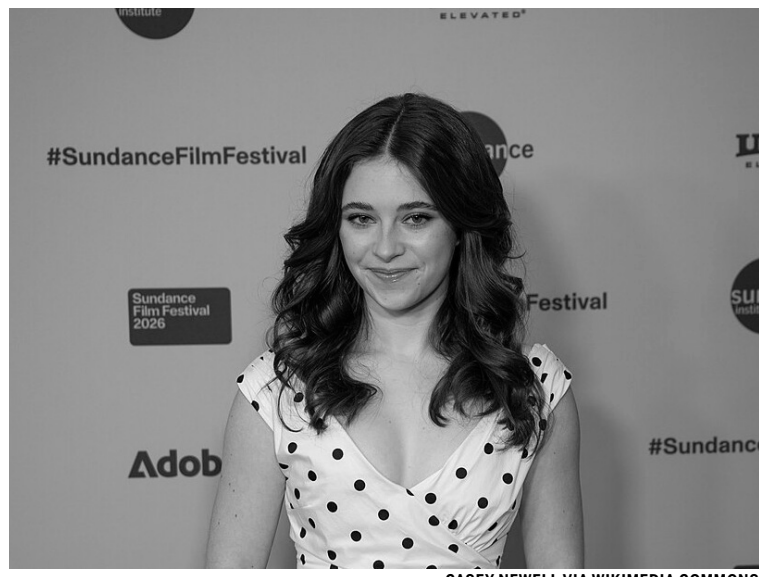
At Yale, Marvin said she has had the opportunity to explore new facets of acting, since she had never written comedy before or been behind the scenes of a production.

"It can be really scary, but in a good way," Marvin said. "If you want to try something, you can just do it here, which is challenging, but it also forces you to figure it out."

That willingness to explore shaped how she directed "Machinal" last semester, according to Julia Weston '28, who acted in the play's lead role, and Mya Osei '29, the show's stage manager. Since Marvin had performed Weston's role herself outside of Yale, she said she could direct from inside the character.

"She had a good understanding of how to create blocking that is naturalistic," Weston said in a voice message. She added that Marvin let actors feel out a scene themselves and activate their imagination before offering notes.

Osei, who said the play was the first theater production of any kind in which she had participated, noted Marvin's willingness to share control of the rehearsal room.



CASEY NEWELL VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Alyssa Marvin '29, who has toured with Broadway musicals including "Annie" and "School of Rock" and acted in several films and television shows, has juggled an acting career with being a full-time student at Yale.

"The fact she, being so well-versed in theatre, gave me, someone who had basically no experience, space to also run elements of rehearsal speaks to how gracious she is when it comes to creating things amongst peers," Osei wrote in an email to the News.

Outside rehearsals, Weston described Marvin as someone who brings the same excitement to conversation that she brings to a role.

"She is just a wonderfully curious person who really aims to investigate anything that she is a part of," Weston said. "She really tries to dig into any text, any art piece that she's involved in."

Marvin said she is grateful that her academic coursework directly contributes to her career, since she wouldn't have been exposed to the content in classes such as dance improvisation and Shakespeare seminars otherwise.

"I love Yale so much, and I also love acting so much, so it doesn't ever feel like a sacrifice," Marvin said. "I feel so invested in both of those things. I will always make space to do both."

Marvin's film "Run Amok" premiered at the Sundance Film Festival this January.

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Music mentoring program for local middle schoolers expands

BY ALIZA SHYOVITZ
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The Yale Undergraduate Music Mentorship Initiative is gearing up for a second semester of bringing music to New Haven middle schoolers.

Founded last spring by Quincy Rosenzweig '26+1, YUMMI, pronounced "you-me," is a registered nonprofit focused on making music education more accessible to New Haven youth. According to Rosenzweig, about 50 Yale students signed up to be paired with public school students this semester, compared to the 15 mentors who worked with students last semester.

YUMMI's goal is "filling the gap of one-on-one support for young musicians in New Haven who otherwise might not have access to it," Rosenzweig, who is also the initiative's current president, said.

Joelle Kim '28, the group's outreach chair, said personalized mentorship is critical for musical growth.

"I've played the flute for 12 years now, and I've taken private lessons for most of that, all the way up until the end of high school," Kim said in a voice memo. "I was definitely very lucky to be able to have so much musical training, so I'm really excited that I'm able to pour that back out into students."

This semester, YUMMI is expanding its programming to all New Haven middle schools. Previously, the program functioned specifically as a supplement to the music program at Worthington Hooker School in East Rock, Rosenzweig said. Yale mentors met with students at the school for about 45 minutes after school once a week, helping them with music theory, rhythm, composition and specific pieces.

According to Rosenzweig, 17 Worthington Hooker students were mentored under the initiative last year across about 10 different instruments, including vocal technique.

Frank Parker, a music educator at Worthington Hooker, said last semester's students were enthusiastic about the program.

"I've heard from students that once they have a couple of sessions and get to know their mentor, they look at them as a friend," Parker said in a phone interview. "If a mentor is sick or running late, they're like, 'What? But I want to see them!' They start to get attached to them."

Rosenzweig said that supplementing an already established educational program at Worthington Hooker enabled him to develop the structure to expand the initiative to all New Haven students.

He said the experience taught him a lot, "both about structure and logistics of the program, but also about actual mentoring practices."

Rosenzweig said YUMMI's leadership has reached out to local middle schools asking for help publicizing the program. Once the younger students sign up, they will be paired with a Yale mentor, who will meet with them at Dwight Hall for one 45-minute session each week.

He said that the program's location on Yale's campus might present a challenge for some students, however.

"The unfortunate matter is not all students have the means to get to Dwight Hall, especially if their parents are both working full-time jobs with nonflexible hours," Rosenzweig said. "We're still thinking about ways that we can increase the accessibility of the program."

Rosenzweig — who last year was a member of the Whiffenpoofs, the world's oldest collegiate a cappella group — said he founded the program after realizing that the biggest impact on his own musical education came from out-of-school opportunities. In addition to singing, Rosenzweig is classically trained on the piano.

"One-on-one support was a really foundational part of my music growth throughout my childhood. I was very fortunate to have private tutors, as are a lot of Yalies," he said. "But that isn't possible for a lot of New Haven youth."

Last spring, Kim mentored a sixth grader who played the flute. Kim said that the student was initially timid, but eventually warmed up to her.

"I saw her become a lot more confident over the course of the semester, and that was exciting -- her opening up more," Kim said.

Joseph Kayne '27, the vice president of YUMMI, worked with a fifth grader on vocal technique last spring. Kayne said that he enjoyed watching the student's musical growth.

"She developed a ton over the course of the four months," he said, adding that it was exciting to see her get advanced technical things that even he struggles with.

Parker said he was excited about the expansion, saying he was "all for equity and accessibility."

"New Haven has so many public schools and students who would benefit from this opportunity," Parker said in a phone interview. "I believe music has the capacity to reach everyone, so by being able to have access to this, it's community-building and promulgating a shared sense of pride in practice and traditions that have been going on for centuries."

Dwight Hall is located at 67 High Street.

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