



BEHIND CLOSED CURTAINS

THE LIFE OF A CHILD PERFORMER IN LIVE THEATER

Hosted By: Blakesley Rhett



BEHIND CLOSED CURTAINS

THE LIFE OF A CHILD PERFORMER IN LIVE THEATER

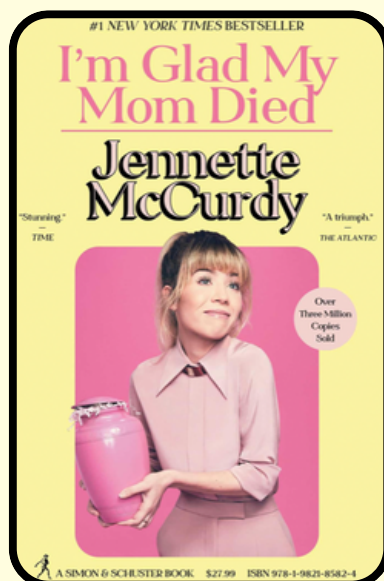
Take a peek behind the curtain and gain a better understanding on the daily lives of child performers and the social and psychological effects that come with being onstage from a young age.

Research Question: What are the long term effects of child performers involved in live theater?

Rationale: In modern day there has been a rise of former child performers involved in television and film (including Drew Barrymore, Jeanette McCurdy and Drake Bell) who have come forward to share their stories about the physical and psychological abuse they faced in the entertainment industry at a young age and how it has impacted them into adulthood. This has led to much public debate on whether it is ethical to use child performers in the film and TV industries but child performers involved in live theater have been left out of the conversation.

Summary of Secondary Research: My secondary research included scholarly articles, press articles, *The Quiet on Set* documentary and Jeanette McCurdy tell all book, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. Through this collection of research it became apparent that child performers in any medium had the potential to face psychological and physical abuse at the hands of adults within the industry such as their families or guardians, producers, agents and directors. Through recounts of child performers involved in high-end live theater (Broadway, West End and national tours) it became apparent that some children struggle to interact socially with their peers outside of their work lives. The research also revealed that the pressure of child performing could lead to psychological distress for child performers well into adulthood and could lead to drug and alcohol addictions and body dysmorphia.

The culmination of all this research guided me to focus my investigation on how children performing as a youth continue to have psychological and social impacts into adulthood.



Evidence and Significance of Findings: Through my interviews it was apparent that child performers in live theater were constantly juggling packed schedules and spent many hours a week working on rehearsals and upcoming performances as when Elise expressed she was attending up to five hour rehearsals six nights a week. It was also apparent that the majority of children involved in theater became close friends with other children in theater and were exposed to many different types of people at a young age; though these friendships were somewhat threatened when competing over the same acting role. Through Elise and Toby it became clear that the pressure of performing caused many children to face acute stress and anxiety that was often put on them by adults in theater. Hayden also expressed how being involved in theater caused her to struggle with self-image and body dysmorphia and was constantly comparing herself to others.

Despite these negative aspects of theater; all my interviewees stated that they still held much love of theater and performing live in their hearts even if they no longer performed themselves. They also cited that being involved in theater at a young age greatly increased their public speaking ability and independence.





AUDIO LINKS

PROMO SPOT

AUDIO
INVESTIGATION



PRESENTING YOUR HOST...

Blakesley Rhett



Some people are just born for the stage...

Blakesley Rhett is a student journalist at the College of Charleston and life-long theater kid who could never quite leave the stage behind. Blakesley has performed in over 25 shows and knows all 20,520 words in “Hamilton” by heart. She is interested in all things performing and answering the question if using children in the media is truly ethical.



SOURCES

MUSIC

- *Phantom of the Opera* “Overture”
- *Beauty and the Beast* “Be Our Guest”
- *Beauty and the Beast* “Tale as Old as Time”
- *Phineas and Ferb* “Busted”
- *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* “Pandemonium”
- *Into the Woods* “Children Will Listen”
- *Phantom of the Opera* “Past the Point of No Return”
- *Rent* “Seasons of Love”
- *Les Misérables* “On My Own”
- *Anastasia the Musical* “Stay, I Pray You”

CLIPS

- Drew Barrymore *The Drew Barrymore Show*
- Jeanette McCurdy *I’m Glad My Mom Died*
- Drake Bell *Quiet on Set*

SOUND EFFECTS

- Audience Chatter (Freesounds.org)
- Orchestra Warming Up (Freesounds.org)
- Applause (Freesounds.org)

INTERVIEWEES

- Charlotte Rhett
- Georgia Kay Wise
- Elise Howle
- Toby O’Connor
- Hayden Cohen

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, L. M. (2011). *Myself or Someone Like Me: A Review of the Literature on the Psychological Well-being of Child Actors*. *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 26(3), 146–149. <https://doi.org/10.21091/mppa.2011.3023>

Child actor syndrome and addiction - Pipe Dream. (n.d.). www.bupipedream.com. <https://www.bupipedream.com/drug-issue-2024/child-actor-syndrome-and-addiction/151763/#:~:text=Child%20stars%20who%20suffer%20from>

Cox, G. (2016, June 8). “*School of Rock*”: Kids on Broadway Are Quadruple Threats. *Variety*; *Variety*. <https://variety.com/2016/legit/news/school-of-rock-kids-on-broadway-1201791285/>

Gaydos, L. (2023). When I grow up... I don't want to be broke: The problems with child actor trust fund requirements. *Family Court Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12745>

Hancock, P., & Tyler, M. (2024). Live Performers' Experiences of Precarity and Recognition during COVID-19 and Beyond. *Work, Employment and Society (Print)*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170231218677>

Hattenstone, S. (2017, December 1). *Drew Barrymore: “My mother locked me up in an institution at 13. Boo hoo! I needed it.”* *The Guardian*; *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/oct/25/drew-barrymore-mother-locked-up-in-institution-interview>

In. (2023, November 20). *OnStage Blog*. *OnStage Blog*. <https://www.onstageblog.com/stage-directions/2023/11/20/being-a-child-actor-in-a-long-running-show>

McCurdy, J. (2022). *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. Simon & Schuster.

Miley Cyrus reveals childhood work schedule: “This girl deserves a little endless summer vacation.” (n.d.). *EW.com*. <https://ew.com/celebrity/miley-cyrus-reveals-hecktic-childhood-work-schedule/>

O'Connor, J. (2008). *The Cultural Significance of the Child Star*. Routledge.

Reid, J. (2017, April 24). *What It's Really Like to Be a Child Star on Broadway* [Review of *What It's Really Like to Be a Child Star on Broadway*]. *Backstage*. <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/really-like-child-star-broadway-4809/>

Robertson, M., & Schwartz, E. (2024). Quiet on Set: The Dark Side of Kids TV [Documentary Series *Quiet on Set: The Dark Side of Kids TV*]. In Maxine Productions (Ed.), *Investigation Discovery*.

Schulman, L. (2022). Judy Garland: The Road Gets Rougher, 1960-1969. *ARSC Journal*, 53(1). <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=bcac099b-9189-4cc2-892a-b89a45ebdfc9%40redis>

Sand, K. (2024). *Child performers working in the entertainment industry around the world: an analysis of the problems faced*. *Repec.org*. <https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/iloilowps/994050803402676.htm>

Tiger, R. (2013). Celebrity gossip blogs and the interactive construction of addiction. *New Media & Society*, 17(3), 340–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813504272>

Warwick, J. (2012). “You Can't Win, Child, but You Can't Get Out of the Game”: Michael Jackson's Transition from Child Star to Superstar. *Popular Music and Society*, 35(2), 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2011.618052>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all of my interviewees; Mom, Georgia Kay, Elise, Toby and Hayden. Thank you for your friendship, support and trusting me to share your stories

Thank you to Dr. Milner and all of my capstone classmates for creating a supportive environment over the past year. It has been a joy to watch all of your projects progress and I am inspired by all of your passion and creativity

Thank you to the cast and crew of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* for being so welcoming to me and reinvigorating my love of performing.

Thank you to everyone who has made a positive impact on my time in live theater. No matter how small it seemed, please know it was deeply appreciated then and still deeply appreciated now.

Finally, thank you to the original Broadway cast of *Wicked* for simply existing.