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ALERT

TOP STORY

FALA GRAD SPOTLIGHT

FALA graduate spotlight: For Torrie Darnell, it's all part of the show

ABIGAIL KESSLER Sun Staff Reporter
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Torrie Darnell is graduating from Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy this month and plans to study musical theater at AMDA in New York City.

Hattie Loper, Arizona Daily Sun

Torrie Darnell, who will be graduating from Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy (FALA) on Friday, added hours to her school day to pursue her passion for acting.

Darnell has focused on adding dance, acting and music practice to her academics during her time in high school at FALA, often taking extra classes during the optional zero- and ninth-hour time slots at the beginning and end of the school day. By the end of her senior year, Darnell had exceeded her school's graduation requirements.

She began performing plays and choir in elementary school and chose to attend FALA starting in middle school for the range of classes it offered in the arts.

“Seeing all of the shows with the advanced acting and the advanced musical theater classes would put on really made want to do that,” she said. “... I worked really hard and grew and ended up being in the advanced classes and got to be in all of the fun shows and do all of the things.”

Among the plays Darnell has acted in at FALA are productions of "Frankenstein," "Little Women" and "Radio Gals." She's also performed in several dance shows and a ballet production of "Tangled" with the out-of-school competition group All That Dance.

Darnell said the role of Madeline in FALA's version of "The Fall of the House of Usher" last year was one of her favorites, because it gave her a chance to try new things.

“It was a very different character than what I normally get to play,” she said, noting the play's Gothic setting. “ ... Getting to play somebody who's trapped inside of this house for a multitude of years ... it was a lot of fun getting to branch out and do something different.”

Darnell has also been dancing for most of her life. She practices six days a week outside of school with All that Dance (starting in ninth grade) and has been taking dance classes at FALA since she first came to the school in sixth grade.

Darnell is part of the first class of graduates from FALA to attend starting in sixth grade after the school expanded to include this grade level in the 2018-19 school year.

She said her main styles of dance are jazz, lyrical and contemporary, adding that her capstone project is also related to dance. Darnell performed duet and solo dances during the school's spring dance show on May 10 and presented at the capstone night. She also performed in the dance show as part of the Contemporary Dance Practices 3 class, which is the most advanced one offered at the school.

FALA's focus on the arts and its supportive teachers were what Darnell said set her school apart.

"FALA has some of the best teachers that I've ever worked with, and they helped me grow in so many ways," she said, saying that her theater teachers -- Eric Walden in musical theater and Anne Cuevas in advanced acting -- supported their students' growth both as performers and as people.

Darnell also said she developed skills in leadership, hard work and task management in high school through clubs, classes and performances. She has been president of the Rotary Interact Club, the National Honor Society for Dance (NHSDA) and was part of the National Junior Honor Society as a middle schooler.

NHSDA specifically focuses on supporting the dance department through fundraising and helping out with shows.



Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy senior Torrie Darnell soars in the air while performing a stunning solo during a dress rehearsal for the school's spring dance show on Friday, May 9, at the Clifford E. White Theater on the Northern Arizona University campus.

Hattie Loper, Arizona Daily Sun

Rotary Interact is the high school version of the Rotary Club. Interact focuses on service projects such as the annual menstruation drive that collects products to donate to local shelters, park cleanups and fundraising for mobility devices through Crutches for Africa. Darnell joined in seventh grade and has been president for the past two years.

Darnell plans to continue developing her performance skills after graduating from FALA this week. She will be studying musical theater at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA) and plans to spend two years each in New York and Los Angeles to complete her degree.

She said she first learned about AMDA from Walden, who told his students about the academy's conservatory programs for high schoolers. Darnell completed two AMDA summer programs before her junior and senior years of high school, one in each city.

Darnell said she hopes to one day live in New York and have a career in musical theater. She plans to start auditioning while in college.

"That's the plan," she said. "I want to live in New York and see where that takes me."

Abigail Kessler has been a reporter for the Daily Sun since 2021, covering education, health, science and more. Reach her at AKessler@azdailysun.com.

MORE INFORMATION



Flagstaff Arts & Leadership Academy adds sixth grade

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