

June 12, 2009

Young producer Rachel Helson

Louisville native, 20, is making waves on Broadway, just as she did while attending Louisville Collegiate School

By Larry Muhammad
lmhammad@courier-journal.com

Rachel Helson first produced a stage play while a sophomore at Louisville Collegiate, auditioned for a role in the Broadway production of "Rent" before graduating from high school, and now, at age 20, is the youngest producer ever of a Tony Award-nominated play.

"How it all came about," Helson said in a telephone interview, "I had interned at Bernard Telsey Casting — he's huge in New York and was casting director for '[title of show],' where I became an associate producer. Opening night, Bernie was sitting next to me and said, 'Rachel, you have to come see "reasons to be pretty,"' which was off-

Broadway at the time, but I absolutely fell in love with it.

"Next time I saw Bernie, I pulled him aside and said, 'Can I get in on this? What do I have to do?'"

A raw coming-of-age drama by Neil LaBute, "reasons to be pretty" was nominated for, but didn't win, the Tony for Best Play, and despite positive reviews, had struggled to fill half the house any given performance.

"Reasons to be pretty" was her second commercial production on Broadway — impressive for a May graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Her first was the aforementioned "[title of show]" last summer, about two friends writing a musical, and she also produced a benefit performance of "The Rocky Horror Show" on Broadway while a freshman at NYU.

Proceeds from that show went to Susan G. Komen for the Cure, for which she also produced a second fundraiser, "The Pink Campaign on Broadway," in April.

Helson has raised more than \$100,000 for the breast cancer foundation, beginning with several "Rocky Horror Show" performances she produced and starred in while a sophomore at Louisville Collegiate School.

She raised money, secured production rights, assembled a talented cast and professional crew that mounted successful, sold-out shows in 2004 and 2005 at the Kentucky Center's 555-seat Bomhard Theater, and she was only 15.

Although the Louisville native originally had eyed an acting career — she'd planned to graduate from Collegiate a year early to turn pro, and at NYU she earned a bachelor's degree in acting — Helson refuses to be pigeonholed.

"Producing has made me a better actor, and acting has made me a better producer," she said. "I think that good people in the industry, the ones that survive and have the best careers, do a lot of things. Hopefully, I'll direct one day. Everything feeds on something else."

Reporter Larry Muhammad can be reached at (502) 582-7091.

Additional Facts

THERE'S MORE

— Rachel Helson will take part in the Blessings in a Backpack national conference in Louisville Friday, June 12, along with actress/singer Hilary Duff. For more information about the program, a Louisville-based nonprofit organization that is helping to feed schoolchildren in Kentucky, Indiana, Florida, Michigan, Missouri, California and New York, visit www.blessingsinabackpack.com or call (800) 872-4366.
