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OUACHITA
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NEWS

For Immediate Release

Ouachita senior Chad Burris makes Broadway debut

By McKenzie Cranford

September 15, 2014

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Chad Burris, a senior musical theatre major at Ouachita Baptist University, recently made his Broadway debut in the national tour of *The Book of Mormon*. Performing in front of an audience of nearly 2,000 people, Burris played the role of Elder Cunningham, one of two lead characters in the production.

Burris, a native of Van Buren, Ark., was hired at the beginning of the summer as a standby for the character and now is traveling the nation with the production cast and crew. While on the road, he is working to finish his degree through online classes with a special degree plan devised with the help of Dr. Holsclaw, dean of the School of Fine Arts.

Although Burris originally had planned to return to Arkadelphia this fall, his plans changed when he had the opportunity to audition for *The Book of Mormon* and was offered a position on the national tour alongside several Tony-nominated actors.

“Chad is industrious, inquisitive and unafraid of networking and making the necessary connections with professionals in the field of performing arts,” said Dr. Jon Secrest, professor of music and chair of the department of applied music, who worked closely with Burris in the OBU productions of *Die Fledermaus*, *Hello Dolly!* and *Guys and Dolls*.

Dr. Glenda Secrest, professor of music, has worked with Burris in weekly private voice lessons since the time he transferred to OBU. She also served as his vocal diction teacher and stage director during *Die Fledermaus*.

“You can have the talent but you have to have the work ethic to go with it,” she said. “Chad has always been one who has worked hard and then applied what he has learned,”

Echoing that perspective, Dr. Jon Secrest added, “He hangs on every pearl of wisdom of his instructional experience and is also uniquely motivated to succeed.”

Burris said his primary advice to students is: “The person who applies what God has given them and is constantly working on their talent and reaching out for opportunities will come across opportunities such as this. The early bird truly does get the worm.”

He also makes a point to express his appreciation for the people who have supported him on his journey. “Dr. Glenda Secrest has helped me through many of the auditions and prepared me to do these shows,” Burris said. “Additionally, Daniel Inouye’s classes at Ouachita have helped prepare me to quickly memorize the script and dances in short periods of time.”

Reflecting on what it feels like to see Ouachita students on the Broadway stage, Dr. Jon Secrest said, “It is exciting for us as teachers to see how the potential we recognize in those we work with comes to fruition.”

Another Ouachita student recently made his Broadway debut, as well. Jacob Watson, a 2011 alumnus and Wynne, Ark., native, performed in the Tony Award-nominated musical *Violet* on Broadway during the summer of 2014.

For more information about Ouachita's musical theatre program, contact Dr. Jon Secrest at secrestj@obu.edu or (870) 245-5134.

PHOTO AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AT <http://www.obu.edu/news/2014/09/15/ouachita-senior-chad-burris-makes-broadway-debut>.