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For immediate release

Jacob Keith Watson ('11) (Captivating audiences on Broadway and beyond)

By Kiki Schleiff Cherry

November 18, 2022

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at comm-mark@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206.

Actor, singer, Broadway performer and Ouachita graduate Jacob Keith Watson fell in love with the university while attending Super Summer camp on campus as a teenager. He was drawn by the discovery that the school had a musical theatre major—the only one in Arkansas at the time.

"One thing that was important to me was experience," Watson said. "I could do the operas, I could do the Shakespeare, I could do the contemporary plays, I could do the musicals." He was also able to stage-manage and design lighting and sound, which helped him become a "whole theatre artist," he said.

Watson's big break came at a National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) competition, when the artistic director of the Shreveport Opera saw him perform and asked if he would join their company as a young resident artist. Watson stayed in Louisiana for seven months, acting in children's theatre and performing in operas, before deciding to move to New York to pursue musical theatre.

He started waiting tables and one day found himself "in the right place at the right time," he said. Watson landed a role in the Tony-nominated revival of *Violet* at the Roundabout Theatre, which qualified him to join the Actors' Equity Association.

His musical theatre repertoire now includes other Tony-nominated revivals including *Carousel* and *Hello, Dolly!* as well as roles in *Phantom of the Opera*, *1776* and national and international touring companies of *Chicago the Musical*. Watson has shared the stage with some famous faces along the way: He was cast in *Violet* along with Broadway veteran and TV star Sutton Foster, and he joined *Amélié* starring

Phillipa Soo—Broadway's original Elizabeth Schuyler in *Hamilton*—both on Broadway and in Los Angeles.

Opera credits include classics such as *La bohème* and *Pagliacci*. Watson also has performed with numerous symphonies and as the tenor soloist in *Elijah*, *Messiah* and *Carmina Burana*.

When the musical theatre industry shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Watson suddenly realized how tired he was after months of "just working, working, working."

"I had a lot of creative output and not a lot of creative input," he said. The first year of the shutdown became "kind of a forced rest period." Watson and his wife Elisabeth Hipp, also a Broadway performer and 2011 Ouachita alum, found that the break helped them to "re-prioritize our real purpose and mission."

Watson's first performance following quarantine was in *Annie Live!* on NBC, where his appearance in seven different roles became an internet sensation. In Spring 2022, he was cast in the new musical *Swept Away* at the Berkeley (Calif.) Repertory Theatre. He believes that *Swept Away*, which features the music of the Avett Brothers, has great potential as a Broadway hopeful. "It has a lot to tell us about humanity and the world around us," he said.

Watson, a native of Wynne, Ark., returned to his home state to accept a role in *Into The Woods* at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre in May.

To hear more of Jacob's story, check out the Tiger for Life Podcast at obu.edu/tigerforlifepodcast.



By Kiki Schleiff Cherry, marketing manager for graduate and online education