

A CONVERSATION WITH DYLAN GODWIN THE STAR OF *FULLY COMMITTED*

Before the start of rehearsals, Dylan Godwin sat down with Alley Theatre Director of New York, Elizabeth Frankel, to talk about *Fully Committed*. What followed was a conversation that was unexpectedly personal for both of them.

Elizabeth: I'm excited to get to talk with you about *Fully Committed* because while so many plays have stuck with me and meant a lot to me, *Fully Committed* is the one that actually affected my life the most concretely. My mother took me to the original New York production during my senior year of college and I thought, "Wow, that looks so fun!" So when I moved to New York and needed a day job, I applied to be a reservationist at fancy restaurants. I ended up working at the Union Square Cafe on-and-off for six years.

Dylan: That cracks me up because when I first read the play I thought "Oh I can't imagine a more stressful situation!" I've only worked a service job once and I was terrible at it. So the idea of having 50 phones going off at one time makes me break out in a cold sweat, which is a great motivating factor to do *Fully Committed*.

Elizabeth: I know you play over 40 different characters in the show and I hear you've been practicing by leaving messages on your director's voicemail...

Dylan: It's my way of making myself accountable. One morning I woke up and had my coffee and it just sent me into a super productive frenzy.

So I called him and left a message as one of the characters. Now every morning I leave him a message as someone else.

Elizabeth: Is there one character that's the most fun to play?

Dylan:

"Right now, I'm playing with the first character, Bunny Vandevere. She's a Park Avenue socialite. You later find out her husband invented Botox, so it's fun to play with the idea that she can only move one quarter of her mouth while she's talking."

Elizabeth: Is there a character that you connect with most?

Dylan: I really connect with the central character because Sam is a struggling actor. I have always taught or done something so I can keep doing my craft. Sometimes when you're in those jobs it can just be heavy. Another part of his



story is that he's trying to get back to his dad because his mom just passed away. My dad passed away seven years ago. It's a very understandable thing when you lose a parent to feel like you need to be closer to the one that remains.

Elizabeth: So this is your moment to ask a former reservationist a question. What do you want to know?

Dylan: What's something that really stood out to you?

Elizabeth: What struck me was the dichotomy between the fine dining atmosphere and how the chefs were tough-looking tattooed guys with lots of muscles, which is so different from the delicate plate of greens you would be served at your table with the white table cloth. Before I got there, when I thought of cooking, I thought of moms and

elegant women and then to see these tough men being the ones who want to talk about the nuances of spices and sauces...

Dylan: And microgreens!

Elizabeth: And microgreens! Yeah, I just didn't picture that.

Dylan:

Elizabeth: Yes, it is like a performance.

"Maybe the reason that I have always had a bit of a fascination with that kind of world is that it's so similar to what we do. It's similar to the process of a tech leading up to a preview. There's all that prep, all that intense work, and then all of a sudden the audience is here and it's all gonna happen, except restaurants do that every night."

And in a way being a reservationist is like being backstage because you don't have to put on any kind of uniform, even the chefs have to usually, but no one sees the reservationists.

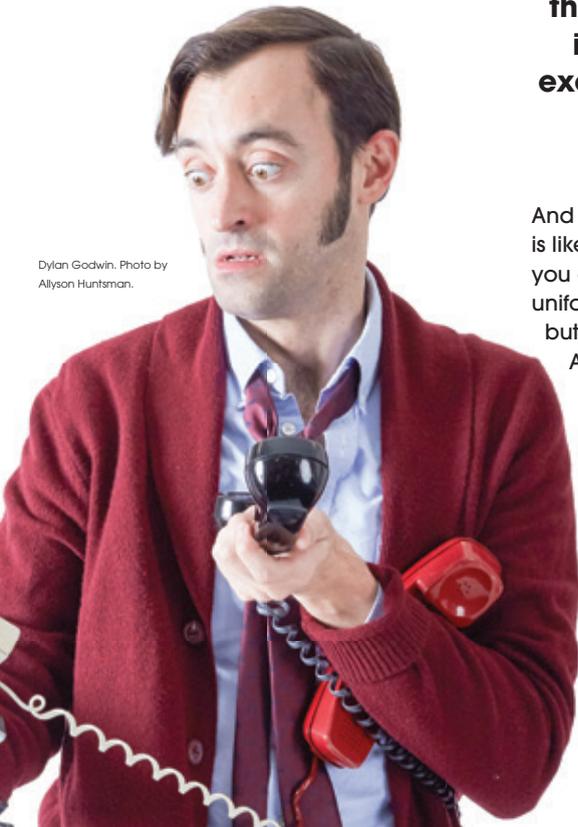
And getting comfortable with juggling all the phone lines was another fun part of it.

Dylan: That terrifies me. Even just knowing about the logistics of this show. How in sync the stage manager and I are gonna have to be because every beat change is basically another phone call.

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Alley Theatre 17

Dylan Godwin. Photo by Allyson Huntsman.





Elizabeth: Since the play is set at Christmas-time, I have to ask you about your family's holiday traditions...

Dylan: My mom has already started putting the screws to me about making sure I'm coming home because Thanksgiving and Christmas are sacred.

Elizabeth: Where is home?

Dylan: Athens, Texas. It's a really beautiful hometown. It's got rolling green hills, lots of pine trees. My mom still lives in the place where I grew up. It's this farm/ranch situation with lots of acreage and my grandparents live at the bottom 10 acres of it and my mother lives on the top.

"We always had holidays at my grandparents' house. My grandmother starts cooking probably two and a half weeks before Christmas. She's 90 years old and she still makes all of her candy, cakes, and pies from scratch. It's a big process."

Elizabeth: Did you grow up farming?

Dylan: Yeah! We always had at least 50 or 60 head of cattle on. We had tons of chickens. We had a potbelly pig at one point named Emma-Gene. We had horses when I was really little, but I was allergic to them, so my parents

had to get rid of them. They got a bunch of horses later when I went off to college. One time I drove in from school in the night and it was dark because in the country there's no lights around us. All of a sudden, I felt something. It was a miniature horse biting my butt. My dad had bought something like seven of them.

Elizabeth: Will any of your family be coming to see *Fully Committed*?

Dylan: Oh yeah, they're all going to come see it. It's so funny how my mom mobilizes. As soon as she found out, she immediately started texting people. She's got groups coming at all different times.

Elizabeth: And if any of them are reading this article, is there anything you want to say to them?

Dylan:

"Thanks for putting up with all my terrible middle and high school plays because it all led up to this."

When I was a kid, my grandmother zeroed-in on the theatre gene in me early. I had these little cousins and she would always make me conceive and execute this Christmas pageant on Christmas night. It was every year in my grandmother's living room. It was hilarious. I would go into her closet, because she kept all of her clothes from the 60's and 70's, and we would fashion shepherd and angel costumes out of these double-knit polyester dresses and twin sets. My little cousins, Don, Jeb, and Christina, would have to be my cast. Every year it would be different but it would always culminate in reading the Christmas story.



R to L: Jeb Johnson, Dylan Godwin, Don Johnson performing in the Christmas night pageant.

This one year my Uncle Jim had given me RuPaul's first CD *Super Model*. That year we played a track from *Super Model* and then my cousin would strut down to the end of runway, stop, and say a Christmas fact. It was a hybrid runway show/Southern Baptist Christmas pageant. It's embarrassing. But really at the core of who I am.

One time my grandmother had just gotten a VHS camera. We would do a little scene and then we'd switch to the TV and there would be a clip. I decided that smoke would be a really effective theatrical illusion, so I made my little cousin Don Mathew light a smoke bomb and stand with a robe over it. He opened the robe and the smoke came out and we were videotaping it, but he almost asphyxiated so it didn't make the cut.

Elizabeth: Were your cousins happily into this?

Dylan: No! The first year I had a total meltdown because we had rehearsed and practiced, and then when it came time to perform, they just refused! And so I threw a huge fit. All the pictures of me that year are me sitting angrily on my grandmother's La-Z-Boy, red

eyes, with a Bible open in my lap just scowling at the camera, because they ruined my production and I didn't have understudies! Granted, they were like five years old.

Elizabeth: And will your grandmother be traveling to see the show?

Dylan: Yes! She hasn't seen a show that I've done in five or six years, and she is so hyped and enthused about coming to see this one. She's one of the first people who really encouraged me.

Elizabeth: She gave you your first job.

Dylan: Exactly, in her living room. But, you know what I mean, she encouraged that in me at a very young age, in a town and place that was maybe not the most accepting of the kind of kid that I was. She'll get to be here for this one, and that night will be extremely special to me.



R to L: Dylan Godwin with his grandmother Margie Johnson.