**TALKING WITH GREY HENSON**



The PlayhouseSquare Community Engagement & Education Department *Buzz Extra* newsletter writer Robin Pease spoke with Grey Henson who portrays Elder McKinley in **THE BOOK OF MORMON**. Mr. Henson, a 2012 Carnegie Mellon University graduate, got cast in the show at the age of 21. He started rehearsals the summer he graduated from college. THE BOOK OF MORMON is his professional debut.

**Pease:**  You’ve been busy since graduation.

**HENSON:**  It’s been quite a year. Right after graduation, I went home to Georgia for about a month, then came to New York, started rehearsals and it hasn’t stopped since.

**Pease:**  How did you get started in this business?

**HENSON:**  I have been performing my whole life. I started as a dancer, ballet lessons when I was four years old. My mom said I was dancing all over the house. She had always been involved in the local community theaters, so I always auditioned for shows. My first play was *Peter Pan,* at six years old. I was the youngest lost boy. Even though ballet was where my heart was at the time, I grew up dabbling in acting and singing.

In high school I had a huge growth spurt. I am 6’3″ with a pretty big build. That’s not a typical male dancer’s body. I realized dance wasn’t going to be my path. My heart transitioned and I fell in love with performing in theater and musicals.

I worked closely with Theatre Macon’s Youth Theatre. I played Curly in *Oklahoma*, Marius in *Les Mis*, did *West Side Story*. Then at my high school, I did Pseudolus in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Pirates of Penzance,*so many shows, probably about 25 shows in High School.

After my junior year of high school, Carnegie has a pre-college summer program for high schoolers. I went to the summer drama program and fell in love with the teachers and knew that is where I wanted to go. Senior year, I auditioned and got accepted.

**Pease:**  What classes did you take at Carnegie?

**HENSON:**  We took movement classes, voice lessons, clowning class, Shakespeare, the Greeks, Restoration comedies and contemporary scenes. But acting training was the thing I was most excited about. You can be a performer in Music Theater, a fantastic singer and a knockout dancer, but if there isn’t a good foundation of acting skills, then the performance will fall short. It was a very busy four years.

**Pease:** How did you get this show?

**HENSON:**  The reason I got this show so soon was because of the school I went to. Rory O’Malley, who is from Cleveland, originated my role in the Broadway production. He went to Carnegie Mellon, as did Josh Gad who originated Elder Cunningham. So there was THE BOOK OF MORMON already in the Carnegie family. A teacher of mine noticed the similarities between Rory and me. Rory ended up getting my stuff through to the casting director and it snowballed. I am very lucky for those Carnegie connections.

**Pease:**  What did you do in the auditions?

**HENSON:**  They normally want to see you sing your own material. They wanted to see just happy, youthful, positive energy. They also sent sides (or scenes) from the show and songs. I sang “Turn it Off,” which is the song I sing in the show. We had a dance call. It all just worked out.

**Pease**:  How many auditions did you have before you got the role?

**HENSON:**  I had four auditions. I was home on Christmas break of my senior year. It was January 3 when I got the call that I got the role and was starting the summer after my graduation.

**Pease:**  Do you live in New York now when you’re not on the road?

**HENSON**:  No, I never really had a chance to live anywhere else. I’m a vagabond, a gypsy. Two suitcases. Most of my stuff, I am storing back home in Georgia. Eventually when I leave the tour, I will settle down in New York or LA and get a place. But no, I don’t have a home. It’s so strange.

**Pease:**  What are your career goals after the show?

**HENSON:**  To never be worried about having work, that’s the goal of any actor. It’s hard because it is a really unpredictable business that I don’t know much about. Maybe just to be doing good work and maybe even create my own. That’s something the head of the school at CMU always encouraged. If there isn’t work, create your own and make that for yourself.

Also, I would like to be able to find a healthy balance between work and life. It’s complicated becoming an adult. My career choice has started off on a really great foot, but I’m excited to see where it will go next. I don’t really know and that’s the nature of the business, but hopefully it all works out.

**Pease:**  What can you tell us about THE BOOK OF MORMON?

**HENSON:**  The show is the perfect musical. A traditional song and dance show, but flipped on its head. It’s exciting to see the audience’s reaction every night. It has some of the best material, well written and choreographed. Matt Stone and Trey Parker are amazing and really great guys.

**Pease:**  What do you think are some of the main themes of the show?

**HENSON:**  The show is about friendship and trusting that you and your personal journey may be difficult at times but it is worth the struggle in the end. This is a coming of age story and knowing that the world is bigger than we are.