

The Phantom and the Viking

Broadway Lead Got Her Start at FHS



Story by Patrick J. DeGeorge

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Broadway's longest-running musical, Phantom of the Opera, will end its historic 35-year run on April 16 – and in that final production, the iconic role of Christine Daaé will be played by a Fremd High School alumna.

Emilie Kouatchou launched her acting career while at Fremd, starting with her sophomore year production of “The Secret Garden” and performing in every musical until her graduation in 2015.

“I started my sophomore year because I was very nervous my freshman year,” she said. “I was still trying to suss it out. I didn’t feel that I was qualified enough to audition that first year.”



In addition to playing Mrs. Medlock in “The Secret Garden,” Kouatchou’s Fremd roles included Sylvia in “All Shook Up” and Pinnochio in “Shrek.” She also performed in school plays and was an active member of the drama club and Group Interpretation Competitions, performing at state competitions.

Emilie Kouatchou as Christine. (photo by Matthew Murphy)

It was another aspect of Fremd’s performing arts – choir – that drove her passion.

“That was my bread and butter,” Kouatchou said. “I loved theater, but choir is what I spent most of my time doing.”

Kouatchou decided to pursue acting as a career option while attending the University of Michigan and discussing theater career options with a classmate one year ahead of her.

“I don’t know that I ever thought I would make theater my life, but I knew it was something I could make money off of,” she said. “I was on the path to do something different in my life like going into business like my parents did.”

Not only is Kouatchou closing out the role of Christine, she also is making history as the first black actor to play the role in its 35-year run. The importance of this milestone is not lost on her.

“It was a lifelong dream to be on Broadway,” she said. “Being the first black Christine felt healing to my inner child. You look up to these performers and try to look for ones who look like you and do what you want to do. I am so happy that I get to be that representation to black and brown girls who come from places like Palatine.”

For students who are thinking about following a career pathway in the arts, Kouatchou recommends becoming a well-rounded individual.

“Try to get off your phone as much as you can,” she recommended. “Start forming your own opinions about everything. Start cultivating your creative mind. Some of the best actors and theater performers I have seen have been well rounded.”

She also recommends students enjoy the educational process.

“Focus on school now,” she said. “You’ll have your whole life to be a theater actor. Your time in school is time you will never get back. Invest in your hobbies and invest in what you are doing now.”



Members of the company (photo by Matthew Murphy)