From Wedel, Germany towards Broadway

Hanna Mortensen became "Hanna Westi"and her show-dreams became reality

07/15/2023- top-news about life, culture and education in Wedel

Hanna Westi- a woman lives for the stage. Photo: privat.

Tap-classes with masks- the path to artistic fame is often not easy.

No, Snow White, don't bite! Hanna Westi starring in a children's musical at the Galli Theater.

The children are having fun! Hanna Westi (on the right) also teaches theater classes for the "stars of tomorrow".

Hanna Mortensen's story is one of a lot of talent, even more energy and endless diligence. It proves that even today it is still possible not only to chase dreams, but also to make them come true. Dreams that began in a small but rather sleepy town on the Elbe River and are fulfilled anew every day in the vibrant metropolis on the Hudson. And it all started with Grandpa Kurt Westi, the opera singer.

"He was a well-known Danish opera singer. I used to like watching his performances on video tapes and always found it very fascinating," she says. She was still a student at the Albert Schweitzer School at that time and later at the Gebrüder-Humboldt School, when in the choir of the parish of Wedel, Grandpa Kurt's inheritance finally broke through. "I developed an interest in singing, dancing and acting from a very young age. I sang in the church choir for seven years, played in a few musicals and took part in a few Christmas oratorios that were rehearsed and performed under the direction of Susanne Krau."

And then there was Beate Hoffmann, who inspired the children at Wedeler TSV to dance playfully - the applause for the performances at the harbor festivals made the first adrenaline rushes make Hanna's eyes shine. But Hanna wanted more. She took private singing lessons from music teacher Britta Johannsen because of their shared passion for pop music. "At the same time, I started ballroom dancing at the dance school Riemer, which I enjoyed so much that I was even employed there as a dance assistant. My dance partner and I danced in the team shows at the dance school's gala balls three years in a row."

At the GHS, Hanna was so enthusiastic about the "Theater Class" course that she attended it for three years. "We wrote our own plays and performed them in front of our parents and

other students. That strengthened me incredibly." With a "Sketch Contribution" in the 13th grade on the subject of "Sustainability", the ensemble received the Jan Palm Advancement Award in 2018, a year before she earned her Higher School Certificate.

When she came into contact with Jeannine Michele Wacker, an actress who was successful in the musicals "Wicked" and "Kinky Boots" in Hamburg, it finally "clicked" for Hanna! She had studied at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA) and reported very enthusiastically. Hanna dared and sent off an application. "My audition took place in Paris, and I will never forget this experience." She also applied to the renowned musical school Stage School Hamburg at the same time. "I was first accepted at the Stage School Hamburg and then I was accepted from New York," she said and: "My decision was made immediately. I really wanted to move to New York to start my musical studies!"

It started in October 2019. Hanna's days consisted of singing lessons, drama classes, music theory classes, musical theater classes, jazz, tap and ballet classes - everything it takes to become a performer. "The course wasn't exactly easy, but it certainly prepared me for the world outside the school walls."

Because of Covid, she had to continue her studies partly online in Wedel and then paused her studies for a year and a half. “I fought with myself for a long time whether I wanted to finish my studies in New York at all or whether I should stay in Hamburg. In the end, I decided to go back to New York and have been living there permanently since the end of 2021. I've never regretted my decision because it's simply a dream city."

After graduating in 2022, she is now working as an actress and performer at the Galli Theater NY, which specializes mainly in children's and youth musicals, but also performs plays for adults. She has adopted the stage name "Hanna Westi" in honor of Grandpa Kurt. The Theater in New York offers performances in its own theater space in Tribeca, New York, as well as in schools and other locations in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Boston, Philadelphia and other cities. In addition, the "Galli Theater NY" has launched a very important project, the "Dr. Fairytale Program". It enabled the Galli Theater to go to various hospitals such as the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center or the Ronald McDonald House to perform various musicals in front of very ill children. Hanna Mortensen: "This project is very important to all of us, especially me."

She also teaches acting for children and young adults at several schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn, both in German and in English. "I rehearse some of the Galli fairytale musicals with them," says Hanna Westi. This is entirely in the tradition of the theater founder, the German author, actor, musician and filmmaker Johannes Galli, who wrote all the Galli fairytale musicals based on the stories of the Brothers Grimm.

In addition, Hanna Westi is also working on other projects. "I'm regularly booked in various cabaret shows and sing on various stages in the heart of Manhattan. One of my favorite venue’s is the Don't Tell Mama NYC, which is located in Manhattan's Theater District and has therefore been visited by many familiar faces."

How it goes on? Hanna Westi would like to stay in New York: "I really hope that America will give me the chance to stay here, because New York is simply the best city to successfully work in this." And of course, the confession of her show colleague Frank Sinatra about New York, New York also applies to her: "And if I can make it there - I'm gonna make it anywhere." (Jörg Frenzel/Kommunikateam GmbH, 07/15/2023)