



Shipman's rising star

by Nancy Thompson
photos by Ben Gancsos
and T. Charles Erickson

■ **Andrew Shipman** acts, sings, dances and does spot-on British and Southern accents. He's appeared on Broadway, at The Bushnell and at Hartford Stage with veterans such as Matthew Modine. **Not bad for a 13-year-old.**

Shipman, who lives in Glastonbury with his parents, Marci and Gregg, and his two older brothers, can't remember a time when he didn't love to go to plays.

"Since I was really little, I've loved going to shows and singing around the house," he said. "It was always like a dream to be in a play."

He realized that dream in the fall of 2004, when he

played Alakazam in the Hartford Children's Theatre production of *Aladdin*. Other roles in community theaters followed – at Park Road Playhouse, Glastonbury Youth Theatre, Connecticut Family Theater and others.

His grandmother thought he was ready for more, and encouraged him to audition for a part in Hartford Stage's production of *A Christmas Carol*

On stage

by Marie Scarfo

■ As summer turns to autumn and the days grow cooler, the Greater Hartford arts scene heats up with a new fall schedule of performances

The Bushnell

166 Capitol Avenue
Hartford
(860) 987-5900
bushnell.org

COMING ATTRACTIONS

- Capitol Steps \$38**
September 30, 8 p.m.
- Warriors Don't Cry \$12-\$33**
October 4-7, 10 a.m.
October 4, 7 p.m.
- Dr. Melba Pattillo Beals**
October 7, 7:30 p.m.

- Pilobolus \$28-\$45**
October 21-23, 8 p.m.
- Nite of Lite Laughter featuring Lily Tomlin \$37.50-\$70**
October 22, 8 p.m.
- Blue Man Group \$17-\$70**
October 26-31, times vary
- Jason and the Argonauts \$12**
November 3, 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.
- Irving Berlin's White Christmas \$17-\$75**
November 16-18, 7:30 p.m.
November 19-21, times vary

in the fall of 2006.

He auditioned, returned home and waited for a call. When it came, he learned that he'd landed the role of Tiny Tim.

"That was one of my best winters," he said with a smile. "It was really fun being with a professional cast."

Since then, he's been with one professional cast after another, including *Our Town* with Hal Holbrook, *To Kill a Mockingbird* with Modine, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Hartford Stage, and *The Music Man* with Patrick Cassidy at The Bushnell.

He's the kind of young actor adults love.

"As an actor, **Andrew has tremendous light and presence while being very simple and truthful.** This is very unique," said Michael Wilson, artistic director at Hartford Stage.

"Many young actors push to be noticed on stage. Andrew innately understands that the most compelling stage presence is 'to be.' He knows to listen on stage, which is also a secret to all great acting. As a young man, he is tireless in his energy to rehearse and achieve a moment,

whether it be an acting beat or a step or choreography. He has a great sense of humor, a wonderful sense of play, a great smile, and a big heart. I love him so."

Modine, who played the title role in *Birdy* and appeared in *Full Metal Jacket* and several other movies and television series, shared Wilson's admiration for the young actor, especially for his focus and his family's support.

"He is really unflappable," Modine said. "As a person, he is so kind, polite, and eager to learn. He never seems to presume, but keeps his mind open to others' opinions and ways of thinking. His family is great, and supportive of Andrew's artistry and commitment to the acting profession. But I also think if Andrew chose to walk away from it to become, say, an oceanographer, they would be just as supportive. Perhaps that is why Andrew is such a mensch."

Modine was impressed by the young man's no-nonsense approach.

"The thing that I loved most was teasing him about his powerful silence, his note-taking during rehearsal. So serious," he said.

"I loved seeing that serious-

ness crack, so I started to joke with the other actors and director. 'You know,' I'd say, 'I saw Andrew last night. I wanted to get his advice about what he thought about the scene and what it was really about. I met him at his house, sitting in a big overstuffed leather chair. He smelled like Old Spice. Andrew was having a glass of scotch on the rocks and smoking an expensive cigar. He said — spoken like James Cagney — 'Modine, if I was playing your part, I'd do it like this, see...'"

"This teasing became a running gag throughout rehearsal. Andrew always smiled, good-humored. But there was always the hint that he was at home, older than his years, drinking scotch and enjoying a big cigar. And the joke was really on us!"

Last summer, Shipman and his parents contacted an agent, who got him an audition for a role in Disney Theatricals' production of *Mary Poppins* on Broadway. He had to sing, memorize lines and sound British.

Within a few weeks, he had the part of Michael Banks, one of the children *Mary Poppins* is hired to care for.

Hartford Stage

50 Church Street
Hartford
(860) 527-5151
hartfordstage.org

COMING ATTRACTIONS

- William Shakespeare's Antony & Cleopatra*
October 7-November 7
- A Christmas Carol* \$22-\$61;
\$10 discount for children
12 and under
November 26-December 31

Hartford Symphony Orchestra

99 Pratt Street, Suite 500
Hartford
(860) 246-8742
hartfordsymphony.org

COMING ATTRACTIONS

- An Evening with Emanuel Ax* \$350
Belding Theater, The Bushnell
September 25, 5:30 p.m.
- Masterworks Series: Beethoven's Emperor!*
Belding Theater, The Bushnell
October 14, 7:30 p.m.
October 15-16, 8 p.m.

- Sunday Serenades: American Moderns*
Avery Court, Wadsworth Atheneum
October 24, 2 p.m.
- Masterworks Series: Scheherazade!*
Belding Theater, The Bushnell
November 4, 7:30 p.m.
November 5-6, 8 p.m.
November 7, 3 p.m.
- POPS! Goes Vegas*
Mortensen Hall, The Bushnell
November 13, 8 p.m.
- Masterworks Series: Tchaikovsky's Passionate Piano Concerto*
Belding Theater, The Bushnell
December 2, 7:30 p.m.
December 3-4, 8 p.m.
December 5, 3 p.m.

"I was so excited," he said. "I was proud of myself. Michael is in everything."

He started rehearsals in July and performed in his first show at the end of August.

During rehearsals, Shipman would go to New York with one of his parents and stay at a hotel when necessary.

Once he was performing, he alternated with two other young actors and usually only had to go to the city once or twice a week, so he and his mother would travel back and forth whenever he was appearing or on standby.

His work impressed Anthony Lyn, the associate director for the Broadway and national touring productions of *Mary Poppins*. He met Shipman at an audition and **knew immediately that he had a winner.**

"I had heard of Andrew in advance, from the president of Disney Theatrical Productions, Thomas Schumacher, who had seen Andrew in a regional production of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and was very impressed by him," Lyn said.

"The role of Michael Banks is HUGE and the children we require need to be exceptional.

We instantly hired Andrew for the Broadway Company and set about rehearsing him into the production. Andrew has a maturity and thoughtfulness ahead of his years. He is an incredibly polite young man — a wonderful credit to his parents — and has a focus, as an actor, that one would usually only find in a seasoned adult performer. I often say that being selected to be a child actor in a Broadway show is like having a child who is selected to train for the Olympics. We see thousands upon thousands of young people every year and only the very best are selected. And Andrew is amongst the very best."

Shipman's success has been the result of a lot of training and a lot of hard work.

He's studied with Michael Lamb of South Windsor.

"He's helped me a lot," Shipman said of his mentor. "He's been very supportive. He went to see me in *Mary Poppins*."

Lamb is also a big fan.

"Andrew possesses a natural talent and ease on stage, coupled with a strong singing voice and marketable looks," Lamb said.

"I have not been surprised

at his success. Anyone who meets him would agree that he is a delight and a really special young man."

Shipman ended his run in *Mary Poppins* in May. Young actors tend to grow out of their roles, so they don't keep the parts as long as the adults in the cast do.

He planned to kick back and relax, maybe play a little basketball or golf before heading off to Smith Middle School at the end of the summer.

He said he'd like to continue acting and, several years down the road, try his hand at directing. "I'd like to try different things," he said.

Whatever he does, Michael Wilson of Hartford Stage won't be surprised to see him succeed.

"Andrew is a keeper," he said. "We are seeing a wonderful young actor develop right in front of our very eyes, and he's doing it the way they have done for centuries, by working with veterans in the field and learning and honing his craft. I have seen great things from Andrew these last four years, **but the best is yet to come.**" HM

- Handel's Messiah**
Belding Theater, The Bushnell
December 10-11, 8 p.m.
- Holiday POPSI Spectacular**
Mortensen Hall, The Bushnell
December 18, 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

TheaterWorks

233 Pearl Street
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(860) 527-7838
theaterworkshartford.org

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