



KAYLEIGH TRUMAN'S JOURNEY TO BROADWAY, AND BEYOND

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Kayleigh Truman was destined for the spotlight. Not in it: the person behind it, running the show.

Kayleigh grew up in the theatre. "My parents met at a famous old vaudeville house, Proctor's in Schenectady, New York, so they always called me a 'Product of Proctor's.' My dad got his union card when I was ten, but I didn't really understand why unions were important. I didn't intend to go into theatre. When I went to college, I wanted to study archeology. But my work/study job was in a scene shop. By the time I graduated I had done 35 college productions, two seasons of summer stock, and had interned at a regional theatre. And I realized that was really what I wanted to do."

It's well-known that the New York theatre scene is famously difficult to break into. Not for Kayleigh. "Right out of college, through a happy accident I got a job as an intern with a major Broadway props company. Got yelled at by John Malkovich second day on the job. Good times. From there, I spent the next three years freelancing in props production."

It's also well-known that one of the most difficult unions to get into is the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), particularly New York City's Local One. Kayleigh broke through that barrier as well, on her first try. "There's a couple of ways to get into the union, and to me, the apprenticeship is the best. The test is only offered every four years, but if you're one of the top scorers you get guaranteed employment for two years with full benefits, and at the end you get your card." She grinned. "I was in the top 12%."

Kayleigh did her apprenticeship on Broadway, working full-time at the American Airlines Theatre with the Roundabout Theatre Company. "It was fantastic. I still consider it home. I got to work on a great farcical comedy, *Noises Off*, where I hid on the upper level of the set, setting up all the gags which had to happen so fast, bam-bam-bam. My personal claim to fame is that one of the clips used in the TV ads was one of my scenes." She added, "I worked on so many great shows. One of my favorites was [Eugene O'Neill's] *Long Day's Journey into Night*. She laughed, "We renamed it "Long Day's Journey into Overtime" because it was four hours long and over the time allotted for in the contract. We had to get special side letters—and we made *really* good money!"

So with such a booming career, why did Kayleigh decide to go back to school, and what made her choose SLU? "I started getting more active in my union a couple of years ago. I wrote a petition to our executive board asking for better mental health coverage and resources for our members. Fast forward to now: for the past year we have had a full-time mental health professional on our Wellness Fund staff, so I'd call that a success. In addition, my mentor at the union is Trustee Eileen Macdonald, only the second woman ever elected to our Executive Board. She told me about the UALE summer school. I was amazed that the union would pay for me to take four days of classes with hundreds of union women. And those four days turned out to be life-changing. They affected me so much that I started looking at other courses and workshops, including the women's leadership program at Cornell ILR. It was Eileen who encouraged me to consider SLU. She was attending a panel there and asked me to join her. I met Maureen LaMar and her team on a webcast conference, along with a lot of my UALE sisters. And that's when I realized I already belonged to the SLU community. I enrolled in the Masters' program in labor studies starting in spring 2020."

Kayleigh had only eight weeks of in-person classes before COVID-19 shut down the city, and Broadway. "I had been working on *Mrs. Doubtfire*. We were supposed to open in two days. And then ... on March 13th, everything stopped."

But Kayleigh didn't stop. "I was really fortunate. I have some savings, and my fiancé is still working. At the end of the summer I got a couple weeks of work organizing thousands of costume pieces at NBC's giant warehouse. But the pandemic gave me time to do a lot of other things. I helped organize donations and did shopping and drop-offs for nurses. Some of the temporary hospitals at the height of the pandemic didn't even have windows much less TVs, so I collected board games and books for patients in non-COVID units. I and other volunteers from the union ordered Girl Scout cookies for the nurses, and bought dozens of pairs of compression socks to help them get through their long shifts. I also worked with the Broadway Relief project building hospital gowns for patients."

And Kayleigh took time to enroll in the Fall 2020 virtual semester at SLU. "I'm taking three courses." She rolled her eyes. "What *was* I thinking?" She went on, "But seriously, these classes are changing my life. Josh Freeman—his labor history class blew my mind, it totally changed my understanding of how the labor movement was created—and he has an amazing way of stating a thesis and getting students to understand it from different perspectives. I'm also taking arbitration with Ellen Dichner, and I am so in awe of her that I started working on my final paper in the middle of the semester. And then there's my "Labor in Arts and Entertainment" class that I'm taking with nine other Local One members, people from the Writers Guild and more. It's an amazing amalgamation of entertainment people, and it's fascinating to hear their perspectives, to learn how regulations from the Taft Hartley Act impact different locals."

What does she plan to do with her degree? No surprise—Kayleigh has that all figured out. "My union's next election is in spring 2022 and I'm going to run for Trustee. I want to make sure that women are always in the room, and that's hard because women are only 5% of Local One's membership. I want to be a leader in my union, but if that doesn't work out, I'd love to be a special rep for the International. I'd like to represent members of color and members of the Queer Community in my union, and spend my life breaking down barriers and structural racism, building new systems to replace the ones that are broken."

What advice does Kayleigh have for members of her union and other workers considering going back to school? "I one-hundred-percent believe that education is power. The people who lack power have the least amount of resources to further their education and try to even out that power discrepancy. To them I say, SLU is *so* supportive. They will make it work for you. I apply every semester for the tuition assistance grant—it is *amazing* that I can get financial aid directly from the School."

For the first time, Kayleigh paused and tears started to well. "That kind of support is so important in these times. Especially as people in my union and all over the city really start to struggle. Homelessness and food insecurity are becoming a reality for more and more people. Trustee Macdonald and my Local are starting a food pantry for our union members, and we're trying to get help and supplies for those

who are having trouble with basic necessities. We are so fortunate to have resources, like the Actors Fund. That is an incredible organization that has pulled so many people through dark times, including me. I think that's why I have such a passion for connecting with people and for giving back. The need is so great, especially now."

I asked Kayleigh if she thought Broadway would come back, and she had a ready reply. "I'm not afraid for Broadway," she said. "One of my mentors with the IA told me, 'Broadway survived the Depression, it survived AIDS, and it will get through COVID.' You know, when things start to come back to normal, people are going to be desperate for entertainment. So yes, Broadway will be back. I don't know if it will come back exactly as it was. But maybe—maybe there are things that will change for the better. So instead of focusing on what we fear we've lost, maybe we should focus on what we might gain."

She added, "I'm not a half-glass-full person, but I am a problem-solver." Kayleigh grinned. "You have to be when you're a props person—there's no budget and no time. I love looking at something and figuring out how to make it work. *We can* make it work, we can bring Broadway back. I really think we'll come out stronger on the other side of this."



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