

"Wicked," winged monkeys and a decade well spent for Macomb native

Dancer celebrates 10 years with Broadway hit show

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Mary Kate Morrissey (left) and Ginna Claire Mason as Elphaba and Galinda, the witches of Oz.

Ryan Patrick Farrell has been part of "Wicked" for quite a spell.

And the Macomb Township native wouldn't have it any other way.

Farrell certainly has other credits in the theater world, including the national tour of "Cats" and the "Radio City Christmas Spectacular." But on June 24 the Dakota High School alumnus logged his 10-year anniversary as part of "Wicked," the "Wizard of Oz" spin-off, having joined the resident production of the musical in Chicago.

"Wicked" is "The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz" — good witch Galinda and wicked witch Elphaba.

Farrell didn't get a golden wand or anything for hitting that longevity mark, but Farrell says by phone that "more than anything else I feel insanely accomplished."

"Not many people are able to say they've done the same Broadway show for 10 years. Never in my life had I thought I'd still be doing 'Wicked.' I'm living the dream. It feels good."

Farrell, 36, is also happy that "Wicked" is giving him a chance to come home for an extended stretch during its upcoming Detroit Opera House run.

"To be able to be back for an entire month will be so nice," says Farrell, who now resides in Los Angeles. "How often do I get to come home like that? I'm a Michigan boy at heart, so I'm excited to visit family and friends and enjoy the Michigan summer."



GINNA CLAIRE MASON AS GLINDA AND THE NORTH AMERICAN TOURING COMPANY OF "WICKED."
JOAN MARCUS

Farrell's theater dream started when he was young and his mother enrolled him in the Mary Skiba School of Dance in Clinton Township.

"From there it was kind of nonstop," says Farrell, whose role in the "Wicked" ensemble includes portraying one of Oz's iconic flying monkeys. "That's all I really remember growing up, always dancing. It's always been a part of my life. I just developed this passion for dancing and knew early on it was something I could make money doing and making a career out of."

Farrell continued his education and performing throughout his youth, singing as well as dancing. After graduating from high school he got a job entertaining on the Princess Cruises line, then moved to New York to audition for the Radio City touring show. "Cats" gave him an opportunity to perform back in the Detroit area during the mid-'00s, before he settled into "Wicked."

Farrell says the long tenure in "Wicked" allowed him to grow as a performer, and at this point he feels like part of the foundation of the show, which won three Tony Awards and seven Drama Desk Awards and is one of only three Broadway shows to surpass \$1 billion in ticket sales. It's being adapted into a movie by director Stephen Daldry and creators Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman.

"The ensemble ... is kind of the backbone of the show," Farrell notes. "We really build this world around these two witches because we don't have many elaborate sets and props. It's us in a costume parade making this whole green world come to life around these two girls."

Farrell has also watched the show's pro-acceptance, anti-bullying themes become more potent and resonant as the years went by.

"Now I really, really appreciate the really positive message that the show sends, especially to younger kids," Farrell explains. "That's really important, especially in the climate going on in the country today, to let these kids know that ... we're all different and that's OK, and it's a good thing. I think everybody should be told that at some point."

"We forget that as a society we're all different and all important and we all have something special inside us to give back and bring forward. So 'Wicked' has that great message, and sometimes I feel like I relearn that myself over and over and over again, just being part of the show."

Despite his devotion to "Wicked," however, Farrell isn't sure just how much longer the show will go on for him. The son of a respiratory therapist and retired phlebotomist, he's also pursuing a nursing degree, which Farrell calls "another dream I've always had" and which may well lead him off the theater boards at some point.

"This crazy, wild dream with 'Wicked' and 'performing and dancing has come through, and I love it, but eventually it might be time for the next phase," he says. "This living the dream has shown me that anything is possible, so I'll probably be joining the family in the medical jamboree, eventually — and hopefully I'll love that just as much."

- If you go: "Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz" runs Aug. 8-Sept. 2 at the Detroit Opera House, 1528 Broadway St. Tickets start at \$43. Call 313-961-3500 or visit broadwayindetroit.com. Two-and-a-half hours prior to each performance, people can submit their names at the box office for a lottery to be drawn for a limited number of orchestra seats at \$25 each, cash only, limit of two tickets per person. Entrants must have valid photo ID.