



StarKid: From 'A Very Potter Musical' to Apocalyptour



CHRIS DZOMBAK

StarKid (from left) includes Joey Richter, Joe Walker, Brian Holden, Jaime Lyn Beatty, Dylan Saunders, Lauren Lopez, and Brian Rosenthal on the Apocalyptour.

By **John Vitti** | GLOBE STAFF JUNE 07, 2012

In the spring of 2009, four performances of an original work were staged by a group of friends in the Basement Arts theater at the University of Michigan. Those actors, writers, and musicians had a hit on their hands and

went on to form StarKid, staging four more Internet-only original musical parodies.

Three years later, that show, “A Very Potter Musical,” recorded at Basement Arts, has played on YouTube nearly 9 million times.

And in total, Starkid’s work — traditional musical theater performed in front of a live audience only often enough to capture it on video in a three-camera sitcom setting — has been seen online a staggering 125 million times. Its cast recording charted on Billboard.

Three years later, Darren Criss, who played Harry Potter in “AVPM” and its sequel long before he got the role of Blaine on “Glee,” is sitting in his car in the driveway outside his Los Angeles home. He is trying to explain how a theater troupe without its own theater is on a 21-city concert tour — including a stop Saturday at Boston’s House of Blues — even though the performers are actors by trade and not singers.

“I don’t envy your job trying to sum up what StarKid is,” Criss said. “We’ve had enough trouble trying to do that ourselves — and we’re in it.”

“There is no model like us. We’re not an amazing new thing, as much as we are an accidental surprise for ourselves. We never planned on any of this. It’s all very accidental and quite organic.”



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Brian Rosenthal and Joe Walker performing on the tour’s opening night in Chicago.

Joe Walker has a similar take. Walker played Lord Voldemort in “AVPM” and Batman in the most recent show, “Holy Musical B@man!” He’s on one of the two StarKid tour buses headed across the country.

Walker grew up in Cambridge, attending the Atrium School in Watertown, Fessenden in Newton, and Buckingham, Browne, & Nichols in Cambridge, before enrolling in Michigan’s theater program.

Working with almost all Midwesterners, he is excited about the upcoming Boston stop. “It’s always nice to have people come to where I’m from,” he said, “because you can sort of point around and say, ‘This is maybe kind of why I am the way I am.’ I say, ‘Look, everyone drives like this here.’ ”

Three years ago, Walker and Criss and others were in their senior year and “Potter” was their final show. Each and every StarKid member says being in it, working on it with friends they had worked with for years, was the most fun they ever had. They decided to videotape the show as a souvenir.

The Potter show was put together, Criss remembers, “in maybe three weeks, and I wrote most of the songs the week of.”

Matt Lang, “Potter” director, didn’t want to burn 30 DVDs, says Walker, so he put it on YouTube. “And then suddenly, bam, 200,000 views in a day, and you go, ‘Oh wow, people like this.’ ”

There had been shows before “Potter.” Lang, his brother Nick, Brian Holden, and Criss had staged “The Hobbit,” “The Lord of the Rings,” and “Jurassic Park,” said Criss. But those shows were never taped.

“People always say, ‘Darren, good move with the first musical being a Potter video and targeting an already large fan base on a new medium like YouTube. Smart move,’ ” Criss says. “And I’m like, ‘I’m not that smart!’ ”

Never in a million years would I have strategized that bizarre plan.”

Criss had moved to Los Angeles after graduation, as had Holden and the Lang brothers. As the Potter video became huge, the friends looked around, deciding what to do next.

They decided to form StarKid. Since the players — now graduated — were spread over the country, Chicago was chosen as the company’s home base mostly because of its central location. Troupe members Lauren Lopez and Julia Albain, for example, had moved to New York. But they kept coming back for StarKid projects, such as “The Very Potter Sequel,” and by the fall of 2010 they were moving to Chicago.

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