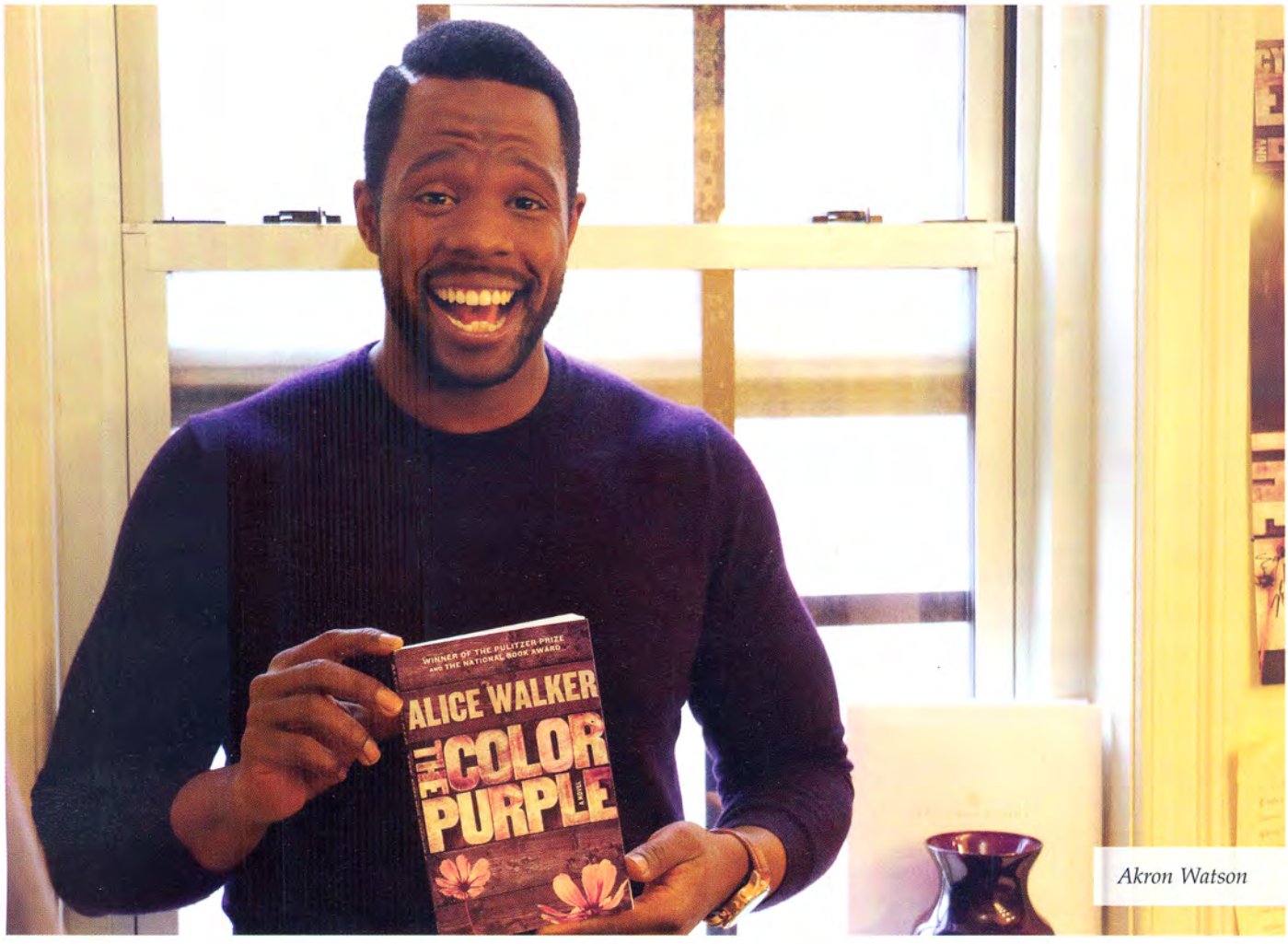


Akron Watson

Triumphant Theatre Trifecta

by Heather DARROW

Collin Alumni inducted into Hall of Fame

The aptly named Living Legends conference room was full of anticipation. Red-faced theatre students walked back to their seats, certificates in hand, flushed with the after effect of applause and public acknowledgement of a job well done. Finally, the time arrived for a trifecta of academic immortalization. Cory Boulieris, James Chandler and Akron Watson were named to Collin College's theatre Hall of Fame. The trio offered their aspiring protégés inspirational comments, flecked with hard-won words of wisdom.

A lot can happen in a year

According to Watson's mother, Theresa, her son gave himself one year to make it in New York. Even when this young actor lost his father, he pressed on, and today he is performing in the 2016 Tony-nominated, Broadway musical *The Color Purple.*

The year has been filled with extensive hours of arduous work, rich adventures and spikes of brushes with the rich and famous. As an

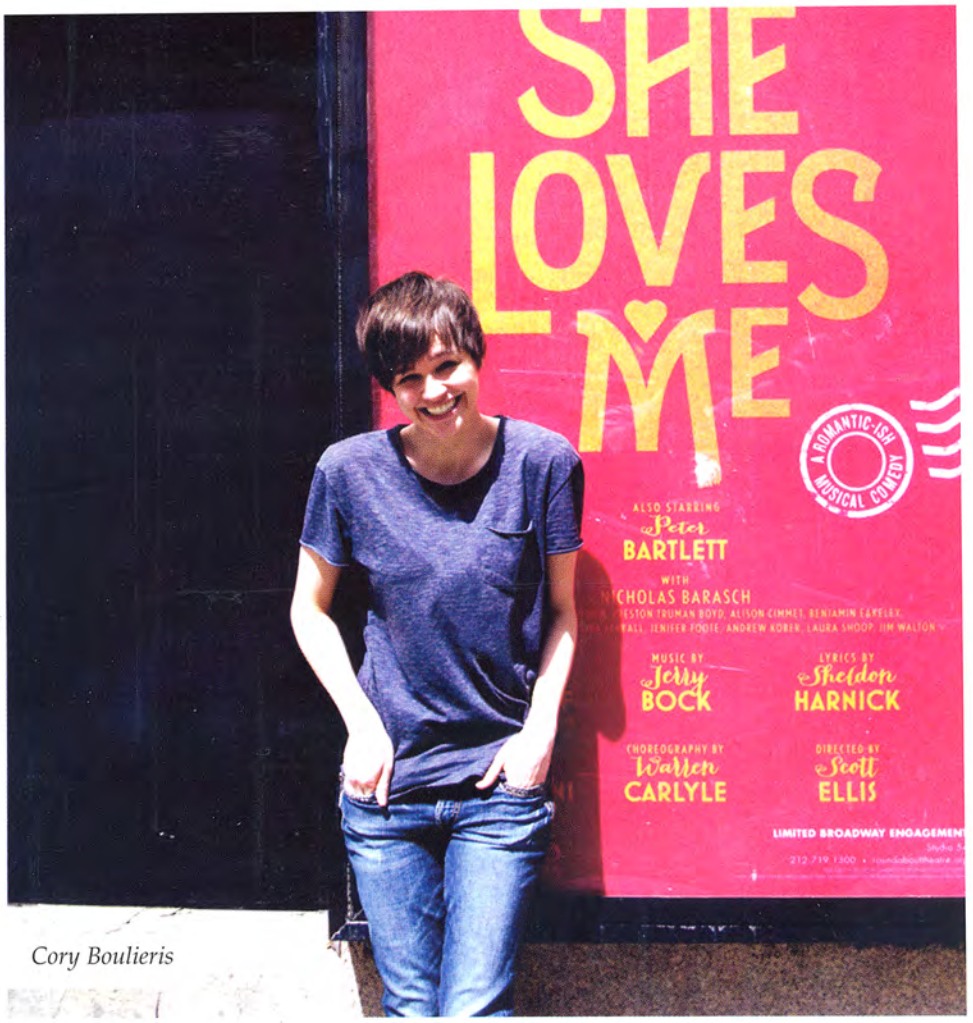
ensemble member, Watson sings and dances with Jennifer Hudson on a daily basis. He revels in the memory of the day when Oprah, a producer of the show, sang with the actors and thanked them for bringing the production to life. Spike Lee signed his shoe, and Steven Spielberg, who directed the movie with the same moniker as the musical, complimented the cast.

"I want to thank Collin College professors Shannon Kearns Simmons, Gail Cronauer and Brad Baker for teaching me. I walked into a program where people were dedicated to doing the work, and that was highly influential. For me, doing the work has made all the difference. I'm still working; it's still working," Watson said.

Managing life's stages

Sub-assistant stage manager for the 2016 Tony-nominated, Broadway hit *She Loves Me*, Boulieris also recently worked as the script production assistant for the Gloria Estefan musical *On Your Feet*.

According to her Collin College professors, Boulieris worked in every



Cory Boulieris

aspect of the department, from the box office to the Black Box Theatre.

"I must first thank my parents. I said, 'I want to do theater,' and they didn't laugh at me. They said, 'Let's make this happen for you.'"

Boulieris' favorite quote is "I am a part of all that I have met," from *Ulysses* by Sir Alfred Lord Tennyson.

"I have consistently found this statement to be true. My time at Collin had such a great impact on shaping me as a person and artist. I am very grateful. To be inducted into the Hall of Fame and placed into the same category/level of recognition as those who have come before me is a real honor."

Images of Boulieris and the other two newly inducted members of the Hall of Fame will grace the theatre hallway. Like the 40 who were inducted before them, these fresh faces will be seen by those who aspire to follow in their footsteps.

A humble Boulieris proffers that while Collin College helped shape her ideals, the most important advice she can offer is to simply be yourself.

"Be a well-rounded human being. Do anything that makes you interesting. Be the person that, after people have worked with you for 80 hours, they still want to go out with you. You are the only you that will ever be you, so own that."



James Chandler

Give it the old college try

The fact that he was afraid of heights did not stop Chandler from donning a tuxedo and descending from the top of the John Anthony Theatre. A well-known, local, professional actor, director, teacher, costumer and improvisational performer, Chandler is currently performing in *Spamalot* at the Casa Mañana Theater in Fort Worth.

Chandler shares Watson's work ethic and concurs that Collin College was instrumental in instilling a relentless drive into his daily endeavors.

"Never stop working and learning—that I definitely got from Collin. With a phenomenal theatre program, there is an amazing caliber of work here. It was never a question of whether or not to attend Collin. The artistry you learn here is amazing," Chandler said.

Chandler worked on *The Musical Adventure of Flat Stanley* and *Avenue Q* with director Michael Serrecchia, who played Frank in the original cast of *A Chorus Line*. In New York, he performed in *Heaven Can Wait* and *The Road to Ruin*, two new shows directed by Patricia Birch, choreographer of *Grease*.

Chandler advises people to trust in themselves and pursue their passions. "It may be scary, but without risk there is no reward. Don't short change yourself. You may have to work for those opportunities, but they are out there if you want them," he said with conviction.

Chandler says he met Boulieris while attending Collin College. She was a stage manager in one of the shows in which he performed. He was not at all surprised about her success on Broadway. ❖

Heather Darrow is a public relations writer at Collin College.