



OUTSIDE THE BOX, INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

RENAISSANCE MAN ALEX LEE AND GREY'S ANATOMY ACTOR ANTHONY HILL REMIND US TO BREAK OUT OF THE BOX AND CHASE OUR DREAMS

When 15-year-old Alex Lee describes himself as “the coolest guy other than Cristiano Ronaldo to ever walk the earth,” *Grey’s Anatomy* actor Anthony Hill wholeheartedly disagrees.

“Alex is cooler than Cristiano, he’s the coolest dude of all time,” he beams, “and it’s effortless. As soon as I met him, I realized I had no chance of out-cooling him.”

Though Alex is used to the spotlight as a model, singer, keynote speaker and comedian, he appreciated Anthony’s positivity and thoughtfulness during their *Be Beautiful Be Yourself Fashion Show* photoshoot.

“I really appreciated how he kept asking me

questions to make me feel more comfortable,” Alex says, “especially because the environment was so new.”

That evening was the first time these exceptional young men met each other and hit the runway with a standing ovation from over 1,300 people. Anthony rocked it with the ever-charming model Sara Wilson, and Alex wowed the audience along side model, actress and Down syndrome advocate Amanda Booth.



“I didn’t expect to be so inspired,” Anthony reflects, “it was really special to witness so many incredible people being so authentic, so confident. I legitimately left the fashion show feeling liberated to just be myself and proud of who I am.”

Alex agreed, “I definitely felt the excitement walking with Amanda and picked up some new ideas from her walk as I work on my professional model walk,” he says, “it was so fancy and I felt like a real model.”

COMEDY—IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR!

While the Fashion Show was Alex's first time on a runway, he's no stranger to show business.

"My biggest accomplishment was to have my big ol' face on a Toys R Us coupon," Alex says with a sarcastic smile, "It was such a flex to say that everybody's \$10 coupon has a really fire image of me barbequing plastic barbeque on my plastic grill."

He's an experienced keynote speaker, model and singer, but his favorite art form is comedy. Not a field that many people with Down syndrome enter. Gratefully, Alex shares his comedic gift with his hilarious sister and partner in crime, Isabelle. He fondly remembers their many hours spent making videos and bringing their silly ideas to life.



"But she betrayed me and is away at college now," Alex gripes, "we FaceTime a lot so we're still constantly plotting things."

One of the duo's greatest hits was a current event's show called "*The Fly Guy*," which played in their school's morning announcements. Isabelle wrote, directed, filmed and edited the program while Alex served as on-camera talent. A fan-favorite episode featured Alex as a groundhog auditioning to become an official Groundhog's Day shadow-spotter.

ANTHONY ON THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Coincidentally, Anthony's sister was also a major player in his creative journey. While his interest in acting was

long-standing, she was the one who suggested he finally give it a try after his promising football career was seemingly cut short. His talent and hard work on Kansas City's Shawnee Mission South High School football team had earned the attention of college scouts, but the courtships abruptly ended in the wake of an injury.

"To be honest it was a very, very difficult time," Anthony admits, "It was a wakeup call that college athletics is a business, and athletes in the NCAA are just numbers. Tough lesson to learn at 17."

But at 36 years old, Anthony says this catastrophic change of plans was the best thing that could have happened to him. He was forced out of his "athlete" box, whether he liked it or not.

"I discovered the value of not being afraid to try new things, and that it's okay to do multiple things," He recalls, "Acting was one of those new things I chose to dive into, and I've never looked back."

Anthony worked hard to rehabilitate his injury in time for his freshman season at Coffeyville Community College, where he studied theater and played football for one year before transferring to Oklahoma State University (OSU) with an exciting scholarship. While he did join their football team,



that wasn't what earned him the discount OSU wanted him in their theater program. In an ambitious feat, Anthony went on to minor in theater and letter in football

as a walk-on player. Keeping up with both theater and athletics proved to be a tall order, but Anthony had learned his lesson about forsaking other passions to lean completely into one. He loved them both too much to box himself in.



“I love the empathy that acting elicits in me as a performer and in audiences as viewers,” Anthony says, “Since the beginning of time, we have used stories in our respective societies to help make sense of the world around us. I like the idea of being part of that in some way.”

Anthony’s unique path led him to join an artistic profession later in the game than most of his peers. Steeped in vulnerability, he could have equated “different” with “impossible.” Instead, he chose to employ the skills he’d honed along the way.

“I started off by utilizing my strengths which (being a former collegiate football player) was specifically



auditioning for football commercials...”

Anthony explains. “I learned about on-set etiquette, terminology and technicalities on those jobs early on. Huge blessings.”

ALEX’S EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

Alex’s path to the spotlight, however, more closely resembles that of common success stories. Unlike Anthony, Alex enjoyed an early introduction to the performing arts thanks to his mom’s photography and dad’s acting and directing background. Opera was one of his first loves, thanks to his mom’s influence, and he can sing in Italian in addition to speaking Korean and English at home. Amadeus is his middle name – seriously, it is! His artwork has been shown at a CreatAbility group show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He’s also traveled the country delivering speeches, including a closing keynote at the United Nations’s World Down Syndrome Day Conference in NYC.

Alex’s favorite part of performing is, of course, the standing ovations. “The very first presentation had about 20 people, but the next one was 600

people, then 1000 and my sister and I were invited as keynote speakers all over the country.” Alex explains. “Excuse my nerdiness, but in math, that’s almost like exponential growth!”

While Alex’s path to the spotlight was remarkably smooth, he did get put into a box early on at school, especially around math. When Alex was born, his parents were told his ability to learn new math concepts would be capped at age seven. His initial difficulty in elementary school math only seemed to bolster this absurd prediction.



“My entire elementary school career was practically just drilling adding and subtracting single digit numbers over and over again,” Alex remembers, “because everyone thought I couldn’t move on unless I magically figured out adding and subtracting in my head.”



His parents could have taken this as the doctor’s prophecy coming true. Good thing they didn’t.

Alex’s mom made a deal with the school to keep him on the same track as his typical peers while supplementing with additional independent work. Alex’s teacher and paraprofessional eventually took a chance and let him move onto more advanced math and use a calculator for those pesky single-digit problems. Before he knew it, Alex was soaring through typical 5th grade math, taking unmodified quizzes and totally acing them! It turned out he had a knack for remembering formulas and working through complicated problems.

“If my teacher hadn’t believed in me, I would still be trying to figure out how to add $3+4$ in my head and I would have no idea that I could be doing all kinds of complicated calculations in 10th grade algebra.”

Contrary to the doctor’s predictions, Alex went on to earn his place in the Junior National Honor Society in middle school then the National Honor Society in 9th grade. He’s currently crushing typical algebra and can’t wait for geometry next year.

DREAMS ARE WORTH THE WORK

Both young men have found success through roads less traveled and refused to stay in a box that others put them in. Anthony’s led to what many actors consider a dream job – a regular role on a beloved, established television show.

“Winston on Greys is the longest I’ve played a character, and the idea of character growth, and change over years is a fun idea,” Anthony says, “I also find the challenges of the medical field pretty fulfilling.”

As for Alex, most people twice his age would feel immensely proud to accomplish just one of his feats. He would love to give acting a try, and when he does, he’ll be armed with his friend Anthony’s words of wisdom:



“My advice for budding superstars like Alex is to be persistent AND consistent,” Anthony offers, “Don’t let the words “I can’t” be in your vocabulary. If you get knocked down, jump right back up. If you fall down five times, get up six times. And by consistency, I just mean try your very best every time you attempt something.”

With so many talents and interests, there’s no telling what path Alex’s career will take next. One thing’s for certain: that path will be uniquely, perfectly his.