

# Adam Lambert returns to musical theater roots

Adam meets and inspires 200 young performers in Poway

By Pat Launer, SDNN

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He walked in when he was eight years old, a strawberry blond, freckle-faced kid. He left at 17 looking pretty much the same. But in between, Adam Lambert developed into a charismatic triple-threat, which in musical theater terms means he could sing, act and dance extremely well.



Adam Lambert in Poway. (Photo by Rhonda Kramer)

In case you've been living under a rock, here's the big scoop: the "American Idol" finalist who grew up in San Diego returned for his "Hometown Day" last Friday. During his tightly scheduled sojourn, he made a special visit to [MET2](#), the Metropolitan Educational Theatre where he cut his singing/acting/dancing teeth and developed his performing skills. At the Poway Center for the Performing Arts, he met with about 200 child performers, and the 45-minute visit turned into 90 minutes.

"He was terrific with the kids," says Alison Bretches, artistic director of MET2, which runs four youth theater companies in Southern California (the others are in Torrance, West Covina and the San Fernando Valley). "The kids performed for him (they're about to open a huge production of "Seussical, the Musical," running at the Poway Center May 23-34), and he critiqued them, giving tips on acting and physicality."

Adam suggested that the young performing wannabes "let the audience see your thought processes. Let your emotions show on your face. Don't be over the top; let your physical actions come organically." He told the adolescent actor playing The Cat in the Hat, "You just gave 150 percent. That's what you *all* need to do all the time. I learned that here."

The questions from the awestruck aspiring performers ranged from "Who's your favorite judge?" to "What's your favorite candy?" (Answer: Reese's.) A five-year-old plaintively queried, "How did you get so good?"

Adam had a question of his own: "How many of you feel a little different because you're creative

and in the arts? Well, just let it go. Say 'I'm gonna be okay as a creative/artistic person and there's nothing wrong with that.' If you ever feel different, hold your head up high. We're artists. We're all crazy. And that's good-crazy!"

"That was the most important thing he said to them," says Bretches. "He was so inspiring. And so humble. The kids were screaming, waving banners and posters and balloons. He seemed almost embarrassed by it all. It was very sweet of him to come here. He requested the visit.

"He told the kids some important things he'd learned in his years at MET2, including a healthy sense of competition," recalls Bretches, adding that Adam also said: "When you go out into the world, you have to put your claws away." He believes his training at MET2 gave him the skills, enabled him to keep going, and made him what he is today. He told them: "If you can do this, weather this training, the discipline, the focus, the life lessons, then you can be successful at anything you want to be."

If Adam's meteoric rise to "Idol" status has changed him, no one at MET2 noticed.

"I grew up with him, and we've stayed in touch over the years," says Bretches. "And he's pretty much the same as he was: hard-working, dedicated, very gracious. He had typical teenage attitudes when he was younger, but he was never over-the-top as a child performer. He was an energetic, talented ball of fire, who could sing and dance like nobody's business. And he was a great actor, too."

Bretches, who at 31 is four years older than Adam, was the choreographer who taught him the dance moves for his roles, and also performed with him.

"He was an excellent dancer, really nimble and quick to catch on. He remembered the time we were doing a number together and he dropped me on my head. We just had a good laugh over that."

Bretches and her mother, Kathie Bretches Urban, the executive producer of MET2, whose husband Alex Urban founded the youth theater company 30 years ago, presented a plaque to Adam, which read: "The young people of MET2 applaud Adam Lambert for inspiring us to achieve our dreams and for giving us a voice. Congratulations on your 'American Idol' success."

During his time at MET2, Adam played the title role in "Peter Pan," Huck Finn in "Big River," Linus in "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown" and the stratosphere-reaching Russian Tenor in "Fiddler on the Roof." In "The Secret Garden," he played both the magical young Dickon and the

hunchbacked, tormented uncle, Archie. In fact, founding artistic director Alex Urban added the show to the company's repertoire because of Adam; he knew that the mega-talented 16-year-old could sing that difficult, vocally demanding role.

After Adam graduated from MET2 and Mt. Carmel High School in 2000, he went on to perform in the European tour of "Hair" and a musical version of "The Ten Commandments," opposite Val Kilmer, as well as understudying the role of Fiyero, the love interest, in the first national tour and the L.A. production of "Wicked." Now, Broadway casting directors are eyeing him for the lead in the upcoming Spider-Man musical, "[Turn Off the Dark](#)," which will feature music by U2's Bono and The Edge.

He's not the first MET2 alum to make it to Broadway, but he has by far the highest profile. After all, there were 64 million record-breaking votes cast in the latest round of the "American Idol" competition that brought Adam into the top-3 finals. Apparently, however, not all of those were individual votes.

Bretches admits that one MET2 family, using all their cell phones and home landline, actually called in 10,480 votes. And then they got to get up close and personal with the superstar. Well, the kids did; parents weren't invited to the private meeting with Adam.

"It was a glorious day for the kids," says Urban. "He showed them that they can aspire to be successes, too. When he was performing here, he always stood out. He was emblazed in my mind. I knew he'd be a success in the arts in some way. Performing was his heart, his soul, his passion. I think his musical theater background has helped to make him the incredible performer he is today."

*Pat Launer is the SDNN theater critic.*

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