

Q & A with Disney Star and Desert Stages Alumni, Landry Bender

Written by Ericah Whitmill

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Landry Bender knew when she was just five years old that she wanted to pursue a career in acting—and the dream was achieved by the age of 10. Starring in her first play at Desert Stages Theatre—as a flower in the musical “Peter Pan”—was the first step she encountered on her road to a successful career. At the age of 10, she made her break by starring in the movie “The Sitter,” alongside actor Jonah Hill. Since then, she starred in two Disney Channel shows, “Best Friends Whenever” and Disney XD’s “Crash and Bernstein.” She is currently working on the Netflix reboot show, “Fuller House,” where she just became a new addition to the third season.

After finishing a long and busy day on the set of “Fuller House,” Bender was able to talk to AFM about her excitement in coming back home to attend the [Star-Studded Sunday event](#) put on by her old community theatre, Desert Stages, as well as her life growing up in the industry and how it has shaped her into who she is today.

AFM: You’ve been in Hollywood since you were 10 years old. Now that you’re 17, how has it been so far growing up in the industry?

LB: It’s been really great. It’s interesting since it has kind of been all that I’ve known. [My teenage years have been] very interesting since it’s all been in this industry. It’s incredible, and I wouldn’t want it any other way, I’ve learned so much. I’ve definitely grown up in a very unique way, and I’ve known my entire life that I’ve wanted to do this. The fact that I’ve gotten the opportunity to do this has been really great.

AFM: How did you get interested in theater? Was it something you were always passionate about?

LB: Yes, absolutely! I did my first play at Desert Stages when I was five years old, and I had seen a play when the Broadway production of “Annie” was at Arizona State University in Tempe. My mom took me when I was five years old and I remember saying, ‘Mom, I have to do this!’ She responded, ‘What? You’re five years old, what are you talking about?’ Ever since then, I started at Desert Stages, and that’s where I found my love for it. It never really went away, it wasn’t just a phase. It was something that continued, and I’ve never stopped loving it, it’s amazing.

AFM: Do you remember your first play?

LB: Yes, my first play was “Peter Pan” and I played the role of a flower.

AFM: You’re coming back home to attend the Star-Studded Sunday event by Desert Stages Theater, the theater that gave you your start. How do you feel about that?

LB: I’m very excited! I used to visit all the time when I first moved but I haven’t been back in a while. It’s gonna be very cool to see “Cinderella”—which I was in when I was at the theatre—and all the kids perform. I’m going with two other actors, Asher Dov and Rachel Redleaf, who are friends of mine. It’s going to be incredible, especially the fact that it is so full circle and getting to talk to those kids and knowing that they have dreams of wanting to be actors and singers and overall performers. It’s really cool to be able to have that whole experience.

AFM: Do you have any advice to give any of the kids you plan on seeing at the Star-Studded Sunday event by Desert Stages?

LB: My advice is that first of all, the industry is full of so much rejection but I think it is also very important that if it’s something you really want to do, keep persevering, keep going, and don’t let that knock you down. It is also good to make sure that you’re in it for the right reasons. I think especially in the day of social media, there is such an urge to want to have a following or live in a big house—ha! Whatever your dreams are, I think the main roots for this business—because there is so much rejection and so many ‘nos’—is to really love the art of it because that’s what will keep you going and keep you focused.

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AFM: Being a Disney star is a dream for some people, and you got to star in not one Disney show, but two. What was it like being on the Disney set? Any favorite memories you want to share?

LB: I started when I was 12 and ended when I was 16 so there's so many good memories. We would be talking for hours long if I start talking about all of them. I think overall to experience that as growing up watching the network then being able to be a part of it is really special. And different things like being able to do the wand activity, where you're like 'you're watching Disney Channel' was super cool. Also, to have a camaraderie with the other kids because we're all so weird, and getting to be among a group of kids where we all understand each other is really cool. Overall, the experience, in general, was an amazing way (I'm still growing up) to grow up and I will forever remember it.

AFM: Being on that show during your teen years (12 to 16 years old), how do you think it shaped you into the girl you are today?

LB: I think it's an interesting way to grow up. The whole crew that you get up with and go to work with every day are all adults and then a few kids on the set. You really do become like family and, in some instances, I see them more than I see my actual family. I spend a lot of time with those people. They are people that are like father and mother figures to me and siblings in terms of the cast. To be able to grow up with those people and have so many amazing role models in my life is something that I will forever cherish. They are people that are still in my life which is very cool. Those people will forever be in my life and, if I get married someday, they'll probably be at my wedding which is the best, and I think it's just awesome.

AFM: Many were sad to hear "Best Friends Whenever" didn't get renewed for a third season. What's one powerful message from that show that's shaped you into who you are today?

LB: That show had so much girl power that was involved in it. The show was about two teenage best friends who I think were the definition of girl power. They had such an incredible sisterhood and bond, and I've had so many little girls who are friends come up to me and say how, 'we pretend we're you guys and we pretend to time travel, me and my best friend' and that's very cool to hear. [The two main characters in the show] were so strong and powerful and it showed little girls and boys that they can be exactly who they want.

AFM: Working with Disney must have been a dream come true. How was it working on the show "Fuller House"? Did you grow up watching "Full House"?

LB: Yes, today I was actually on set for the season three finale, and it's been really fun. I am a new addition to the third season that comes out late September, and I can't wait for everyone to see it. It has been really fun, but I was a little intimidated at first just because I did watch the old show and I don't know, it's one of those things where you grew up watching those people and now you're working with them, so it's a weird dynamic. But, the second I got to set, all of that went away, they were all so welcoming and incredible. I love being a part of it and they are all so awesome to work with.

AFM: That's super cool that you're going to be a new addition to the third season! You recently posted a picture on Instagram, of you and McKenna Grace (co-star for the Disney XD show "Crash and Bernstein") with the caption "Look who's working together again! #sistersforever." Could you tell us any details about that?

LB: We're working together again, and our characters don't interact with each other at all in this episode—which is a little disappointing—but she is amazing and is one of the most talented kids I know. I met her when she was five years old and now she's 11, which is insane, but after a few years, we're working together again and it's been great. We had lunch together today, and she's the best. She's amazing!

AFM: It's no secret that you love Audrey Hepburn and that you look up to her as your idol. What about her and her career inspires you?

LB: Well, first of all, I am a big fan of old movies, and I love studying the history of film. She is a star and the focal point in a lot of those movies such as "Breakfast at Tiffany's," "Charades" and "Sabrina" and she was an icon at that time. To be able to watch her and there was no one like her at that time and a lot of actresses at the time were gaining a lot from her which is something that is pretty cool. She's an icon, and I look up to her a lot. Personally, her fashion and everything about her is something I've always idolized and I've always looked up to her. I think she's amazing.

AFM: I know you've had a busy day, and I don't want to keep you for too long so I have one more question for you. On Instagram, you state how much you love "brunch and musicals." Any favorite brunch spots you're excited about going to while you're back home for the Star-Studded Sunday event?

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LB: Oh—my—gosh, I honestly don't know. My mom will probably be better answering this than I am. There are a ton! I honestly can't wait to probably try new places while I'm there. I don't know if I can think of any off the top of my head.

AFM: Yes, there are a ton of new and amazing brunch spots to try while you're in town, so no worries there.

Landry: I don't know what it is, but I really love brunch so any place that serves good pancakes will be good for me.

Be sure to catch Landry at the Star-Studded Sunday event in Scottsdale on Sept. 10 and for her appearance in the third season of the Netflix Series, "Fuller House," appearing Sept. 22!