

Stage, Screen Vet Relishes New Role at ART

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Hank Stratton [1] has had a career that many aspiring actors would envy. After being classically trained in London, he found success on Broadway and in Hollywood.

But Tucson is where Stratton, the new artistic director for the [Arizona Repertory Theatre](#) [2], finally feels like he is "firing on all cylinders." The 2019-20 season marks Stratton's first as artistic director for ART, a professional theater company run by the [School of Theatre, Film and Television](#) [3].

Acting wasn't Stratton's first choice for a career path. His original plan was to pursue a literature degree at Yale University. However, a high school drama teacher saw his ability and convinced him to audition for world-renowned theater schools. A combination of talent and timing took Stratton to one of the theater capitals of the world.

"I chose to go to the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art because I thought it was more cutting-edge," Stratton said. "I ended up derailing my lit degree at Yale and breaking my mother's heart, but the connection for me between literature and theater seemed very logical."

While Stratton's original plan did not include the stage, it didn't take long for him to discover his calling.

"I just didn't think there was money in acting. I didn't think you could actually make a living doing it," he said. "But then, all of a sudden, that stopped mattering, and that's when I knew that I had to be an actor. I wasn't thinking about money, I wasn't thinking about fame. When I was on stage, I was home."

Stratton left London in the late 1980s to pursue acting in the United States. He was able to land some television jobs as well as roles in plays and musical theater.

"I began to figure out that I could sing, and I didn't realize that was a superpower in this line of work," Stratton said. "It helped me stand out above everybody else with a jawline and a classical resume."

Stratton has compiled an impressive list of theater credits. He performed in "Hamlet" in Washington, D.C., with Tom Hulce, best known for playing Mozart in the movie "Amadeus." He was also in "The Man Who Came to Dinner" on Broadway with Tony Award-winning Nathan Lane. Stratton returned to England to perform in "Love's Labour's Lost" at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of the legendary playwright. His television credits include recurring roles in the series "[American Dreams](#) [4]" in 2004 and "[The Unit](#) [5]" from 2008-2009.

Despite the success, Stratton said he wasn't feeling complete, because he didn't like having to "ask permission to be creative and to create" through the audition process. A focus on

directing led him to opportunities at universities. After seeing Stratton's work, the University of Arizona asked him to be a guest director and, ultimately, to join the faculty, which he did in 2016.

"What I found about directing, which then led me into teaching, was how exciting it is to help young artists discover that they could do something that they didn't know they could do," Stratton said.

Stratton shares the ambition of College of Fine Arts Dean **Andy Schulz** ^[6] to make the University an arts destination. Stratton says major markets like New York, Los Angeles and London are not a fit for everyone, and Tucson can be a viable alternative for students. Stratton will be traveling overseas next month to cultivate study abroad opportunities for theater and film students in Paris and London.

Research is part of the job for faculty members. For a performing artist, Stratton says, that means continuing to act.

"Students like that I'm still working," Stratton said, "because this is the world they're trying to get into."

He isn't sure where he'll be seen next on stage and screen. In that regard, Stratton has returned to the approach he took as an actor in the 1980s.

"I'm just waiting for the phone to ring," he said.

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Links

[1] <https://tftv.arizona.edu/people/directory/hstratton/>

[2] <https://theatre.arizona.edu/>

[3] <https://tftv.arizona.edu/>

[4] <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0319930/>

[5] <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0460690/>

[6] <https://cfa.arizona.edu/profile/apschulz/>