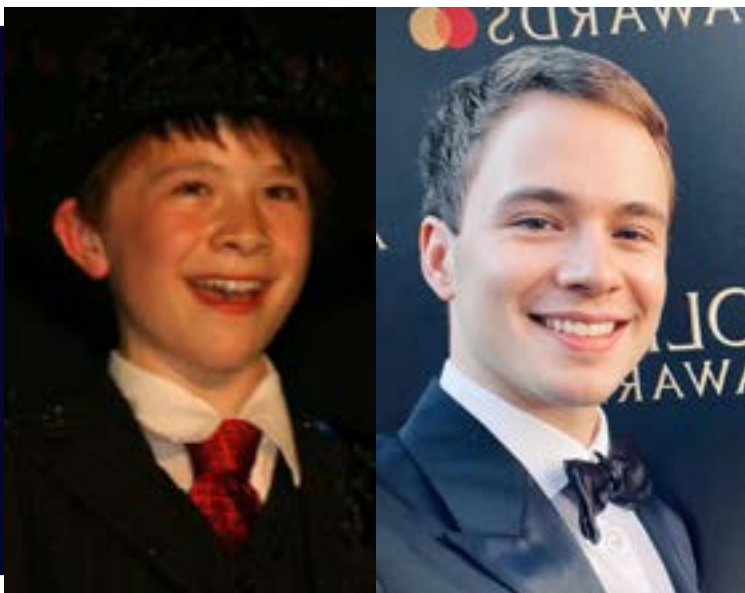




Thomas's Battersea

Rupert Henderson

Class of 2008

I was a pupil at Thomas's Battersea from Reception through to Year 8, leaving in 2008. I have such wonderful memories of my time at Thomas's, not least of all the brilliant teachers who nurtured me through those early stages of life.

When I think about how Thomas's influenced my life, I think first of the ethos of 'Be Kind'. It continues to surprise me how often this simple yet powerful principle seems to be absent from our culture. In a very tangible way, Thomas's ingrained empathy and respect for other people, and in life's challenging moments, it is a thought I often return to.

I also think of how Thomas's encouraged me to wholeheartedly pursue my passions. Today, as a theatre producer, I can see how my love of theatre was captured and celebrated from the very start in drama lessons with Mr Clarke, Miss Faye, and Miss Lacey. We were so lucky to put on such fully realised productions at Thomas's. In Year 7, I played Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain* - and we had real rain! I can still remember the sensation of singing and dancing under the sprinklers for the first

time: it may have been the Great Hall, but in my mind, I was at the London Palladium.

I went on to Westminster School, continuing to pursue my love of theatre both with school productions, and with the National Youth Theatre and National Youth Music Theatre. Whilst I enjoyed my academic studies, particularly History of Art, I was set on training as an actor. And after a year out - during which I returned to Thomas's Battersea in the guise of Teaching Assistant 'Mr. Rupl' - I was thrilled to gain a place on the acting course at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

I loved my three years at Guildhall, exploring voice, movement and all kinds of dramatic texts for nine hours a day - it was incredibly demanding, but a completely unique experience that taught me a lot about myself. In the final year, the focus turned to the industry - and I was very fortunate to join the cast of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* at the Palace Theatre in the West End.

The year I spent with *Harry Potter* was in fact just the start of the next phase of my journey with theatre. It was, and of course still is, an



enormous production, that required a huge number of talented people to deliver the show to a very excited audience each night. I quickly became fascinated by the wider process behind making this all happen, and whilst I was not running around on stage, I was as nosey as I could be about the work each of the different departments were doing. So I left that year with a new determination, to become a producer.

Eager to put on a show myself, I teamed up with a friend to throw together a production on the London fringe, which highlighted how much more I had to learn. I went on to work for Jonathan Church, former Artistic Director of Chichester Festival Theatre, whilst also producing independently, before Covid slammed the breaks on for everyone in the performing arts.

As theatre was emerging from the pandemic, I was thrilled to join the Donmar Warehouse, where I have been a producer for the last three years. The Donmar is an intimate 251 seat theatre in Covent Garden, which produces six productions a year, including new plays, revivals and musicals, and attracts world leading talent. As part of a very small producing team, we are constantly juggling the needs of a current production, whilst supporting rehearsals for the next one, and making plans for the season ahead.

I've worked on some brilliant productions: particular highlights include the UK premieres of *The Band's Visit* and *Next to Normal*, which has now moved to the West End this summer, and leading on our production of *Macbeth* starring David Tennant and Cush Jumbo, which will also be heading to the West End in the autumn. I've worked closely with incredible theatre artists - writers, directors, designers, actors, stage managers and production teams, but above all have spent every day engaged with making theatre happen in enormous detail, fully immersed in my passion.

Later this year, I will be leaving the Donmar to start a new independent producing endeavour under the banner of Henderson Theatrical Productions. I will be focusing on raising investment for commercial theatre productions, partnering with other producers, and developing new work for the stage. www.hendersontheatricalproductions.com.

I will always be grateful for my time at Thomas's. When I left, I remember saying thank you to Thomas's for giving me the very best start in life - and that is a sentiment I can still wholeheartedly agree with.