

## For Emily, school meant support, strong friendships

By Sharyn McCowen

SYDNEY performer and former Santa Sabina student Emily Potts is preparing for the bright lights of New York after being accepted into the musical theatre course at the New York Film Academy.

"They rang me very early one morning and said that I had been accepted," says Emily of the one-year course.

"It was very exciting. I was blown away by it."

Not only was Emily accepted into the school, she was also offered an \$8000 talent-based scholarship to help pay her tuition, and she has since received \$2000 from the Dame Joan Sutherland Fund.

Her audition in Sydney was one of many held across Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Asia and, of course, in America.

"I went to the Sydney auditions about three months ago," says Emily, who found out about the auditions quite late and had just a week to prepare.

"You had to perform a monologue and a couple of songs. They made me sing a fair few musical theatre numbers from contemporary and traditional pieces, because so many musicals now are now pop-based that they have to hear whether you can sing that style.

"I always get a little bit nervous, as you do, but good nerves. It always helps to be a bit nervous because it gives you energy."



A conversation with **Emily Potts**, product of Catholic schooling and aspiring Broadway star.

When the call came offering her a place, she was ecstatic, and relieved by the amount of information and assistance offered.

"They were really good with communication," she says.

"They rang me a couple of times to explain a few more things and see how I was going with my decision-making. They provided a lot of information about housing and so forth in New York."

With Emily unable to work in America while she completes the course, due to visa restrictions, she will spend the next few months

working and saving for her tuition and living expenses.

She has been advised to look for accommodation in Brooklyn or Queens, and hopes to find a roommate in her class.

On completing the course she will be given an opportunity to stay and work in America.

"You can obtain a nine-month practical visa, it's called an OPT [Optional Practical Training] visa, which you apply for at graduation and if you are successful you are allowed to get nine months to audition on Broadway, and fingers crossed you get a role!

"One person I know has gone to New York, and she is more danced-based. As she would say, it is very difficult to get jobs there; you're up against the best of the best.

"The good thing is that there are shows constantly being cast over there, which is so different to here.

"Although we've had some great shows coming here lately there are really only three or four professional musical theatre auditions in Sydney a year."

These factors weighed heavily on Emily's mind as she decides whether to accept.

"It's very hard to make the decision to move there because of the cost," she says.

"I'm hoping to save as much as I can and otherwise I'll probably have to take a loan but in this financial climate. I'm being very cautious.

"Saving money is so important and it's hard to make that decision, to put it in a course or save it for a house down the line, because I don't want to miss out on decisions like that as well.

"But it is such an important opportunity, it's very hard to say no to, and not many people get this chance."

Her aim is to make it "a time when I can step out from the course into a professional career".

"My goals for the course are to enhance my vocal and acting technique and further my dance skills so I would be at a professional level to audition on Broadway.

"It would be fantastic to create a career in New York."

Emily says her mother Moya had more than a small role in nurturing her love of theatre.

"My mum and I used to always watch the old Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals and Judy Garland and Gene Kelly movies, and we both still enjoy the classics," she says.



**CAREER MOVE:** Emily Potts ... thankful for the support of her parents and her Catholic education. (Below left) As Mary Magdalene in *Superstar*.

"I loved all that and I still do; I really have a passion for that golden age of Hollywood.

"Those sorts of musicals, with the love stories and the beautiful scores, really inspired me to continue my passion for singing and acting.

"When you sing them they are unlike any other songs, they are really powerful. I think that's the most inspiring thing about musicals, they always tell a story in the lyrics."

She is also grateful for the support of both her parents, who recognised her talent from a young age.

"They really have supported me, my whole life I've been interested in acting and singing and performance," Emily says.

"My family has always attended as many shows as we can; we've always gone to see what's on in Sydney, and when we've gone overseas we've seen lots of shows in London.

"Seeing modern shows as well like *Jersey Boys* and *Wicked*, they're very contemporary and they're fantastic.

"All through high school I was involved in musicals and they always supported that, but their idea was for me to get a degree before I tried to make a career out of it.

Emily has a Bachelor of Communications from Notre Dame University, where she studied journalism, film production and theatre, wrote several screenplays and made three short films.

"I'm dedicating this time to try-

ing to make a career, and see where it goes, and I've got a back-up if I need it."

The arts faculty of Santa Sabina College at Strathfield was also encouraging of her passion and talents.

"I did HSC drama and music, and they were really strong focuses for me in Year 12. I put a lot of time and effort into my performances, and I was really happy with my results.

"My school supported whatever choices suited you, because in the long run it's going to be your career."

Despite being the third girl in her family to attend the school, Emily admits to being "very daunted before I went there because it seemed like such a big school when I was 12 years old".

"But it was a fantastic time in my life and I have really strong friendships from that school that have carried on until now ... I'll probably send my kids there!

"I think that's a strength of the Catholic school system, that they place an emphasis on creating strong relationships with each other and having that nice environment to grow up in."

Emily is the youngest of four children. Her sister Sarah is an executive assistant with Austereo, and Allison is an intensive care nurse at North Shore Private Hospital and also has a passion for performing.

"They are both very in demand in their roles, both very different to what I do," she says.



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