

NEIGHBORHOODS

Father and son duo find admiration in each other

Larry and Joey Williams perform in 'The Secret Garden' this weekend

BY AMANDA ROBERGE

In a time where fathers and sons are struggling to find meaningful ways to connect, Larry and Joey Williams have cracked the code.

It involves one stage, 30 pages of script and countless hours together.

The father-son duo, who debuted last weekend in the Cornerstone Performing Arts Center's production of *The Secret Garden*, is gearing up for another run this weekend and then some much needed R&R.

"I'm ready for a break," Larry Williams says with a sincere smile. "But this has just absolutely been an amazing experience for us."

The Williams family itself is pretty amazing. With five kids ranging from 8-year old twins all the way up to two daughters out of the house and in college and the working world (Joey is the middle of 5), theirs is a house full of love and encouragement.

Larry's wife Connie, who currently home schools Joey and his twin siblings at the Leominster home in which they have lived for the past 6 years, has been a huge part of making Joey's dreams of life on the stage come true. Larry calls her a "trooper," but most moms know that the surest path to true joy is helping your kids find it.

"He really likes [acting] and the thing is - he's really good at it," she beams.

For a child who, on the outside, appears reserved and relatively quiet, Connie maintains that he takes his role at the theatre very seriously and rises to whatever challenge he meets.

"It's actually been kind of a shock because he's very shy," she said, "but he is completely different onstage."



Larry and Joey Williams are pictured in 'The Secret Garden' last weekend.
PHOTO / CHARLES STERNAIMOLO

"He becomes the character," adds Larry, with a look of admiration for his son. Larry himself is no stranger to the stage, but his role in *The Secret Garden* came somewhat unexpectedly.

While he had done some acting before going on to a career in the United States Air Force, his intention when bringing his son to audition at CPAC was simply to offer support. And currently, with a time-consuming career as Director of Facility Services at Heywood Hospital, he was not exactly in search of something that would find him working a second shift.

"Our rehearsals are basically Monday through Friday, 6 to 10 p.m.," he said. "It's a long day."

When Joey was cast, Larry was thrown - albeit willingly - into the spotlight. At some point during the process, it became clear that the theatre group was having trouble finding enough men to fill the roles. "I would never have thought of auditioning for this," he said. "It wasn't supposed to be for me, it was something we were doing for Joey."

In the end, it seems to be something the whole family - but particularly Larry and his son - has been completely invested in. From practicing lines with Connie to having his older sister return from UMASS for the

weekend to see her brother perform, *The Secret Garden* has been an experience the Williams family has shared.

The Secret Garden will be onstage this weekend, May 8, at 7 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, May 9 and 10, at 2 p.m. at Phillips Hall, First Parish Church, 923 Main St., Fitchburg. Tickets are \$18 for adults and \$15 for students and seniors. For more information or to order tickets online, visit www.cpacfitchburg.org.

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