

Hong Kong News

The wind in his sails

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Nikhil Sridhar, 16, stars as Mr Toad in a stage adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's beloved children's story *The Wind in the Willows*.

A teen doesn't let social expectations dampen his love of drama

By Barry C Chung

Parents often demand that their children take up such practical areas of study as business, science or engineering. Sadly, such practicality may well drain the creative juices of young people, who fear being an artist means a tough future.

Rather than devote themselves to their aspirations, they simply settle on areas of study that set them on a course to the boring world of better job prospects.

But, in some cases, it can work the other way around as well. Take the example of 16-year-old Nikhil Sridhar, a gifted student from the Delia School of Canada.

Born in Bangalore, India, Nikhil moved to Hong Kong when he was three. It was at Delia that he discovered drama. In a short time, he went from simply enjoying the arts to actively participating in them.

That had a marked effect on the soft-spoken student.

"I'm interested in a lot of subjects," Nikhil notes. "But I'm most interested in drama. I was actually not very confident before I began doing it.

"The drama club in Grade Seven was my first exposure to it. Since then I've built up my confidence and I'm very confident now in whatever I do."

Nikhil's long list of academic achievements would make any parent proud. Yet it's his accomplishments in the world of drama that are starting to turn heads. He writes, produces, directs and stars in plays at school. And now he's about to make his debut in a non-school-based play.

Nikhil will be starring as Mr Toad in Faust International Youth Theatre's production of the classic children's story *The Wind in the Willows*.

"It's a fun play. I recommend it to anyone of any age," says Nikhil, a Grade 11 student at Delia. "The amazing thing about it is that there are little children - as little as seven - and it's giving them so much exposure at this young age. I kind of envy them." He smiles.

"But, seriously, it's amazing that Faust can handle people from such a [broad] age range," he adds.

After he graduates from Delia, Nikhil has his mind set on pursuing higher

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education studies in drama. He lists several schools in New York as his preferred destinations.

Topping his list is the famous Juilliard School, a performing arts conservatory whose alumni include such actors as Jessica Chastain, Kevin Spacey, and Robin Williams.

And importantly, he has his parents' full support. "I think they realise, just as I do, that sometimes you need to follow what's in here and not what people tell you," he explains, pointing at his heart.

Meanwhile, he will continue doing another thing close to his heart: charity work. "I like to help people help themselves," he says. Nikhil has been a volunteer at Community Chest, the YMCA, Stride for a Cure, Habitat for Humanity and most recently the Red Cross, during a drive to help victims of Japan's deadly tsunami.

Nikhil says charity work has brought out the best in him and has also helped him find another outlet for his creative urges. But, for the time being, it's all about drama for him.

"I could actually get into anything - business or science - if I chose to pursue them as a career," he says.

"I'd be making more money. But the reason I'm choosing acting is that it has boosted my confidence. It's been a passion and a creative outlet for me - even though it can be hard work."

***The Wind in the Willows* runs from tomorrow until Sunday at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts**

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