

# Q&A with Jorrel Javier from “Percy Jackson” musical

by Connor Caserio and Hannah Sussman

“The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical” is a 2017 musical with book by Joe Tracz and music by Rob Rokicki. Based on Rick Riordan’s 2005 novel by the same name, the musical follows Percy Jackson a young demigod on his quest to return Zeus’ missing lightning bolt.

The updated show can be seen in Chicago from Jan. 8-13 at the Oriental Theater. Jorrel Javier who is playing Grover/Mr. D in the show gave us an inside look at the upcoming show.

**Q: What are your past experiences in theater? How does this role compare?**

**A:** I did theatre and speech and debate all through high school. After doing that, I went to Texas State and got my BSA in musical theatre. I graduated in May of this year and moved to New York three months ago and my agent got me the audition for this show.

**Q: How have you prepared for your role?**

**A:** I’ve been reading the Percy Jackson series since I was in 6th grade. So a lot of the preparation came innately because I was already very familiar with the world of the show. But, aside from knowing the world, I also had to figure out how the character lived in my body because I play two



Actor, singer and dancer Jorrel Javier will open “Percy Jackson” at the Chicago Oriental Theater | Jorrel Javier

characters: Grover and Mr D. I had to figure out how Mr D moved and how that was different from the way Grover moved. Depending on which character I am currently playing, this informs the way I speak to Percy and how I move around the stage.

**Q: How does the script compare with the book?**

**A:** It was really incredible to be able to read the script and find direct correlations to the source material. Because I was an avid fan of the books, I knew all the little secrets and Easter eggs within the script. It was really neat to be able to find inside jokes that I knew were major plot points in the book or even little references that aren’t even mentioned in the first book but are from the third book in the series.

**Q: Have you gotten the chance to**

**look at any of the music?**

**A:** Of course! Because I’m a fan of the books, I was familiar with the musical when it first came out Off-Broadway. I was immediately hunting down sneak previews of the score when they came out on YouTube. But it wasn’t until recently that a full cast album came out. I had the opportunity to listen to the entire soundtrack when I was preparing for my auditions. I have fallen in love with it ever since. I mean, I still listen to it and I’m a part of the show now!

**Q: What’s your favorite part of the story?**

**A:** For me, it was always Grover’s journey. I guess I’m a little more attached to it now, but Grover’s journey is really about redemption. He’s been on this road in which his past seemingly always comes

back to haunt him. Throughout the entire book series, we see Grover start to own himself a little more. We see his character develop from this meek little Satyr to someone who eventually takes ownership of himself as a Satyr Protector. For me, that’s always been my favorite part.

**Q: Can you tell us about how you’ve formed relationships with the rest of the cast?**

**A:** I was actually a little scared about joining this company because we had four returning members from the original Off-Broadway cast and only three new members joining the tour company. I was a little bit scared of perhaps not getting along with some of the people—you know, typical first-day-of-school kind of things. However, the cast has been so kind and so welcoming. They’ve

really taken me under their wing and taken me in as one of their own. On our lunch break, we all get our food and sit around in a circle and discuss everyone’s day. We’re on the road to becoming one big family.

**Q: Do you think there will be a sequel to the musical?**

**A:** I do not think that there will be an adaptation of the later books. To my knowledge, we are not going to be making another musical in the same world. However, I think that the first book is so encapsulated into the musical that perhaps it will get people to want to read the books.

**Q: There are a lot of aspiring actors and actresses at our school. Can you give any advice to students who would like to pursue a career in the industry?**

**A:** If I could say anything to myself when I was in high school, it would be to never lose sight of what makes you different. What makes you different is what’s going to help get you where you need to go. It’s kind of like a theme we have in the show—what makes you different is what makes you strong. There is so much power and strength in individuality. Your idiosyncrasies that sometimes feel like flaws are actually your gold. To anyone that is trying to pursue this as a career, I would just offer to never lose sight of what makes you really stand out from others. Because the things that you think make you weak are actually what make you, you. There’s a lot of power in that.

## Does Christmas music belong in school?

Holiday tunes seen as overly religious

by Lily Vance

Holiday music can either put students in a festive spirit or create an uncomfortable atmosphere.

Teachers, especially advisers, have leeway to make their own decisions regarding students’ comfort, with some deciding to ban Christmas music.

Math teacher and senior advisor Katherine Linsenmeier is one of those. She explained that some students may feel offended and excluded, since a majority of students celebrate Christmas.

“In a public school it’s problematic because schools are supposed to be separate from religion,” said Linsenmeier.

In her personal time, Linsenmeier celebrates both Christmas and Hanukkah, and listens to holiday music. However, she wants advisery to feel safe and inclusive, and to learn tolerance.

“Part of my message to [my] advisery is to recognize that our experiences aren’t everybody’s experiences and that we should listen to what other people say about their own,” said Linsenmeier.

Senior Evan Gross feels excluded when Christmas music is played in stores and at school.

“There are more religions than just Christianity,” Gross said. He feels uneasy when he’s shopping and hears holiday music, but none about Hanukkah.

While some students are against playing religious music at school, others believe in its festive value.

Senior Izzy Vratimos, a Linsenmeier advisee, said she wishes she could listen to holiday music in advisery.

She celebrates both Hanukkah and Christmas, and listens to holiday music as a way of joyful celebration.

Vratimos participates in choir opera and swing choir, and said that the majority of the songs in her musical classes are dedicated to the holidays this time of year.

“For two periods a day I sing Christmas music, but then in advisery we can’t even play Mariah Carey,” Vratimos explained.

She also brought up the choir opera traditions of Christmas caroling and performing at the Winter Music Festival.

Vratimos shared how Christmas music, “for the most part, is seen as a winter tradition. It’s not questioned very much since it’s been going on for so long.”

But, “some students have brought [the issue of religion] up before...[saying] they are not represented,” said Vratimos.

Vratimos noted, “They always put in one Hanukkah song to try to be inclusive, but it’s not really. It kind of goes unnoticed.”

As a music teacher, the Department Chair of Music David S. Ladd’s biggest struggles can be regarding choosing holiday music. He said the importance of listening to holiday music, which includes Christmas and Hanukkah songs, with his students.

“We also do music that has Hebrew text,” said Ladd. “We sang ‘Ashira’ this year.”

Songs with secular texts, like “Winter Wonderland” and “Let it Snow,” are more comfortable since they relate to winter but aren’t tethered to a specific holiday.

Ladd believes in the importance of studying holiday music, including Christmas and Hanukkah songs. “It is a part of history, it helped develop music in a certain way.”

## Christmas lights up Cleveland St.

Decorations double as festive fundraiser

by Grant Feldman

Festive decorations are common throughout the North Shore, but the Maris home in Wilmette takes it to the next level. With 50,000 lights synchronized to music on its own radio station, the “Christmas House” at 1200 Cleveland Street is one of the area’s premier holiday attractions.

Also known as “Christmas on Cleveland Street,” the house attracts visitors from all over. In December, it’s not uncommon to see dozens of cars lined up to catch the show, which runs from 4:30-9:00 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 4:30-10:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

The Christmas House’s unique light and music show is the brainchild of homeowner Steve Maris, whose love of Christmas started at a young age.

“My father used to take us when we were kids to see the lights in the Sauganash neighborhood of Chicago. He was the only one who decorated the house on our entire block.”

For the past few years the family has held an annual light show fundraiser for Lurie Children’s Hospital in Chicago, organized by Maris’ wife, Meg. They typically raise upwards of \$1,000 in donations and are glad to help children in need.

The lights are synced to various techno-themed and traditional Christmas songs, which are broadcast on radio station 101.5 FM. Maris uses a small transmitter that allows him to broadcast on unused radio station numbers. It sounds complicated but he insists, “It is actually one of the simplest things.” Maris has about 18 songs programmed “and changes them up every night.”

It takes about 18 hours of programming to do a three minute song. He cites “Here Comes Santa Claus” as his favorite song that he’s



Lights at the Maris household are synced to 101.5 FM. | Feldman

programmed.

Seeing the Christmas House in daytime is nearly as fascinating as it is at night. There is a vast network of cables and wires criss-crossing the yard.

As Maris explains, “The lights are controlled by a software program called light-o-rama. I have a dedicated laptop computer for the show. Network cables are daisy-chained from the computer to all the controllers in the yard.”

A side effect of the show’s immense popularity is increased traffic.

“Our street is short and narrow, and because they live on the corner of our street and Thornwood Ave (a busy street), it causes some congestion within the area,” said senior Katie Stearns, who lives on the same block. “But they always seem super friendly and I know they love putting on this display for everyone to enjoy.”

Maris is now in his seventh year of producing the holiday show. He jokes that he contemplates taking a

year off every year but promises, “I will continue doing it as long as I am physically able.”

The show doesn’t always go smoothly.

“There is always a light out or something misbehaving on a nightly basis, but the biggest issues arise when it gets wet from rain or wet snow. I have learned to just leave the show off on those nights.”

Maris tells about the time when, “after set-up in year three, I was contemplating making it the last year. On the first night of the show as I was out testing the lights, a minivan with about eight children pulled up to the house, and the kids all started singing the songs and thanking me. That was my most rewarding experience.”

Maris said that “most of the neighbors look forward to it, and give me encouragement during set up.”

Stearns agrees: “Living by the Christmas house is a super fun way to get in the spirit of the holidays. It’s very festive and so many people love to come and look at the show.”