

# BOBCAT SUCCESS STORIES

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BY BAILEY FINK

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## JONATHAN FREEMAN

Jonathan Freeman, best known as the voice of Jafar in the Disney movie “Aladdin,” graduated from OU’s theater program in 1972. Since graduating, Freeman has been on Broadway 10 times, most notably in “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying,” “The Little Mermaid” and “She Loves Me,” for which he received a Tony nomination.

Now, Freeman is performing in Disney’s “Aladdin” on Broadway as Jafar.

### Q: What was your time at OU like?

A: At the time, Ohio University had a lot of support in the arts department, it attracted an acting teacher named Robert L. Hobbs, who I really wanted to coach with. ... It was a great time period to be growing up and coming of age, I remember it being really wonderful, especially in the spring. The Hocking River used to flood every spring, pouring silt over Ohio. It made it incredibly green, it was almost unimaginably green.

### Q: What inspired you to pursue acting?

A: I started as a kid working at a children's theater, called the Children's Theatre on the Heights, and I did a couple of things at the Cleveland Playhouse, so I started pretty young. My inspiration was just being in a theater where there was a live performance and it moved me and made me want to do it. There is no substitute for live performance. ... Every performance is a bit different and everything about the enchantment, the magic of being in a room where there is a live performance, is very special.

**Q: What do you consider to be your big break?**

A: I am not sure that there is one moment that changes people's lives, it's cumulative. I can look back at the touchstones and tell you the things that were the most important that helped me along the way, but the fact is that without the failures and minor disasters and unfortunate experiences, you wouldn't have gotten to the place that you got to. ... It's all important, I really do believe that your lowest point and your biggest failures are the things that change your life the most.

**Q: Were you a fan of Disney prior to voicing Jafar?**

A: Absolutely, since I was a kid, but more than that I was a fan of Disney villains, specifically. Everything about them appealed to me, Disney villains always seemed to live on an operatic scale, bigger than life and I think the fact that they had this certain cruel beauty. I always wanted to be a Disney villain, so, it sounds incredibly corny, but it was a dream come true to finally be able to voice a Disney villain and one that turned out so well.

**Q: What is it like reprising such an iconic villain on Broadway?**

A: Bringing him to life, I wouldn't consider it reprising the role because a) I never stopped and b) it's such a different animal. I am very privileged to be able to do that, there is no other person who's ever voiced a Disney character that has taken it to another medium.

**Q: How do you keep up with the busy lifestyle of doing eight**

**shows a week?**

A: I always say that doing a Broadway show every night is like building a car. It's wonderfully creative in the beginning, but then it sort of becomes like a blue collar job. You get to the theater and you get on the stage and I say a line, and then you say a line, and I say another line and we get a laugh, and then we move on and I say a line, and you say a line, and then there's a song, then there's a blackout, and then we go on to the next scene. It happens the same way eight times a week and at the end of the evening, if you're lucky, you've got a beautiful car.

**Q: What is your favorite part about playing Jafar?**

A: At this point, I think my favorite part is the continuity, it's knowing that it's something I've helped create such a long time ago is still a part of my life. It's kind of strange in a way, there just aren't many people who have had the history with a character that I've had and I feel that it's a privilege. I don't want to make this sound too precious, but I feel like it was something special that was handed to me and to have cavalierly thrown it away would have been disgraceful.

## **JOHN SWARTZ**

John Swartz graduated from OU with a degree in telecommunications in 2006. He worked as an assistant at Paramount Pictures and for Kathleen Kennedy for eight years before getting a job at Lucasfilm. Swartz was a co-producer on "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" and "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story." Swartz is a co-producer on "Solo: A Star Wars Story," which hits theaters in May.

**Q: What was your time at OU like?**

A: I loved my time at OU, I tried to make the most out of the college experience while I was there. Coming out of high school, I knew that I wanted to get into film and video production, but I wasn't quite sure

exactly what part of that I wanted to do. ... I think because I got so involved, it helped me figure out what my career path was going to be. It was such a great experience and I've met a lot of the same people that I still consider incredibly close friends today that work out in Los Angeles and came to the industry with me.

**Q: What made you want to work for Lucasfilm?**

A: I was a huge “Star Wars” fan as a kid, I loved it growing up. ... The “Star Wars” movies were key to me figuring out that I wanted to make movies for my career. Going with Kathy, being her assistant and the excitement of her telling me that George asked her to take over the company and would I like to come along, it's hard to say no to something like that. ... It was definitely a dream come true, something that I didn't even dare dream because it was so crazy to imagine that I would be working at Lucasfilm someday producing “Star Wars.”

**Q: What do you do as a co-producer?**

A: One of the biggest responsibilities for the role is communication because you have hundreds of people on a film crew and the director has to make so many decisions, you end up being a collaborator and a partner to the director to help make sure that all of that gets done. ... Everybody is different, every director is different, it's the producer's job to know how to make the company run most smoothly to support that person and that personality.

**Q: Why the decision to tell the “Rogue One” story?**

A: John [Knoll] had an idea about a group of rebel spies stealing the Death Star plans and he met up with Kathy Kennedy and pitched her his idea and she said, “This is great, let's figure out how to do it.” It was a long process of figuring out exactly what the story would be, but a lot of the inspiration came from John's original idea. It was an easy thing to get excited about because it was such a fun story to explore and something we hadn't seen on film before, but it's such a big part of “Star

Wars” history that it was kind of a no-brainer for us to jump into.

**Q: What made the locations of “Rogue One” ideal for the world you were trying to create?**

A: I think one of the really important things about “Star Wars” is that you need to make it feel like it’s a big galaxy and you want to make it feel like it’s real places. ... We wouldn’t have evoked the feeling that we did in the prologue, of it being cold, rainy, desolate and secluded, if we had just done that on our green screen stage back at Pinewood. We had to go somewhere that felt real and felt right to the characters and to the scene, and I think that’s a really important part for any of the locations to play when it comes to filming somewhere for “Star Wars.”

**Q: Did you face any major obstacles during the production of “Rogue One?”**

A: I think one of the biggest challenges is that there’s such high expectations for “Star Wars” and we were the first non-Skywalker “Star Wars” story to be told. There was such a pressure to get it right that was kind of looming over us every day, but we just tried to keep our heads down and make it work.

**Q: What is your favorite part about your job?**

A: That it’s different every day, I think I’d get bored if it wasn’t, and that’s the fun part about it. ... As a producer, you have to adjust to that every day, you’re going to go to different locations, you’re going to have different actors, you’re going to be doing so many different, challenging things that it becomes a really exciting adventure just to make the movie every day, and that’s become my favorite part of it.

**Q: What do you consider to be your biggest accomplishment?**

A: I was an assistant for eight years before I got the opportunity to be a co-producer on “The Force Awakens,” and be a co-producer on “Rogue One” and I’ll be co-producer on “Solo.” ... The fact that it doesn’t really

feel like work to me, that feels like a pretty big accomplishment, and it feels like I'm on the track that I've always wanted to be on. It's taken a lot of work, but it's been worth every minute.

## **TURNEY DUFF**

Turney Duff graduated from OU with a degree in journalism in 1993. He moved to New York where he began working as a hedge fund trader on Wall Street. After battling addiction and other problems, Duff found himself in rehab. Now, Duff is a New York Times bestselling author of the book "The Buy Side," and a consultant on the Showtime series "Billions."

### **Q: What was your time at OU like?**

A: I loved college, and I still love Ohio University, I just think that it's a magical place. I was very social so I was out and about all of the time, which I loved, but given the way that the journalism school was set up and the types of classes that I was taking, it was perfect for my sort of skill set and what I wanted to do after college.

### **Q: Did you feel underprepared entering Wall Street with a journalism degree?**

A: I definitely was underprepared, there were things that I should have known that I didn't, but I think I was able to get by on the ability to talk to people and to interact and communicate. So, where I lacked, I made up for in other areas.

### **Q: What was the darker side of Wall Street like?**

A: My biggest skill set ended up being my downfall, when the office lights went out and the city lights came on, that was my time to shine. Some of the real money to be made occurs at night because it is all about relationships and getting information from other people, and that very often happened behind the velvet rope.

**Q: How did you know that you had hit your lowest point and needed to seek help?**

A: It just got to the point where cocaine had taken over my life. I literally faked a mugging to get out of work, so I ended up slamming my body multiple times on a sidewalk so it looked like I got mugged. I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to know that if you're faking muggings to get out of work that maybe you have a problem.

**Q: Why did you decide to write “The Buy Side?”**

A: For 15 years I was trying to fill this hole inside of me with choosing drugs and sex and money and alcohol and power, and I never could. Once I got out of my second rehab, I just started to write and I really enjoyed it. ... I was getting a natural high, when I was so used to getting other kinds of highs. It was something I felt like I was always meant to do, and once I started doing it, it just all made sense.

**Q: Do you have any advice for college students?**

A: Number one is be teachable, number two is be likable, number three is don't do targeted networking. If you start hand picking the people who you think can get you your next job, you're taking a big risk because they might get hit by a bus tomorrow, you don't know.

## **MARCUS YAM**

Marcus Yam graduated from the University of Buffalo with a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering before coming to OU in 2007 to pursue a master's degree in photography. Yam has won two Pulitzer Prizes in Breaking News Reporting for photographs following the San Bernardino, California terrorist attacks and a landslide in Oso, Washington. Yam won an Emmy Award for his short film “The Home Front” while working at The New York Times.

## **Q: What was your time at OU like?**

A: I have an undergrad in aerospace engineering, when I changed careers, I had absolutely no background in it. So, I figured OU would be an intensive boot camp program that would determine whether or not I was cut out to do this. The VisCom program there is pretty intense, it got me accustomed to 18 or 20 hour days really quickly. ... People that you go to school with are the people that you grow up with in this business, all of the people that I went to OU with are all somewhere in the business. It's a great way to network quickly, without having to actually go network.

## **Q: What is the hardest part about your job?**

A: It is a rare privilege to be a journalist, you get the license to enter people's lives when there's tragedy and document hardship. ... You have to do it with some sensitivity and without being an asshole.

## **Q: What is your favorite picture you've taken?**

A: It's the one I'll take tomorrow. I don't have any favorite images, things are always changing and I'm always doing something else. I'm always going to get better so to say that I have a favorite image is to say that I'll never grow again.

## **Q: Do you have any advice for college students?**

A: You've got to put your time in, approach any job with a lot of passion, you have to pour your heart and soul into it. ... No matter how talented or not talented you are if you have passion, it will lead to greatness.

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