

ASU student magician performs for millions on ‘America’s Got Talent’

Acting major has been honing his skills since age 5 in hopes of a career onstage

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
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Story highlights

ASU student Geno Ploeger, an acting and marketing major, is performing his magic act on the current season of “America’s Got Talent.”

Ploeger credits the discipline he learned in ASU’s theater program with helping him prepare for the show.

At Arizona State University, [Geno Ploeger](#) showed his fellow students that magic can be cool.

Now, Ploeger is performing for millions of people as a contestant on the “America’s Got Talent” competition show.

Ploeger, a senior who is double-majoring in theater and marketing at ASU, is one of several acts to be accepted onto the show after impressing a panel of celebrity judges during an audition episode in June.

As each judge voted “yes” (including the notoriously cranky Simon Cowell), Ploeger became teary on the stage.

“It was so gratifying in that moment. I put hundreds and thousands of hours into wanting something, and then it finally came true. It was just a big release of like, ‘Wow, I just did the thing

that I've been dreaming of,'" said Ploeger, who has been performing magic since he was 5 years old.

"I've never really wanted anything else."

? [Watch the audition on YouTube](#)

In 2014, Ploeger saw Mat Franco become the first magician to win "America's Got Talent" and became inspired by Franco's performance, which incorporated storytelling. That's when Ploeger knew magic could become a career. He created an act and performed at house parties and restaurants. During the pandemic, he created a virtual magic show for corporate clients.

Ploeger decided to major in acting at ASU because of its strong theater program.

"I thought it would help me the most with magic in the long term," said Ploeger, who later added a marketing major.

At ASU, he has performed in plays and served as the emcee for the senior showcase.

"And then I kind of just go around and do magic for students, like in my classes and stuff, just for fun," he said.

He can see the questioning expressions when he tells people he's pursuing a career as a magician.

"But once I'm able to show them something, they suddenly realize, 'Oh yeah, magic can be cool.' And I think I've gotten a lot more respect once I've been able to show some of my peers what I can do."

Ploeger tries to dispel some of the outdated images of magicians, like a guy with a top hat who makes balloon animals or the spectacle of David Copperfield.

"What inspired me the most from Mat Franco was the fact that he was just him. He wasn't playing a facade. It was just him onstage," Ploeger said.

"And that's what I strive to do."

As a first-year student at ASU, Ploeger submitted a video audition to "America's Got Talent" but did not advance.

"I was really disappointed. But then this year, when it came around, I was glad because I honestly wasn't ready at that point. I think this year, I was the most prepared I could be for that moment."

Since that freshman-year video, Ploeger honed his technique and even worked with Franco.

"I interned for him for a couple years, doing some social media stuff with him, kind of behind the scenes, and he is still a mentor and a friend to me today, which is the craziest part," he said.

After Ploeger's "America's Got Talent" audition episode, which aired on June 9, Franco called him to praise his technique.

“He was the one that taught me some of the techniques that I did, so it was very special to hear that from him,” he said.

As the show’s audition episodes are ongoing, Ploeger can’t talk about results yet. The finale will air in September.

He says he trained constantly leading up to the audition.

“Where the ASU theater program helped me out the most is rehearsal — doing it all the time, four hours a day, every single week, which is what rehearsal is for the plays at ASU,” he said.

“Magic is the same way. You keep doing it every single day, and suddenly your muscle memory takes over. So even though I was so nervous onstage, once I started my performance I was so locked in because I’m like, ‘I’ve done this hundreds of times, it’s going to be OK.’”

After Ploeger graduates in December, he’s hoping for a career as a performer, possibly in Las Vegas.

“Nowadays, I see all the magicians on the Strip. It’s been my biggest dream since I was a kid. And (‘America’s Got Talent’) is a steppingstone for a lot of those magicians that make it out there. So I’m hoping that it could be a steppingstone for me, too.”

“America’s Got Talent” airs Tuesdays on NBC and streams on Hulu.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Geno Ploeger, a senior who is double-majoring in theater and marketing at ASU, is one of several acts to be accepted onto “America’s Got Talent” after impressing a panel of celebrity judges during an audition episode in June. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



Ploeger became teary on the stage as each “America’s Got Talent” judge voted “yes” (including the notoriously cranky Simon Cowell). Courtesy photo