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Kevin Jones spends time in his Carolina Forest home

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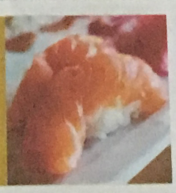


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BY ANGELA NICHOLAS
For The Sun News

His uncle was a guitar player with some of Nashville's greats and his grandmother was a follies showgirl, but while talented blood seems to run through his veins, Toronto, Canada, native Kevin Jones did not find his way into music until his early teens.

"My grandmother died when I was 10 and my uncle lived in Nashville so I'm not sure my career was really influenced by them," Jones said from his Carolina Forest studio where today he works as a vocal and acting coach to individuals locally and across the nation via Skype and FaceTime.

That career has led Jones down a 23-year path in the professional theater as an actor, musical director, director and choreographer and in filming TV commercials and doing print advertisements. He has also shared his knowledge with hundreds of talented students, coaching them into Broadway shows, national tours and regional theater productions.

Developing his talent

Jones said his early years were spent just like every other boy in Canada—playing hockey. At least until he realized his slight stature frequently left him "slammed into the boards" ending in trips to the doctor.

“I decided I had to do something safer,” he said.
His sister was taking piano lessons and the opportunity to join her was available to him.
However, a natural talent seemed to propel the then 13-year-old.
“When I surpassed my sister, she stopped playing,” he said.
For the first three years of piano lessons, he simply played and enjoyed but at age 16, he realized what career choice he wanted. He then found himself moving at a “fast and furious” pace with some great teachers. His goal to get into the Toronto Royal Conservatory of Music—one of the most respected music education institutions in the world—meant a lot of catching up to students who had studied and played music longer than he had. He had five years to complete all nine grades required by the Conservatory that would put him at the required level of performance.
“At that point, all I thought I wanted to do was piano,” he said. When he reached his senior year at Western University in London, Canada, however, he had a life changing experience.
“I got into a musical and it really changed my life,” Jones said. “I thought, ‘boy this is a lot of fun.’”
From college where he earned a degree in music education (piano performance), Jones headed to New York City to study musical theater as a singer/actor/dancer at The American Musical and Dramatic Academy where he received his certificate in musical theater performance.
“I had just been piano boy,” he said of himself. But in his last month of school, he auditioned for the European touring company of “Annie Get Your Gun.” The nine-month tour allowed him to make enough money to pay off his student loans and return to the U.S. as an actor.
For the next few years, Jones went from show to show and landed a job as an actor and assistant musical director. While directing “Evita” in Lancaster, Pa., (he has done three productions of “Evita” and two of “Phantom”) he met Melia, a choreographer and mother of his two children, Noah, 7, and Miranda, 16, who now have some acting credits of their own.
“We did a series of shows together and were together all day and then at night at the theater,” Jones said of Melia. “She got to look at me because I was giving out the cues and I got to look at her.”

The couple met in September and he proposed in May; however, during their year of engagement he was away in Asia on tour with “Annie” and with Broadway’s national tours of Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast.”
So goes the life of an actor/director. “We’ve had years together and a lot of years not together,” Jones said of their schedule. The couple home schools their children so they can take advantage of opportunities that arise, whether it means going off together or separately. During a national tour of “Beauty and the Beast,” the family had an 18-month “gig” together.

Sharing his talents through teaching

While Jones has lived in the big city and traveled the world, he and Melia chose to move to Myrtle Beach two years ago where his Canadian family had vacationed over the years during Canadian/American Days.
“After we married, we came and brought the kids and every time we’d leave, I felt I was going away kicking and screaming,” Jones said. “There is still going to be traveling but I would rather have this as home base. New York is accessible and amazing but comes at a hefty price tag and different quality of life. I want my kids to be able to run in the grass and enjoy a backyard pool.”
Homeschooling the children allows them to pick up and go whenever an opportunity pops up. To ensure they experienced the big city life and had an opportunity to go on auditions, however, the Jones family rented an apartment in New York City for five weeks.
In their Carolina Forest home, they have built a studio to accommodate teaching. That studio also houses Kevin Jones’ unmatched collection of 10,000 musical scores. He started keeping scores of shows he conducted and it continues to grow, allowing him the ability to assist people of all ages and talents.
“I have a real knack for sizing people up and picking an audition song for them. I hear that all the time from professionals. It is a real draw for the kids,” he said.
Jones is currently working with about 30 students with the majority coming to the Kevin Jones Performing Arts Studio (KJPAS). He also provides coaching sessions for actors across the country, primarily those seeking audition

material or coaching for a large audition. On a recent day, Jones was working for an hour with a man in Hollywood and in the next hour with a girl from New York City.

While some of his work is virtual, he is very hands on with the summer camps he has held each summer for the last 17 years with a full-time faculty of professional directors and choreographers who are not only performers but excellent teachers. Day camps are held at Christ Community Church in Myrtle Beach and at Camp Bethel, a residential camp in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia where students reside in the elegant Heritage Lodge. Camp days are filled with theater workshops on topics like Acting for Film and Television, Improvisation, Audition Techniques, etc., and rehearsals for a final showcase.

Students also benefit from a Broadway Masterclass series that brings Broadway to them. Last year, actors included Mary Jane Houdina, a veteran of 11 Broadway shows and performer and assistant choreographer in the original Broadway production of “Annie” and John Bolton, who has appeared in nine Broadway shows including Tony Award winning companies of “Spamalot,” “Contact” and “Titanic.”

The camps, offered at an “all-inclusive price” that is a “fraction of the cost of the big-name camps,” are not all work, however, as campers get to enjoy swimming, hiking, campfires and other fun activities. KJPAS Camps remain the only theater camp in the country to provide free New York quality headshots as part of camp tuition, according to Jones. Campers go home at the end of their week equipped with hard copy and digital edited headshots, a resume and bio — everything they need for an audition. Additionally, students return home with a free DVD of their preferred showcase—acting or musical theater. Long distance campers also benefit from free airport transfers to and from camp.

KJPAS is “in the business of getting our students cast.” Jones has seen many of his campers who have gone on to perform on Broadway or book TV commercials or act in daytime or primetime TV shows or even do feature films.

Local students benefit from Jones' experience

Having a professional coaching students in the local area provides numerous opportunities. Jones takes students on a spring break to New York City in April. Through the couples' nonprofit Opening Doors Foundation, there are scholarship opportunities and quality theater productions to make live theater accessible to everyone, regardless of financial status.

During a recent music history class that Jones taught at his local studio student Emma Vohringer, 16, and a Saint James student, shared that she met Jones when he directed her school's musical.

"I liked everything he had done," she said. So she joined Jones' Myrtle Beach summer camp and was amazed, she said, by what she learned.

"There was a lot of one on one time with Kevin and the choreographer. We learned a lot of stuff that would help us in life like how to make a resume."

Vohringer said taking the camp and working with Jones provides a "stepping stone" as she pursues her dream of becoming a singer/actor.

Socastee High student Margo Perl, 16, attended Jones' summer camp in Virginia. She also met Jones when he served as the school's musical director for "Hair Spray" and this year's production of "The Little Mermaid."

"He seemed very professional but also very honest but in a good way," Perl said. "He pushed me to be the best I can be."

Perl takes voice lessons and some acting from Jones. Her goal is to become a music therapist so she can work with children that have autism or dementia patients.Taylyn Smith, 17, of Socastee said her immediate goal is to make it into a secondary program that will "lead me into a life of working as a performer."

"I like to be challenged," said Smith who is primarily a singer/actress who is also working on her dancing. She has been coached by Jones for more than a year and feels privileged to have found someone so close to home with his talents.

"He knows the way of the business," she said. "He will push you to get to the best version of yourself."

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MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about this year's summer camps available for rising third grade through graduating 12 grade students or to seek private lessons, visit www.kjpas.com or email kevin@kjpas.com or call (843) 251-9542. Early bird registration provides a $50 discount.

Read more here:
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