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PFAMily Arts Music Man production

photo by Chris Fritchie

Creating Stars in Collin County

By Debbie Vallejo

DO YOU HAVE a rising star in your family? How about a young child with plenty of acting potential but no outlet where that potential can change into something dynamic and real? Well, look no further. There is a new act in town that is causing some “buzz” and may be the stepping-stone for the next great talent in North Texas.

The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities strongly believes that children who receive training in the arts have a higher probability of passing standardized tests and making good grades over those who receive no fine arts education at all. The skills involved in theatre, dance and music also create an atmosphere where students learn discipline, teamwork and build self-confidence. Previously in Collin County, there was no one place for a child to become well-rounded in every aspect of musical theatre. Voice, dance and acting are typically offered in different venues, so it is difficult for a budding star of

musical theatre to progress and shape the skill set for something as dynamic as performing on Broadway. Parents, it now seems that your budding Michael Crawford or Bernadette Peters has a place to shape their talent as well as prepare for a lifetime of responsibility. It’s a win-win.

PFAMily Arts (Plano, Frisco, Allen, McKinney) is a new non-profit organization located in Plano on Preston Road in the LakeSide Market. The group is dedicated to producing musical theatre performances that include both Broadway actors and local talent, but also takes things further by offering a large variety of classes to young people that include dance, voice and acting.

Billy Park is the artistic director and founder of PFAMily Arts. Mr. Park, a Broadway veteran, moved to North Dallas from New York City along with his wife and children last year. He has starred in such productions as *The Phantom of the Opera*, *CATS* and

SIDESHOW, but is a native of Texas and enjoys being home. Shortly after their move, Mr. Park realized he could fulfill his dream of building a theatre company and school with the unique blend of professional actors and local talent that draws in crowds to productions. “We moved back to Texas for family reasons and it made perfect sense to name the organization after our hearts’ desire: family,” explains Mr. Park. “The organization gets its name from the four major cities in Collin County; Plano, Frisco, Allen, and McKinney, and the name sums up what we care about.”

The individuals involved in the opening of PFAMily are all personally invested in its success. Funding is provided by individuals and businesses offering sponsorships and by Mr. Park himself. Many of the actors and teachers are personal friends or colleagues. “I do this because I enjoy it, in fact I love it, and I’m good at it,” says Mr. Park. “My intention is to always be honest with my students



Casey Lamont, PFAMily Arts student
photo by Chris Fritchie

visual arts program is coming in the fall and will focus on visual creations such as painting, photography and set creation. The goal is for the new program to work alongside the performing arts so that the visual arts students are involved in designing and creating the sets utilized during performances. "I want the visual wing to work in conjunction with the performing wing so students can work on sets, design costumes and create graphics," explains Mr. Park.

OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME

Organizations such as community theatre groups, music conservatories and dance studios all offer local youngsters a chance to work on each talent separately, but none offer the complete set of skills found in Broadway musicals. Casey Lamont is a ten-year-old from McKinney who attended the three-week inaugural summer camp offered at PFAMily Arts in June. She took part in the production of *The Music Man* and thoroughly enjoyed it. "It was a lot of work, more than I expected it to be," explains Casey. "But everything was so much fun, it didn't really feel like hard work."

Casey's mom, Mariann Lamont, feels the time spent in the program this summer was invaluable and unique. "We had a great experience and can't wait to do more with them," explains Mrs. Lamont. Casey has been taking dance since she was four and has been working on acting and singing since she was eight. The family is grateful for the opportunities PFAMily provides that are not offered anywhere else in the area. "The Broadway veterans, director and cast of *The Music Man* were just amazing," says Mrs. Lamont. "There is such a high caliber of teachers and instructors...and Billy Park treated the whole production like it was a real Broadway show. It was all very professional."

There is no doubt that extra-curricular activities outside of normal academic studies are of benefit to school age children and adolescents. "Just like in sports, you gain an amazing sense of teamwork and camaraderie from being

and provide quality education. I don't ever want to abuse that trust."

A CLASS FOR ALL AGES

There are classes for all types of theatre enthusiasts. The Music Theatre Academy is staffed by Broadway veterans and local professionals and offers classes in dance, music and acting. There are also fitness classes based on the performing arts that provide an interesting way to get fit, stay in shape and work on Broadway movement skills at the same time. For young families the Academy offers "Momma, Me & Music Theater" classes that include role-playing, music and movement, and exploration for moms and their young children (one to five years old). "Broadway Babies" is for two- to four-year olds, and the "Home School Theater Workshop" provides performing arts classes for children receiving an education at home where access to theater arts is considerably more limited than in a typical school setting.

Once your budding starlet feels confident enough to take to the stage, the Theatre Company at PFAMily Arts

provides opportunities for local talent and Academy students to take part in American Musical Theatre Classics with Broadway stars and other young people. The performances take place at The Eisemann Performing Arts Center and will eventually show at the Collin County Performing Arts Center. The groups' first performance was *The Music Man* earlier this summer featuring Tony Award Nominees Mark Jacoby and Emily Skinner. Summer camp participants received automatic roles in the musical and worked hard during extra rehearsals to make sure they were ready for their parts.

The Concert Series is also unique to this particular arts program. PFAMily brings in a variety of professional talent to take part in a year-round concert series. The first in this series was the Spring Gala featuring Emily Skinner in concert this past April. The concerts provide students with inspiration by watching veteran performers, but also allow the organization to raise money benefiting the program.

In addition to all of the aspects of theatre arts that PFAMily is offering, a

in a show or musical,” says Mr. Park. “Students gain a sense of self-worth, confidence, self expression, identity and community, endurance and the list can go on and on.” These are skills educators all agree are an important part of the learning experience and allow young people the opportunity to learn how to work together for a common goal.

A LITTLE EXTRA

Shining Stars, a program created specifically for children with special needs, is set to begin in the fall. This particular part of PFAMily Arts holds a special place in Mr. Park’s heart because his four-year-old son, Patrick, has Down Syndrome. The class is based on a variety of therapy methods commonly used in occupational, physical and speech therapy sessions. The class is free for families wanting to enroll their child. “We decided the class should be free to families with children with disabilities as they spend enough on therapies every day,” explains Mr. Park. “We hope the class grows in interest enough that we can put on an entire show with these

children just for their families.”

It is obvious that Patrick has played a vital roll in the lives of the Park family and in the inception of PFAMily Arts itself. “We are proud of what Patrick has achieved and how he touches our lives. These kids are special beyond the ‘special needs’ tags they have been given. They are a blessing,” says Mr. Park.

SPREADING THE WORD

It is always difficult to get the word out when a new organization comes to town, but on a non-profit budget the advertising can be even more complicated because of monetary limitations. PFAMily intends to let the program speak for itself. “Word of mouth, grassroots, emails and newsletters will be our primary marketing outlets,” explains Mr. Park. “As a young non-profit we are limited in our advertising budget and are working more from the mustard seed approach.” Since the group is a 503 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization, it can receive partnerships and donations from radio stations, papers, magazines and corporations as well as sponsorships from local citizens

and businesses.

Casey Lamont feels the experience she gained from participating in the summer camp at PFAMily far surpasses anything she has ever done before. “You get introduced to Broadway people and others who have had really cool experiences,” says Casey. “I met an 88-year-old actor who was in the first show of South Pacific. I couldn’t have gotten an experience like that anywhere else here.” Casey so enjoyed her summer experience that she is planning to enroll for more classes in the fall. “I’ll get to learn so much more and add to what I already know. I’m really excited.”

Part of the mission of PFAMily Arts is to provide “professional grade, community involved theatre.” It seems they are well on their way to fulfilling their mission and to fulfilling some big dreams for a lot of local kids. If you are interested in joining the PFAMily Arts family, check out their website at www.pfamilyarts.org.

Debbie Vallejo is a freelance writer living in Frisco. Website references can also be found on page 84.

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