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Meet Bryce Pinkham

By Sophie Braccini



Bryce Pinkham with Malagasy children. Photo provided

It is a big deal to get a Tony Award nomination. For 2001 Campolindo High School grad Bryce Pinkham, the nomination gave him a sense of inner pride to be recognized by his peers at the same level as many of his role models. The young actor's goal was to achieve his dream within five years after graduating from the Yale School of Drama - his talent took him the rest of the way to a Tony nod and a successful career on Broadway.

Burton Valley Elementary School first grade teacher Kai Welch gave the initial push that eventually led to Pinkham's career. "It was during a parent-teacher conference," remembers Pinkham. "She recommended that I get an outlet outside of the classroom for my creative and sometimes a little reckless behavior and my parents registered me in a theater class." At the time it was the Moraga Playhouse; then Pinkham continued theater through his school years, but never intensely. "I never took it too seriously and I think it was a good thing," says Pinkham. "I feel very blessed to have had a very happy and balanced upbringing with a

lot of sports and a supportive family that let me do what I wanted to as long as I kept the good grades."

After graduating from Campolindo, Pinkham attended Boston College where he spent two years studying a solid liberal arts curriculum. "Then I decided to give [theater] a serious try and I majored in both theater and communication," he adds. After graduating, he auditioned for different master's programs and fell in love with the Yale School of Drama. "I gave five years of my life to seriously studying acting," states Pinkham. "I then decided to invest another five years to try to make it in that profession, after which I would reevaluate where I was professionally." Pinkham says he's always known that with his solid education he could adapt to another line of work; but talent and hard work moved him quickly to the center stage.

The dark haired, blue eyed actor made his Broadway debut in 2010 in "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" as Black Fox, before landing the role of Carl Bruner in the 2012 Broadway version of "Ghost." Since last year he has co-starred in "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder," portraying Monty Navarro, who finds out that he is ninth in line to inherit a dukedom and decides to eliminate the other eight heirs standing in his way. The show received the most Tony nominations this year, with 10, including best performance by an actor in a leading role in a musical (Pinkham) as well as for Tony Award winner Jefferson Mays (2004, "I Am My Own Wife"), who plays several roles in "A Gentleman's Guide."

Pinkham's father, David, has been the stage director for musicals at Campolindo for 12 years and has seen "A Gentleman's Guide" five times, one of them from behind the scenes. He confirms that when growing up his son was not a "theater kid," trying to be in every show. "What made him special was that he was a good communicator, good at making people trust him, and good at networking," says the proud father.

Pinkham attributes his success to different factors: He pays tribute to two Campolindo choir teachers, Lindley Hall and Gene Peterson, as well as professional connections made through the Yale School of Drama. As far as "A Gentleman's Guide" is concerned, Pinkham believes that he owes

the success of his audition to his other passion: helping others.

Pinkham is one of the three founders of Zara Aina (<http://zaraaina.org>), a non-profit that brings acting to children living in poverty in Madagascar. "I was just back from our first complete class with impoverished children in Madagascar when I went to the audition," remembers Pinkham. "Working with these children gave me a perspective on what is really important and I believe it helped."

The non-profit was founded by Lucas Rooney with Pinkham and Dana Gross. "Lucas visited Madagascar and was shocked to discover that 90 percent of the children live there on less than \$2 a day," says Pinkham, "so he had this idea of training children to become story tellers and actors of their own folk tales." The three partnered with local teachers and organizations, started teaching routines to kids over the Internet and went there for a full session a year ago. The 14 children trained in the program quickly gained confidence, started speaking clearly, and presented themselves with pride. Then the group performed for other children while bringing along school supplies the American actors had collected as part of a fundraising effort.

"This is now an ongoing program and we are working at raising funds to set a permanent location for it in Madagascar," adds Pinkham. For the young actor, giving back helps him to stay real and grounded. He also performs Greek tragedy for service men and women, some of them traumatized, and has witnessed the healing power of words. "I don't want to take this too far; at the end of the day, it's all storytelling," he says, "but performing has the power to move people. It is a human experience; what makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up is when something we do has reached across and affected somebody."

And when Pinkham needs further grounding, he goes for a night out with his former Campo classmates living in New York - actors, Google employees, lawyers - and he lets them poke fun at him, like when they were Lamorinda teens.

As for budding Lamorinda Broadway stars, Pinkham recommends one thing: get a solid education before setting off to live the dream.

The Tony Awards are scheduled to be shown at 8 p.m. Sunday, June 8 on the CBS Television Network. Check local listings.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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