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Piano man *Jeffryes brings sounds to Hayner center*

By Katie Yantis
Staff Writer

One Troy native has followed in his father's footsteps as he explores the world of music through piano.

Jai Jeffryes, a 1979 Troy High School graduate said he has been surrounded by music his whole life, leading to it being ingrained into his being.

"I learned to read music before I learned to read English," Jeffryes said with a laugh. "My father is a musician, there was always music in the house. Troy was very good to a kid who aspired in the arts."

Jeffryes said his father, James Jeffryes was a member of the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, where Jai appeared as a soloist, as well as gracing the stage with a solo with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra.

Throughout his journey in the world of music, Jeffryes said he was taught by Barbara Wasson, who he proudly added is still teaching piano at the age of 92.

As he continued to learn more about the piano and grow in his abilities, Jeffryes received the national first prize in the Music Teachers National Association Young Artist Competition. The first place award led him to Arizona State University with a full scholarship where he received his bachelor's degree.

While Jeffryes was at Arizona State University, he said there was one person in particular that played a vital role in his education.

"The biggest benefit technically came from Steve De Groote," Jeffryes said. "He was a gold medalist of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. He had a lot to teach and driving solutions to technical problems. It's thanks to him I am able to continue to advance."

Jeffryes continued his education at Texas Christian University, where he received his master's of music degree.

"An unexpected turn came working show business Broadway musical theater," Jeffryes said of moving to and working in New York City.

Shows like "A Chorus Line," "Jesus Christ Superstar," and "Annie Get Your Gun" grace Jeffryes conducting resume.

"I conducted 'A Chorus Line' in Paris and Berlin," Jeffryes added about the history he has with the Broadway show.

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Staff photo/Katie Yantis Troy native Jai Jeffryes poses for a photo after the Homecoming Concert at Troy-Hayner Center Sunday. Jeffryes worked in the performance industry for 10 years and now works on solo pieces in addition to working at an insurance company in New York.

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with the Broadway show.

The time he spent in New York was something Jeffryes said allowed him to learn more about three different categories dealing with piano.

"I worked for a lot of exacting conductors that taught me a lot, specifically about tempo, rhythm and phrasing," Jeffryes said. "Professional Broadway conductors expect a lot. I took a lot away in those 10 years working with musicians of that caliber."

Today, Jeffryes said he enjoyed his time in New York, but also is enjoying the solo work he is producing and working on now.

"Playing Broadway shows is challenging but very fun and it's an honest living, but I feel I left it after 10 years feeling satisfied," Jeffryes said. "My heart is in the music I play now, my heart is in classical piano music."

Following the 10 years, Jeffryes retired from touring and works as a database administrator for an insurance company - keeping his piano right beside him along the way.

"It use to be my livelihood and it's not anymore," Jeffryes said. "With that freed I can really define what it is I want out of it. I am determining what I want to say in music."

As he prepared to perform at the 16th annual homecoming concert he said he wants to leave an impression with those in the audience.

"That they connected with a human and it was noble," Jeffryes said of what he hoped the audience received from the show. "My late teacher had a quality of aristocracy when he played and elegance. I would like to capture as many of those experiences in modern life as I can."

Jeffryes said he can't see himself ever not playing the piano and said he will continue to push for new creation as well as new knowledge.

"I'm really trying a different dimension of time and phrasing, it comes from my experience as a conductor of Broadway shows," Jeffryes said.

He said there is not one specific aspect about music and the piano that keeps him interested and pushing forward to create new pieces.

"It is so much a part of me, I cant detach from it to say what I like about it," Jeffryes said. "That would be like asking me what I like about my arm."

Jeffryes and his wife, Jan La Salle live in New York City and spend time together dancing the Argentine tango - which is how they met.



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