

Langhorne's Nicky Torchia finds himself in royal company on Broadway

By Michael Elkin, correspondent | Posted: Tuesday, June 14, 2016 3:30 am

It's good to be "King."

And it's not too shabby sharing the stage with him, either.

Langhorne's Nicky Torchia, who's doing just that these days in "The King and I" on Broadway, knows it's not just a good thing but the best: "The King and I" won the Tony Award as best musical revival last year to go along with three other Tonys.

At 12, Nicky, a self-described "pretty good student" at Pearl Buck Elementary School in Levittown, knows he's in truly royal company in this acclaimed production of the legendary musical, which originally premiered 65 years ago and is based on "Anna and the King of Siam," the 1944 novel penned by Margaret Landon. The show is staged at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater.

As Louis, the son of Anna (Marin Mazzie), the English governess who totes him along to Siam when invited to offer some courses in civility to the determinedly culture-minded king (Daniel Dae Kim), Nicky fires up his talent that has already shed light on many Bucks County area stages, going back to first grade as Tiny Tim in a production of "A Christmas Carol."

Three years later, Nicky was a red-hot prospect, making his Broadway debut, slipping into a patent-leather portrayal of the Young Charlie standby in the Tony Award-winning musical "Kinky Boots."

And that was only by the end of fourth grade.

The kid and I: A conversation with Nicky, now a student at the Professional Children's School in New York, reveals an articulate and impassioned pre-teen who already knows the value of team spirit and the importance of an impish sense of humor.



Nicky Torchia got his first taste of Broadway as a standby for Young Charlie in "Kinky Boots" at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre in 2014.

How time flies, he avows: “The first show I saw was ‘Peter Pan,’ directed by Marc Robin, at the Walnut Street Theatre when I was 3; six years later, I worked with him in ‘The Music Man’ there.”

The youngster, who reveals how “exciting and exhilarating it is to take a bow onstage in front of a theater full of people,” has benefited from swimming in the deep end of his family gene pool: Mom Kris and Dad Michael have been longtime music teachers in the region; she serving the Neshaminy area for 28 years; he at a New Jersey school.

After attending numerous choral performances and school musicals conducted by his mom, music rang out to him and, Nicky admits, “the stage became my second home.”

Indeed, appearing as he did at the Bucks County Playhouse as a third-grader in director Marcia Milgrom-Dodge’s production of “Really Rosie” was a real influential experience, says Nicky: “I was born into it,” he says of the mind-meld that also melted his heart.

His growth since can’t be measured by rulers but by a “King.” “Most kids (at Pearl Bucks) look at me as an ac-tor,” he says, deliberately separating the syllables, “but the Broadway kids” with whom he shares the stage in “King,” “just think of me as Nicky.”

The ac-tor remains in close contact with his friends at Pearl Buck, his alma mater where he felt lucky to have a great education and where “I loved all my teachers,” notably the music teachers.

He also has good things to say about Pat Krzywonos, who helped his career step up to the next level as one of his teachers at Step II Dance Center in Levittown.

But with all the attention that has put him center stage over the years — including star roles in the Walnut Street Theatre production of “Mary Poppins” and a workshop of “Millions” at Lincoln Center Theater (home of “The King and I,” directed by Bartlett Sher, who also was a big part of the “Millions” workshop), the Langhorne lad lauds others for his success.

“I’m not a star,” he says sans a scintilla of ego.

Indeed, there is a signature event that still startles him. “In fact when I’m asked to sign autographs (along with other cast members) after the show, I can’t believe people want to stand in line” to have it done.

No, he says, stars are those who trail sparks and splashes of specialness from proven careers, such as protean Broadway performer Billy Porter, the original Lola of “Kinky Boots”; Lin-Manuel Miranda of Sunday night's Tony-winning “Hamilton”; and his “King and I” director, the Tony Award-winning Sher. All three share special places on hallowed ground in the 12-year-old’s estimation.

And while he has built quite a bio out of appearances as a member of the Yardley Players, as well as TV and film roles, the Langhorne resident’s most important credit is the one he gives his parents for

their nurturing and nudges to do his best.

And being in the best revival Broadway had to offer last year shows how much it has paid off. Not that there haven't been concessions along the way: Mom and Nicky live in New York while he's in "King" as Dad remains back in Bucks.

How hard is the commute commitment? "Being separated can present challenges at times," says his mom, "but being in New York is easy and we are enjoying city life. We are together every weekend and going home is just a quick ride on New Jersey Transit. We are close enough that we see friends and family all the time."

And, unlike the old days when "stage mother" was indelicately defined by Mama Rose of "Gypsy" infamy, who often was not above getting gimmicks to promote her daughter, the new millennium stage mom has a vastly gentler, kinder quality.

"The job of stage mom is the same as every other parent of busy active kids," says Nicky's mother. "Many of our friends have kids who are very involved in sports, music or dance and other activities. Juggling the schedule, packing the necessities, getting the kids to where they need to be, helping them balance school and their activities is just part of the job.

"Every parent wants their child's dreams to come true. We haven't really run into cliché 'stage parents.' Most all of the parents we have met in the business have been great and very supportive of each other."

But there always comes the time when good things end, and when the shout-outs change to shouts of "The 'King' is dead," Nicky will be ready to move on.

Is there anything already on Broadway or in the wings he would like to be part of? What would make the wonder kid whistle a happy tune?

If it's on Broadway ... "Anything!"