



ARTS & CULTURE

# Renaissance Man of the Theater

Keith Baker and His Multi-Layered Career

By Brenda Lange

**Some people discover their destiny early on and never veer from that path.** Such is the case with Keith Baker who figured out that his heart belonged to the theater at age 17.

Growing up in New York City afforded Baker frequent exposure to the creative arts. From his point of view, a life enmeshed with drama and music is simply one he's always lived and one he can't imagine living without.

He first studied music—he is a pianist and singer—at the prestigious Juilliard School at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and later studied drama there with John Houseman and Michael Langham.

Today Baker spends most of his time working in several different capacities at the Bristol Riverside Theatre on Radcliffe Street in Bristol. Not only is he the Artistic Director, but he also acts, directs and performs as a musician. Beginning at BRT in 1992 as an actor, he was involved tangentially for several years, then began to direct occasionally. Since 1998 he has performed not only on stage, but behind the scenes as well. In his role as Artistic Director, he is responsible for all artistic choices—casting the plays, choosing designers and doing the overall programming for the theater.

The Bristol Riverside Theatre is a highly-regarded professional theater in Bucks, and part of the Philadelphia Alliance of theaters. The award-winning theater uses equity actors, meaning those who make their living as actors, belong to the actors union and have the resume to support that professionalism.

Baker directed “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” and will act as Professor Josef Mashkan from November 16 to December 5 in the upcoming “Old Wicked Songs.” He will also perform as a musician in the Winter Musicale that runs from December 11 to 22.

He also began the popular summer concerts at the theater, performing songs with dramatic emphasis in theme concerts such as Broadway Rocks and the music of Cole Porter or Nat King Cole.

Baker has appeared on Broadway as Perchik, the radical student, in “Fiddler on the Roof.” He has sung leading roles with the Houston Grand Opera, Western Opera Theatre, Kentucky Opera Association and New York City Opera.

The multi-talented Baker manages to love all his work equally, separating directing from acting from administration. And unlike many Hollywood types, he never directs himself. “When I act, I take off my director hat and leave it at the door, and I enjoy that. I would never direct myself...there’s no real way to do that in live theater.”

Unlike film directors and actors who review the rushes—or daily work—at the end of each day and have the freedom to do take after take until they get a scene right, in the theater, you get just one chance.

“For an actor, you need to be free, not to watch yourself, to be as unselfconscious as possible. As a director, you watch and correct, and you can’t do these things simultaneously to very good effect,” he explains.

Baker says the richness and ephemeral nature of the play is all-important, and he loves the storytelling, the act of creativity that involves the audience in ways that don’t happen in film.

“Live theater is a unique experience. Watching the skills of artists at work, our creativity, creates a very alive experience. It’s real, and we go deeper, richer and further from the audience energy that is palpable,” he says. “You can feel it, and you respond, all the time maintaining the truth that is inherent in the play.”

“I can see myself doing this forever; I have no desire to do anything else.” **BL**

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