

Local actress returns for role in 'Sweeney Todd'

By Diana Saenger

Many children take singing, dancing and acting lessons with the hope of making it big. Few see that dream come true. Local native Ashley Fox Linton had her eye on the prize at age 3 and never looked back. Hard work, determination, talent and probably a small dose of good fortune has placed Linton on Broadway stages and filling roles in numerous productions around the country.

She is currently starring in Cygnet Theatre's "Sweeney Todd" in Old Town through May 9.

Linton attended Santa Fe Christian School. She appeared in the Old Globe's "Grinch" production and spent 10 years singing, dancing and acting in San Diego Junior Theatre. Although she thought about a journalism career, acting remained constant in her life with performances at SDSU, The Theatre in Old Town, San Diego Opera, The Old Globe and La Jolla Playhouse.

As a teenager, Linton was president of the Honors Society, directing, choreographing and producing productions with other students. "Acting just happened naturally," she said. "My parents and I never even had a conversation about my career choice; acting was just something I always did."

With her skills in acting, singing and dancing, Linton chose to attend the Boston Conservatory, where she received a B.F.A. in musical theater. There, she participated in productions including "In the Groove," "Chicago," "Crazy for You," "The Secret Garden" and many others. Linton also attended Boston's Berklee College of Music, where she appeared in "Tommy." Her beautiful voice was shared with many when she sang "Best of Broadway" with The Boston Pops. Linton was excited to land a role in the touring production of "Les Miserables."

"I listened to the soundtrack growing up, so for me it was the realization of a childhood dream," she said. "With a touring show like this, it's hard to figure out that instant magic, but 'Les Mis' is a classic, and it was exciting to be part of it."

Linton also toured with the smash hit "Wicked," and appeared in regional and New York productions of "Titanic" and "A Chorus Line," "Dancing With Abandon" and "The Thing About Joe," among others.

Linton has expanded her talents as a voice-over artist on numerous commercials and is heard on children's CD Roms, including MGM's "Babes in Toyland" and the Saturday morning cartoon "Pokemon." She enjoys a diversified career.

"I try to focus on the material rather than the medium," she said. "I'm lucky to work on material that inspires me. Musical theater has allowed me to stretch myself by using all of my abilities at once."

Her role in "Sweeney Todd" has brought Linton back to her hometown. She plays the role of Johanna, and in the dark and brooding tragedy, her beauty and magnificent voice is a standout throughout the show. Linton was interested in the show when she learned James Vasquez was going to co-direct with Sean Murray.

"I worked with James at the Old Globe," Linton said. "He's exceptional, so I knew it



Jacob Caltrider (Anthony) and Ashley Fox Linton (Johanna) star in Cygnet Theatre Company's production of 'Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.' Photo/Daren Scott

would be a good production. I had also heard great things about the Cygnet Theatre Company from the San Diego community."

A show about a barber whose mind is so badly ravaged by revenge he would rather slit his customer's throats than give them the perfect shave might not appeal to some actors. For Linton, this show was on the top of her list.

"I like that it's not just a horror musical; there's an important story among the gore," she said. "It's a gorgeous score, the music is beautiful, and the lyrics are clever; I think it's an absolute masterpiece."

Linton is experiencing great success in her career. "I love being challenged," she said. "I've had more jobs than I can count, and while some people find that stressful, I like the feeling of being off balance because it gives me a chance to prove myself."

Part of her success, she said, has been the constant encouragement of her family.

"This is really important, and I have a fantastic family that encouraged my creativity and taught me early on the importance of discipline."

Linton now lives in Manhattan, N.Y., where she continues to pursue her career. She is working on a new album.

Visit www.ashleyfoxlinton.com.

'Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street'

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays-Thursdays; 8 p.m. Fridays; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays, through May 9

**Where: Cygnet Theatre Company, Old Town Stage, 4040 Twigg St., San Diego
Tickets: \$17-\$49; (619) 337-1525, www.cygnettheatre.com**

The Winston School Director of Special Education shares insights at third Conversation Series 'How to Advocate for and with Your Child'

The Winston School's Director of Special Education, Jeff Kozlowski is a trusted guide for students with learning differences seeking to navigate school and prepare for life. A 10-year veteran teacher, mentor and chief advocate, Kozlowski recently spearheaded the school's third Conversation Series panel presentation "Advocating for and with your Child."

Kozlowski was joined by San Diego Unified School District psychologist David Evans, parent Randi Pisapia, senior student Matthew Maichen and 2009 graduate and Humboldt University freshman, Richelle Aries (via Skype). Kozlowski outlined seven key elements of child advocacy, which were supported by examples from the panel and audience:

1. Listen: The first step to teaching advocacy skills is listening, not only to their words, but also their voice, actions, emotions, moods, and interests. When we listen to all aspects of a child, we empower them to feel heard. According to Aries who has dyslexia, listening, or the lack thereof, was a major stumbling block in her early self-advocacy efforts. "I was in 8th grade and all of my services were taken away. I wasn't being heard – it was a terrible feeling. You can't hear me, you can't understand, if you did you would give me what I'm asking for. It was the most frustrating thing that ever happened to me. What helped me persevere was the people at Winston – I couldn't have thrived as well anywhere else."

2. Help students understand themselves and their learning styles: Maichen, who is on the autism spectrum, said he is continually learning how he best functions and learns. "I've had some troubles this year but over the years I've learned that if I said something and didn't just shut myself off in pride that I could get some help and could manage it. I came forward to Mr. K (Kozlowski) and we worked out ways to manage the work."

3. Create the expectation for self-advocacy at school and at home: Maichen's mother Marianne said, "Early in his education I had to fight tooth and nail because the school wouldn't address the fact that he is high functioning on the autism spectrum. However, when kids get older I believe a parent really has to sit on their hands at some point. A lot of kids get to college fail in advocating for themselves when they've had a strong advocacy program leading up to it. At some point I had to sit back and purposely let Matthew fight and learn from his own battles."

4. Help students determine what they want versus what they need: Aries said when she started the IEP process she didn't know what she needed let alone what she wanted. "I really liked the idea of not going to class – so often times I didn't go to class because I thought I knew it. It was a pretty bad idea." Kozlowski confirmed that she strongly advocated for her reasons on why she shouldn't have to go to class and was effective but, in the end they made a compromise.

5. Gauge when to celebrate progress and when to challenge a student to rise to the next level: Pisapia said her son Tom wanted to transition to college by attending another school and she didn't know if this was the right move. "He is popular with the kids and the growth that he's had in the last couple of years is amazing. He came to me saying he didn't want to go to college without the big high school experience. Jeff Kozlowski said this is a great thing and it was a sign of maturity. The growth he's experienced since this has been amazing. It was the right choice."

6. Discover and refine our empathy: Evans, a case worker for non-public schools across the county including The Winston School said listening is a key factor, "I come into an IEP meeting and I may just know that student from the paperwork in front of me. That tells a small portion of the story. I need to listen to the parents, the child and the school. I work as the liaison and step in after the decision has been made about who is going to pay. My role is to make sure that this student is receiving exactly what they need from this different type of school that the district has said 'yes, we need to fund.'"

7. Help each individual find his/her compass: The formal process of transition planning along the way is important. However, guiding each child towards critical life traits such as courage and confidence may be even more important. Aries' mom, Bonnie Dunnum said, "I encouraged Richelle to embrace her learning disability. If you go through life saying 'I have this hardship' then nothing good comes of that. Nothing that is worth it in life is easy. You have to find the motivation to do it. No matter how horrible a learning disability is, the student will be much stronger when they learn that battle."

For more information please visit www.thewinstonschool.com or call 858-259-8155.