Oklahoma Director

VFTH

2/2/12

A WKU Alumni, whose had success on Broadway and on the big screen is back on campus directing “Oklahoma” for WKU’s Theatre and Dance department.

In this week’s View from the Hill, Amy Bingham talks to Jeremy Benton about the role WKU has played in his success.

Jeremy Benton is an internationally recognized actor, dancer and director. He’s worked with people like Uma Thurmon, Shirley Jones and Mel Brooks to name a few. But he’s quick to mention he owes a lot of his success to his alma mater, WKU.

Jeremy Benton started tap dancing when he was five years old.

 “It was all about the shoes, the wonderful noisy shoes.”

The native of Springfield Tennessee also loved to play baseball.

 “I always played first base because a, I was tall and b, because I was in dance I could do the splits so I had the longest reach of the team.”

Dance eventually won out and in 1993, Benton decided to pursue his craft at WKU.

 “The department was so strong, I came and saw a performance and was blown away.”

There was something else that intrigued him about Western.

 “If you have the chops you get to join in the gang, there’s not that political if you’re a senior you get this automatically.”

After graduation, Benton continued to bounce around the Regional Theatre Circuit.

9ish “I tell my students it’s 80 % being prepared and the rest is waiting for the door do open.”

Jeremy’s door opened when he was asked to serve as Dance Captain of the 1st National tour of 42nd Street and later joined the Broadway Company playing the role of Billy Lawlor opposite Shirley Jones.

 “I’ll always remember thinking I’m kissing Mrs. Partridge on Broadway, it was surreal.”

During that run, he auditioned for “The Producers”.

 “I remember her saying where in the world have you been because tap is my thing and they were looking for those six featured tappers in that section.”

Now, Benton has come full circle, teaching a bi-term class and directing the University’s February production of Oklahoma.

 “He’s really captivating, when he talks the room shuts up and everyone listens.”

 “We’ve really never had a musical theater dance professor so he brings a sense of the real world as far as musical theatre goes.”

So a childhood dream continues to impact the University that made it all possible.

 “I always knew I wanted to wind up possibly in Manhattan or somewhere in this business.”

Oklahoma runs from February 24th thru 26th at Van Meter Hall. For tickets call 1-800-5-Big Red. Meanwhile Benton returns to Manhattan in mid-March.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

####