

Shannon Lewis

Choreographer and Co-Director



Photo by Jon Taylor

Q: HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

A: I have danced and been a creature of showbiz my whole life. I grew up in Toronto and I was lucky enough to dance professionally at an early age. When I was still in high school, I was discovered at Canada's Wonderland, a large and respected theme park with renowned Broadway style shows. A very influential casting director named Stephanie Gorin saw me and brought me in to audition for the amazing Susan Stroman and her new Tony Award winning show *Crazy for You*. Thrillingly, I was cast as the featured dancer in the Broadway cast of the show and was whisked off to NYC while still in my teens to begin my Broadway career. I stayed with that show for the next 2 years and then ended up making NYC home. Three decades and 10 Broadway shows later, I'm still here!

Q: WHAT LED YOU TO CHOREOGRAPHY?

A: I have always choreographed from early on in my dance life and I was always making up dances and acting them out for my family! In my performing career, I was very good at being other people's muse. For a long time, I loved the relationships I built with directors and choreographers when I got to originate roles in new works and put my talent in their hands. I accomplished so much at a high level and achieved so many dreams that I had set for myself, making other people's work

come alive. I started feeling the pull to the other side of the creative table was becoming stronger than my want to perform. That's when I knew it was time to start a new chapter. I found that Choreography and Direction were a natural and important transition for me, and I haven't looked back.

Q: WHO/WHAT WERE YOUR INSPIRATIONS?

A: While working on the early stages of *Fosse* on Broadway, I was lucky enough to be mentored by the likes of Gwen Verdon, Ann Reinking, Chet Walker and Nicole Fosse, to name a few. I truly admire Bob Fosse's work because it has such a strong point of view. I love a smart and minimalist approach. I love strong ideas and beautiful lines. Musicality and style. Other inspirations come from Flamenco dance and an influential creator of early jazz dance, Jack Cole.

Q: WHAT INSPIRES YOU NOW?

A: You know who inspires me??? Evan Pappas! He is a super talented and brilliant multi-faceted person. He was always thrilling to watch on stage and is also an amazing collaborator to work with behind the scenes. I'm so inspired by his ability to create a space where creative people can thrive and shine. I am getting a chance to do this incredible show because of him. I have wanted to work with Evan for many years, we have been trying to find a project to do together and when this one came along, I jumped at the chance! Sharing the history of transitioning from performer to creative team has been wonderful. We are finishing each other's sentences on stage and off. Thank you EVAN!

Q: WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A PERFORMER?

A: I love performers that are disciplined with a strong focus and training or technique to build upon, yet, are also open, joyful and ready for anything. I look for those that are connected to something unique within themselves and have done the personal work to distill it and bring it forward during the process of creating.

Q: MEMORABLE STORY FROM WHEN YOU WERE ON BROADWAY?

A: I once had a man jump over the orchestra pit onto the stage during *Fosse* to give me flowers during a performance. I have never been so scared, surprised or flustered in my life. It could have been dangerous, but thankfully he was just very excited about my number in the show!

Q: MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT FROM WHEN YOU WERE ON BROADWAY?

A: I once had my entire wig fall off during a partnering section of a dance feature. I did big quick backbend and it flew off into the wings... It was a very serious and fiery tango, and I continued along with my partner in a full wig cap and mic strapped to my head. The audience loved it. I was so passionate, I danced the hair off my character's head!

Q: HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE?

A: Not easy! I'm married to the brilliant actor, singer, performer, director, writer Marc Kudisch...so, it's hard not to create musicals in our living room every night haha! However, I love to cook, and having our two amazing dogs keep us humble is our joy. I love working with my dogs on agility and training... I spend my (little) free time connecting with them that way. I teach advanced dance classes at the iconic professional studios in NYC and I see the talented folks coming up through the ranks...it is very exciting for me and feeds my soul. I find inspiration in everything, everywhere, all the time, I cannot turn it on and off...so the balance is always slightly tricky to find. If I succeed—I'll let you know!

Q: SALTY OR SWEET?

A: Salty just like me.



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