

BY ALIZA DAVIDOVIT

“Wake up, wake up” the *shofar* cries, for the sounds of the ancient instrument are meant to serve as an alarm clock and awaken slumbering Jewish souls. Thus, in temples across the globe, congregants listen anxiously whether the man blowing the sanctified ram’s horn has the stamina to issue forth the meaningful mighty blasts. In Temple Emanu-El in New Jersey, indeed he does. The children watch and listen in fascination as the man with the kind blue eyes delivers the most powerful and lengthy *shofar* call they have ever heard. And as they focus their attention toward the pulpit, they find not a long-bearded rabbi trained in *shofar* blowing, but rather David Bryan, a long-haired rock star whose celebrated career has not only awakened people, but brought 100 million fans to their feet. And neither Bryan nor his band are about to let them sit back now.

David Bryan is keyboardist and a founding member of the legendary rock band that spirited the words “It’s My Life” into a universal anthem for

DAVID BRYAN

starting in middle “c”

Generation X. His band is none other than Bon Jovi. The award winning group, with Jon Bon Jovi as lead, Richie Sambora on guitar, Tico Torres on drums, and Bryan on keyboard, has gone well beyond “Living on a Prayer.” Since forming in 1984, they have sold 100 million albums worldwide, generated \$3 billion in revenues, performed in 2500 concerts in 50 countries, and circled the globe 15 times. They were recently honored at the World Music Awards with a Diamond Award, an honor bestowed on only three other recipients in the WMA’s history. They also earned, among many others, the Award of Merit for their contribution to music by the American Music Awards. Indeed the title of their last release sums up 20 years of triumphant talent, *100,000,000 Bon Jovi Fans Can’t Be Wrong*.

If the fans aren’t wrong, then the Bon Jovi band must be doing something right. They have done it once again with the release of their ninth album, *Have a Nice Day*, that will take them on tour across the globe starting in November through 2006.

The recent pre-release concert of *Have a Nice Day* certainly gave audiences a really great night. With all the oomph and ardor that have come to define the rock icons, Bon Jovi electrified the stage at the new Nokia Theatre at Times Square. They put on one of the largest multi-media music events in history with live simulcasts beamed via Network Live to AOL Music Live, XM Satellite Radio, and via National CineMedia to 91 movie theaters nationwide and Canada.

And as a restless Jon Bon Jovi spills over the stage with deft jumping, thumping, humping, and near dance-like movements, David Bryan pivots with facility between the two Yamaha keyboards at his sides. His long fingers fly up and down the keys in a crescendo of magic as his blonde curly hair bounces to the beat laden down only by the gathering sweat on his face. Though it’s Jon that lunges to the periphery of the stage titillating



Photo courtesy of David Bryan

panting females, Bryan’s overwhelming talent, his beckoning blue eyes, his fiery passion vis-à-vis his cherubic countenance, and his humility are wildly entrancing and usher him alone to the foreground.



David Bryan, 44, was born in Edison New Jersey. Before a career in rock ‘n’ roll truncated his name, he went by David Bryan Rashbaum and is a descendant of Polish and Russian Jews and Holocaust survivors. He bought his first keyboard not in the old fashioned way with paper-route proceeds, but in the more time honored way with his bar mitzvah money. Influenced by his paternal grandmother and his father who were both musicians, Bryan began taking piano lessons when he was just 7 years old. His musical talent was

evident from the onset. He continued to develop that talent with Juilliard professor Emery Hack for 13 years.

Regardless of the burgeoning innate talent in his fingers, Bryan says that learning music taught him the most important work ethic of all—what you put in, is what you get out. “If I don’t practice, I’m not good,” Bryan says. “So it teaches goals and accomplishments. I’m proud of myself that I went from looking at the piano as if it was a great magic trick and then went on to study it for 15 years.”

Although Bryan was trained to play classical music, his professor was open-minded and permitted him to play a variety of styles, including the Beatles and other forms that would surely traumatize Mozart. Together they’d study the theory behind the pieces and why the music worked. That open-minded approach spurred Bryan on. Even while he was at Rutgers University studying pre-med, he began practicing 14 hours a day to prepare for a shot at Juilliard. “I was always fascinated by how those 88 keys sounded different to everyone and offered a place for everyone to have their own niche,” he tells. Eventually, even though he had a 4.0 GPA, Bryan dropped out of pre-med. And though every Jewish parent wants a doctor in the family, Bryan’s commitment to music was larger than life and irrefutable.

While David Bryan was practicing scales and refining his skills, the then unknown John Bongiovi was serving coffee and playing gofer at a music studio. Always lusting for the mike, Bongiovi convinced the right people to let him use the studio to record a song he had written called “Teenage Runaways.”

And though David and John’s destinies were diverging as two hands in contrary motion, one historic phone call brought both “hands” rushing back to middle “C.” “Teenage Runaways” was a runaway success, but he didn’t even have a band. When Bryan picked up the phone his good friend was on the other end: “The record company just called.

We have a record deal.” With that phone call, Bongiovi put down the coffee pot, Bryan hung up on Juilliard, and the rock legend Bon Jovi was born.

As David Bryan sits with *Lifestyles* at famed celebrity hangout La Fenice Restaurant on Broadway in New York City, his affable, warm, easy-going manner is incongruous with his fame and fortune. He attributes it to his trade. “Piano players are the ones who



Bryan with Jerry Lee Lewis.

have to do all the practicing; that keeps you grounded,” Bryan says.

Yet even with all that practice, Bryan, with genuine humility, says he is still not as good as his professor, Emery Hack. “I’m very hard on myself and I’m also very realistic. I know what I can do and what I can’t do,” he shares. “Once you say ‘I know everything,’ you know nothing.” Always keeping his reality in perspective and driving himself forward, he says he is just lucky that he can earn a living doing what he loves to do.

One of the first luxury items he bought with his “living” was a black Porsche, a car he had dreamed about since seeing the movie *Flashdance*. And though he says he never named it as people often do with their first fancy car, boat, or bike, with a laugh he says, “I simply call it—mine!” No one else is

allowed to drive it.

But even as he speeds down the “open highway,” he hasn’t traveled far from the person he has always been. He still hangs out with friends from his childhood and they acknowledge that he hasn’t changed a bit. And though he wishes his Yiddish-speaking grandparents who lived on Avenue J in Brooklyn for 16 years could have witnessed his economic success, he says, “Most of all they would be proud that I was a good person and not spoiled by the stuff.”

Perhaps the most indicative proof that he remains fastened to his roots is that he shows up every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to blow the *shofar* in his temple. No matter how far across the globe his success or album tours take him, he’s home for the holidays, but with a competitive edge. “No one blows a *tekiah gedolah* longer than me,” Bryan boasts. He holds the note for 45 seconds.

Bryan has also strung together a few more melodic notes when he released his own album, *Lunar Eclipse*, in 2000, which he composed independent from his band. It’s an instrumental collection highlighting all of the aspects of his musical training and influences. He recorded all of the music in his home studio, which is fully equipped with a wide variety of technological wizardry in addition to a collection of classic pianos. Bryan says that music gives him greater pleasure than anything else. “The music is always honest,” he reveals. “The music never sucks if you don’t practice, you do. It’s purely honest. If you work hard it comes out the other side; it never lies. He says he trust his piano more than anything else in the world. “I trust people, but I know the piano has no hidden agenda.”

Bryan himself also seems to be devoid of agenda. A father of three, he says his only politics is to help children. Enlisted by Dena Hammerstein, he is an honorary board member of Only Make

Photo courtesy of David Bryan

Believe, a program that brings the magic of musical theater to chronically-ill children in medical facilities around New York City. The program believes in combining the magic of theater with the power of a child's imagination--to enable children to see a world of possibilities rather than disabilities.

He has also dedicated his time as a national spokesperson for VH1's Save The Music Program, a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring music education in America's public schools. In addition, he is on the Advisory Board for the MUSIC FOR ALL foundation which expands music and arts education programs in public schools across the country.

"Music is very important for kids because it gives them focus and a good work ethic," Bryan feels. "I see kids' eyes when they watch me play as if I'm performing a magic trick. I teach them it all begins with middle 'C' and they can do it too.

"My college professor used to say if you take the apostrophe 't' off of the word 'can't,' then you 'can,'" Bryan says. Through the children's programs, Bryan and other role models try to instill the kids with self-confidence and inspire them and that nothing is beyond their grasp. He advises kids to not let anyone steal their dreams away no matter what their circumstance in life and quoting one of his own songs he tells them don't let anyone "Steal Your Rock and Roll."



Perhaps it was Bryan's commitment to breaking boundaries that attracted him to a recent project that stole his imagination, heart, and creative energy: the theater production of *Memphis*. The story revolves around a white DJ in the

segregated south who crossed racial lines in the '50s and brought African-American music to the "white" airwaves. At the time, black stations were on top of the dial because the signal was weaker. Bryan had long wanted to be part of a theater production but had passed on the many opportunities that came his way. But he really connected with *Memphis* appreciating how a man went against the norm simply because



Bon Jovi.

he loved the music. "I connected with this story of someone who wasn't out to change the world, but one drop made a ripple."

Bryan called the producer and expressed his strong interest to be a part of the project and said he'd like to send some songs his way for consideration. The producer, Joe DiPietro, who wrote the book and lyrics to the musical comedy hit *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* was surprised to hear from the famous rock star, and told him to go for it. In one night Bryan wrote songs for the production at his home studio and sent the tracks out the next day. "When I saw the lyrics, I knew the songs immediately," Bryan tells.

But for Bryan it was more than just about musical entertainment. It was an opportunity to expose the stupidity of racism through a colorful

musical journey of one man. DiPietro and Bryan wound up co-producing the show which received rave reviews. It's the only rock theater production written by a real rocker. Bryan intends to take this musical extravaganza to Broadway and is also interested in pursuing film scoring and writing additional musicals. The investors are already flocking at his door.

And even when no one is at his door, Bryan says that he is never lonely; his music is his ever-present love.

"When I get lonesome, I go to the piano and can make myself cry. I remember the first song I ever wrote," he shares. "It's a great gift."

Although Bryan is anything but a braggart about his musical abilities, he does say that his ego is a righteous one. "I've put in a lot of hard work."

Bryan, who radiates with kindness and a generosity of spirit, attributes his grounded attitude to his

upbringing and to his rabbi. He was able to relate to who he calls his "really cool rabbi" who had long hair and drove a motorcycle. "He taught me to have total respect for all mankind and to recognize the equality of all people," Bryan says. "We all walk step by step."

And as Bryan sets out to begin the global "Have a Nice Day Tour," the lyrics of the band's new release will be there to further guide his steps:

With every step I take I know that I'm not alone

You take the home from the boy

But not the boy from his home

These are my streets, the only life I've ever known

Who says you can't go home.

Yes, he'll be back home to blow the *shofar*, but the exceptional Bryan will never have to blow his own horn.

Photo courtesy of David Bryan