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Page 46

WOMEN AT WORK ISSUE

MY FARR LADY

Columbia native Shana Farr has become a showstopper on New York City stages and in the jewelry industry.

PHOTO BY MAURIZIO BACCI-STUDIO BABALDI

BY STEPHANIE DETILLIER



Whether Shana Farr is delivering another captivating stage performance or designing a new piece for her jewelry line, she finds a way to meld Old World grace with modern strength.

As a critically acclaimed actress and singer in New York City, Farr mixes her bubbly charm with her powerful soprano voice. And, in her Shana Farr Designs jewelry venture, she blends antique patterns with the latest designer trends. Her consistent themes of old and new, delicate and tough reflect who Farr is both professionally and personally.

In 1998, Farr, a Columbia native, drove a 14-foot U-Haul from Boston to New York alone, without a job and with little savings. Through perseverance, dedication and many auditions, she landed several leading roles in theaters throughout New York City. On the

surface, she might seem like the classic feminist, but just as is evident in her work, she also has a timeless, old-fashioned side.

"From my perspective, I try to live my life looking for the good and for the beauty in everything and in everyone," Farr says. "Our generation of females has been raised to be strong and independent. But we sometimes forget to embrace our inner grace and beauty, which are also very powerful."

In New York theater circles and in the competitive jewelry business, Farr's style of feminine strength has helped make her a standout.

BASKING IN THE MISSOURI SPOTLIGHTS

Columbia was Farr's first stage. She acted in Columbia Entertainment Company performances, played the flute at West Junior and

Hickman, led the high school marching band as drum major, lent her vocals at Broadway Christian Church and more. "It was evident at a very young age that Shana was destined to be on a stage," says her mother, Jan.

When Farr was 8, her parents enrolled her in Saturday morning acting classes at CEC, where she took lessons through her freshman year of high school, and the performing arts soon consumed Farr's life. The budding actress added the flute in fourth grade and choir in sixth grade to her growing artistic repertoire. At Hickman, she performed in musicals such as *Hello Dolly* and *The Sound of Music*.

"It was not until I left that I began to realize how lucky children are who grow up in Columbia," Farr says. "There really are some great opportunities to be had as a child."

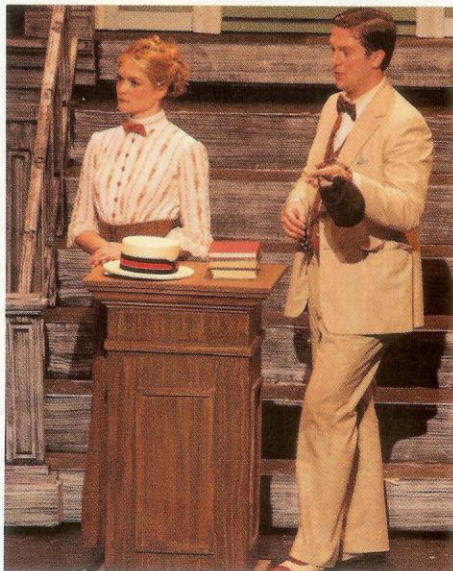
During a field trip with the West Junior High Drama Club, Farr caught her first glimpse of New York City — and the Broadway bug bit her hard.

"I came home and told my parents I was going to live in New York some day," she says.

After graduating from Hickman High School, Farr stayed in town to attend MU on a flute scholarship but continued to pursue theater. The summer after her freshman year of college, she starred in the production of *My Funny Valentine* with the Rhynsburger Repertory Theater. It was her first professional show and an affirmation that performing is what she wanted to pursue. Her junior year, she transferred to Boston University and earned a degree in voice performance.

TAKING THE NEW YORK STAGE

With her slender frame, blonde hair and blue eyes, Farr has been described as both



a "young Christie Brinkley" and "young Cheryl Tiegs." But her voice is what really wows audiences.

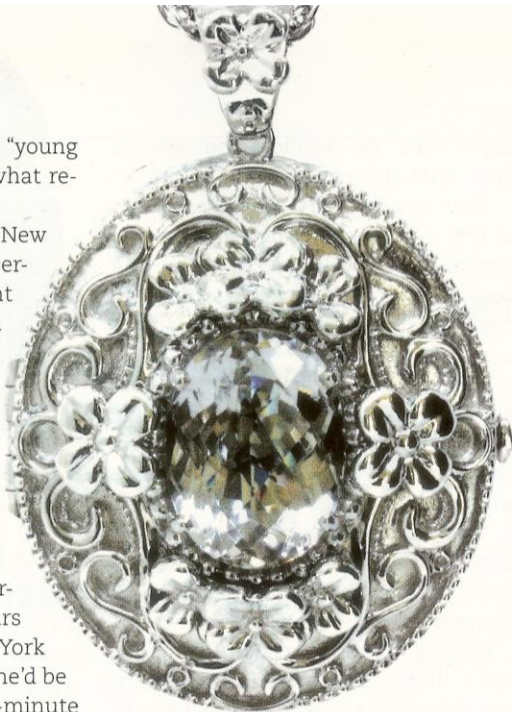
After Farr settled into her New York environs, she began performing with the Village Light Opera Group, a well-respected community theater company. During a performance of *The Merry Widow*, the director of the New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players took notice of Farr and asked her to audition for a role in *The Yeomen of the Guard*. She was cast as the understudy for the lead character, Elsie. Twenty-four hours before opening night at New York City Center, Farr learned that she'd be performing the role as a last-minute replacement because the original actress was sick.

The morning after her performance, Farr awoke to rave reviews from New York's theater critics. David A. Rosenberg commented in *Backstage* that "something's amiss when the understudy steals the show." Frank Scheck of the *New York Post* also heaped praise: "Best of all was Shana Farr ... in the leading role, this beautiful young performer delivered a polished and vocally radiant turn."

ACCESSORIZING HER CAREER

When Farr moved to New York City, she knew she needed a stable job to ensure she could pay the bills. But she wasn't really looking for a job in jewelry. In fact, her only related experience was a six-month stint working at the JCPenney jewelry counter in the Columbia Mall.

After a couple months of temp jobs, however, Farr was offered a position



with one of the most famous fine jewelers in the world, Harry Winston.

At Harry Winston, Farr began as a "salon girl," or sales assistant, and worked her way up to global director of merchandising and product development. That experience led her to a position as director of merchandising with The Aaron Group, a wholesale manufacturer that develops jewelry for department stores, mall jewelers, warehouse clubs and shopping networks.

While at The Aaron Group, Farr developed a line of silver and gemstone jewelry called Silver Elegance, by Shana. She sold her pieces on shopping channels in Tokyo, London, Paris and Munich, but all the travel took her away from opportunities to perform in New York City. In December 2008, Farr left the Aaron Group and began reflecting on her future.

"I was burned out and didn't think I'd do anything in the jewelry business again," Farr says. "But the jewelry industry is where I honed some valuable skills, so I began wondering if I could do this on my own."

While eating Chinese takeout one night, Farr began jotting down a list of the pros and cons of starting her own jewelry business. When she cracked open her fortune cookie, the slip of



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paper read: "Do not close your eyes to doors that are opening."

That was February 2008. By October of that year, Farr had developed a collection of 44 jewelry pieces, which she began selling at www.shanafarrdesigns.com and through private trunk shows across the country.

Paying homage to her inspiration, her signature piece is a fortune cookie pendant, complete with a fortune inside, which customers can personalize when ordering.

"The fortune cookie will always be my signature piece," Farr says, "but I hope to bring in different versions as the years go by."

Evoking a strong sense of femininity, Farr's designs are whimsical, intricate and elegant. For inspiration, she looks to nature, old picture frames and old New York architecture with its wood-carved ceilings and fabric-covered walls. Her creative process begins with larger-than-life design sketches, which allow her to play with the patterns and details she's known for. She then draws her designs down to scale and sends them to a manufacturer that interprets them into 3-D images and creates wax molds. Farr currently works with overseas manufacturers; however, she's begun working with a New York City-based factory and hopes to eventually produce all of her jewelry in the United States, making Shana Farr Designs an American luxury brand.

FINDING AN INTIMATE AUDIENCE

When Farr started her jewelry line, she had no intention of leaving the stage. Although she no longer had the time to stand in audition lines, she was determined to figure out how to do both.

Farr began researching the intimate performance world of cabaret. Cabaret, an entertainment form that flourished in Chicago speakeasies during the Prohibition era, typically refers to a 60-minute show usually in a nightclub or restaurant with audiences sitting at tables and enjoying dinner and/or drinks.

In the summer of 2009, Farr produced her first cabaret show, *Pure Imagination*.



While performing *Pure Imagination* at The Laurie Beechman Theatre in New York City, she got another lucky break. A booking agent for Feinstein's, a luxe supper club on Park Avenue, was in the audience and invited her to perform in the world-class venue.

In August 2010, Farr was invited to return to Feinstein's to perform her second cabaret act, *Finding the Magic: Through Songs of Julie Andrews*.

"Julie Andrews was my childhood idol," Farr says. "This second show is based on my journey from Columbia to New York, finding my passion for music, and I use songs made popular by Julie Andrews to help tell my story."

Performing her own cabaret shows doesn't limit Farr to New York City. On April 15 through 17, she's bringing *Finding the Magic* to Jack's Gourmet Restaurant in Columbia. Melissa Applegate, Jack's co-owner, says Farr performed *Pure Imagination* there last year to an impressed crowd.

"Reaction was highly positive; Farr has a beautiful voice that shines through in the songs she selects," Applegate says. "This is something unique for Jack's and unique for the Columbia area."

Farr says entering the world of cabaret has allowed her to dedicate enough time to singing and continuing her jewelry career.

"I can sing anywhere," Farr says. "I don't have to be on Broadway or traveling the world. I found singing in intimate supper clubs and occasional regional theater to be very satisfying. As long as I can sing, I'm happy." **CH**

UPCOMING COLUMBIA PERFORMANCES:

Finding the Magic: Through Songs of Julie Andrews

Jack's Gourmet, 1903 Business Loop • Reservations: (573) 449-3927

Show times: Fri. April 15, 7 p.m. • Sat. April 16, 7 p.m. • Sun. April 17, 2 p.m.

\$20 ticket + \$15 food/beverage minimum. This does not include tax or gratuity.

*Restaurant opens at 5:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 12:30 p.m. Sunday