

# Corinna Sowers Adler

Educating  
Inspiring  
Entertaining

By Victoria Ordín



**W**ith unbridled enthusiasm, NiCori Studios student Alex Di Philippo says, "It's my favorite place in the world right now." Of the musical theater training he's received at NiCori—the school founded in 2010 in Pennsylvania by husband-and-wife and business partners Nicholas Adler and Corinna Sowers Adler—Kevin A. Bergen states simply: "I couldn't imagine a life without NiCori." Elizabeth Nucci elaborates, "It's more than singing and acting. It's about how to act in your everyday life: how to meet people, make friends, and become the person you want to be." Luke Surretsky agrees with Nucci: "Corinna gives great life advice."

The profound love and gratitude Corinna Sowers Adler's students express for the multi-award-winning cabaret singer who made her New York



debut in 2010 at the Laurie Beechman Theatre with *Stories...A Cabaret*, took concrete form in 2015, when she was nominated for the first-ever Tony Award for Excellence in Theater Education. A second nomination followed in 2016. The recognition was particularly meaningful because, without her knowledge, students submitted essays and videos to explain what their beloved teacher had done for them, both as people and as young artists.

Corinna's story begins on a 50-acre forrest in Pennsylvania. Unlike some musical theater performers or cabaret singers, Corinna's parents were not Broadway fans. They loved rock music and named her after the Steppenwolf version of "Corinna, Corinna." Her exposure to the Great American Songbook came primarily through grandparents, aunts, and uncles. The diverse musical

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tastes of her family help explain the eclecticism of her own tastes, which range from Puccini to Sondheim to Indigo Girls. Reviewers have noted this range, most recently in *Something Beautiful*, her Appel Room solo debut show



at the majestic venue which overlooks Central Park.

The versatile performer learned to sing in an old Victorian house not unlike the current home of NiCori Studios & Productions in Bloomfield, New Jersey, just 25 minutes out of Manhattan. The studio takes its name, a union of Nicholas and Corinna, from a similar theater education venture founded by a husband-wife team they knew and admired in Pennsylvania.

Corinna is the school's Artistic Director. As Executive Director, Nick oversees the business side of the operation, alongside his full-time work as House Manager at Jazz at Lincoln Center. "It's a team effort," she stresses,

"I couldn't do what I do without him. He's the backbone." Musical director Deborah Martin, who worked 25 years for the state of New Jersey before finding what she regards as her calling, echoes the sentiments of the whole NiCori team: "It's a family." "It's not even

like work," marveled an alum, Gerry Mastrolia. "There are no cliques," notes choreographer Lisa Grimes, adding that those enrolled in the school are all part of a single cohesive unit. Production stage manager

Cindy Summers attributes the unity at NiCori to a mutual goal: "Putting the kids first."

Anyone who has studied at a top urban dance center certainly knows how often competition, ego, and studio politics define the experience. There seems to be none of this at NiCori, though Corinna and her team expect a lot from their students, who take one voice lesson weekly (year-round), participate in a summer intensive which culminates in a full-length musical production and, in the spring, appear in a cabaret show at Don't Tell Mama in NYC.

"It's a thrill for the students to hear firsthand accounts from Sidney Myer, when we perform at Don't Tell Mama, about artists like songwriter Jonathan Larson" (*Rent*), Corinna says. Cabaret veteran and Don't Tell Mama presiding angel Myer helps these teens understand how cabaret works differently from theater, due to the performer's direct engagement with the audience. The fall term culminates in a formal recital, with more classical material. For the spring cabaret, the participants can choose pretty much any song they wish, provided they can justify the choice in terms of personal relevance.

Corinna and Nick met at Wilkes Conservatory, where she was a voice major in the process of creating a musical theater major and Nick, a semester younger, also

studied theater. After graduation, Corinna went on tour in a children's show, and started a children's theater program at Wilkes. What began as a small project turned into a serious

training program in which 1,000 children participated.

In 2008, Nick got the job at Lincoln Center. Corinna continued to split her weeks between Pennsylvania and New York, both unable and unwilling to abandon her teaching obligations in her native state. By 2009, Corinna and Nick were full-time New Jersey residents.

Her New Jersey students, who have been exposed to the city (and are from more liberal political environs) are often more savvy when they get to her than those who were in Pennsylvania, raised in more conservative areas. She related well to the more rural students, remembering how she felt as an awkward teen drawn to musical theater.

Once in the New York metropolitan area, Corinna made inroads into the cabaret scene quickly, appearing at all the major rooms following her Laurie Beechman debut:

Stage 72 at the Triad, The Duplex, Feinstein's at Loews Regency, Metropolitan Room, and Feinstein's/54 Below. Her debut on the Rose Theater stage as a featured singer took place at the 2013 Cabaret Convention. She also appeared at the 2014 and 2016 Conventions. The

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