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Farmington native, UA grad makes it big on 'Chelsea Lately'

Posted on 30 September 2009

By: Erin Robertson

Sarah Colonna has traveled quite a distance from her hometown of Farmington to her current position as a comedy writer for the "Chelsea Lately" show on the E! Network.

A graduate of the University of Arkansas, Colonna received her bachelor's of art degree in drama and studied theater under such instructors as Kent Brown, Amy Herzberg, Pat Romanoff and Michael Riha.

She remembers her time in Fayetteville with fondness, and cited a summer trip to New York with classmates to see plays on Broadway and acting at a writer's retreat at Mount Sequoyah as some of her favorite experiences with the UA drama program.

After graduating from the UA, Colonna moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in acting and comedy. Just like anyone trying to make it big in the world of show business, Colonna spent most of her time waitressing and bartending at first, and she looked for as many stand-up comedy opportunities and commercial gigs as she could get.

"Anything to get a foot in the door," Colonna said.

The move from Farmington to L.A. wasn't a rocky shift, as might be expected for a small-town girl making the switch to big-city life.

"I had a little easier transition because my dad has lived in California a good portion of my life," Colonna said. "So I basically graduated and moved right afterward. Everyone knows it's hard to go to school and save money, so I stayed with him and worked at a restaurant and stashed all my money to get my own apartment in L.A.

"Once I did live in L.A. and live by myself, it was kind of weird," she said.

Starting out on her own wasn't immediately successful. But Colonna recognized that her struggles and the hard work she put in to achieve her goals were meaningful to her experience.

"Every time I started to get frustrated, something would come along ... like working on 'The United States of Tara' with Toni Collette," she said.

Other credits to her acting experience include a guest appearance on the USA hit show "Monk" with Tony Shalhoub, work on BBC's comedy show "The World Stands Up," a regular spot on Sci-Fi's "Scare Tactics," a semifinalist position on "Last Comic Standing" and appearances on various other Comedy Central shows.

Colonna cemented her place on "Chelsea Lately" after appearing as a guest comedian on the Round Table. In May, she was hired as a full-time writer, and she continues to do stand-up comedy for the show.

"It's a great job and it's a lot of fun," Colonna said. "It's a great group of people, and I've been really lucky to be able to morph into that after 10 years of trying to get into the business."

And fully into the business she is. Colonna recalled how "cool" it was to be at a restaurant recently with Al Pacino nearby.

"I was kind of in shock, like, 'Wow, that's Al Pacino,'" she said.

Colonna described similar experiences with other stars, like when Jennifer Aniston appeared on the

“Chelsea Lately” show for an interview or when James Gandolfini came into a bar she was working at.

“Even at a grocery store, you’ll see someone randomly,” Colonna said.

Yet Colonna is reluctant to abandon her Arkansas roots. She usually comes home to visit family at Christmas and during the summer, and still remains a loyal Hogs fan.

Colonna spoke highly of her Arkansas background, and recalled getting together with fellow UA alums working in California for the occasional dinner out.

“You know, anytime anyone asks me about school, (I tell them) I loved going to the UA,” she said. “I had so many great professors and so many friends ... (and) a few of them are even working out here now. It’s great to have this camaraderie from back home.”

And though L.A. is a diverse city, made up of people from around the country and world, Colonna doubts her California peers will be able to let go of her association with the South.

“Yeah, I don’t think people will ever stop the ‘Did you marry your cousin?’ jokes,” she said. “But the few of us just usually make fun of them right back.”

This post was written by:



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