

HORSE SHOWS

Ki-Juan Minors Loves A Stage

Whether singing or showing, he believes his hard work will help him realize some big dreams.

By **Jess Clawson**
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Ki-Juan Minors never expected to leave Bermuda—and why would he? He loves the island where he grew up, where he developed his passions for music and horses.

His mother, Verneil Simons, was a well-known musician and made sure Minors and his sister Verlencia Aberdeen grew up singing.

“Mom gave us pointers on how to sing better and the confidence to try new things with our music,” Minors said.

Minors listened to “real singers,” as he called them—Teddy Pendergrass, Brian McKnight, Al Green.

When he wasn’t belting out disco and R&B tracks at home, he was at his grandparents’ house, “running between the legs of the carriage horses and scaring everyone to death,” he said with a laugh. His grandfather drove carriages for cruise ship passengers, weddings and other formal events. Winslow “Buckie” Minors encouraged his grandson to pursue horses and learn how to ride and manage them properly, and he saw to it that he was enrolled in a riding school as a young child.

“My family said I either needed to take riding lessons or stay far away from horses,” Minors joked.

In Bermuda, horses fill many roles, from driving to dressage to taking kids swimming on the beach, all of

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which Minors did with his pony.

“In Bermuda, riding is a hobby, not so much a profession,” he said. “We ride and show half the year, and then for the hotter six months, we pull their shoes and let them relax. It’s not this 24/7, 12-months-a-year grind that it is in the U.S.”

Music was a little more serious than a hobby for him. In addition to singing, Minors became proficient in the alto sax, the alto clarinet and the French horn.

“If I had picked up a guitar at 12, I would be dead,” he joked.

In both riding and music, Minors, now 39, found

that branching out beyond his primary discipline made him better: “You strengthen yourself by doing other things. It helps you understand your limits, control your weaknesses or strengths. Working with other instruments, the ear picks up on it and tweaks any little flaws you have, much like different riding styles help you develop feel.”

WINNER IN YOU

By the time Minors was 12, he knew horses had to be a part of his life forever. He convinced his grandfather to help get him a pony—“he made sure I worked and paid for him myself”—and took his lessons seriously.



Ki-Juan Minors is making his way on the Wellington show scene aboard horses like Virella.

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After several years of jumping, his coach suggested he go to Europe, Canada or the United States to take his riding to the next level. Minors wasn't sure about this plan. He was close to his family and wanted to keep singing.

His music career was going well. He'd been performing with his mother and sister and with some other groups. In 2001, he opened for Patti LaBelle when she came to Bermuda on tour. "[It was] one of the most unreal and nerve-wracking experiences of my life," he said.

When he was about 18, though, his friend and fellow Bermudian show jumper Jillian Terceira invited him to ride with her team in Europe for a few months to see if he wanted to commit to horses as a career. Terceira had represented Bermuda in the Olympic Games and wanted to help a talented young rider from her country get a leg up.

Minors returned to Bermuda with a lot more experience under his belt, so when prominent Bermuda horseman Nick DeCosta suggested he check out Wellington, Florida, Minors was prepared to try living abroad for the sake of his career.

EVOLUTION OF A MAN

When Minors moved to the United States in 2005, the move involved more than just packing and paperwork. He was leaving his beloved home country and his family to follow his dream.

By this time, he had also been in a relationship with his now-wife, Courtney Minors, for many years. While he was making the move to Wellington, she was in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to pursue her studies in nutrition science. Ki-Juan, then 23, embraced the changes, determined to make everything work.



"Talent speaks for itself," said Ki-Juan Minors, shown here competing Pop Muzic for Marilla Van Beuren. "If you develop the right connections and carry yourself well, people will like you and give you more opportunities."

Once in Florida, he began establishing himself with clients in the horse industry and with recording artists. For the past 16 years, he's managed to keep these two plates spinning.

Ki-Juan found himself riding alongside equestrians from Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia. He was pleased to realize that the nationality of a good rider isn't important to whether they can make it in Wellington.

"Talent speaks for itself," he said. "If you develop the right connections and carry yourself well, people will like you and give you more opportunities."

Ki-Juan has cultivated trust with his clients, especially Marilla Van Beuren, who owns several of his regular mounts.

"He's a very good rider and really puts the time in emotionally and physically when he's working a horse," Van Beuren said. "I've been in this business myself for about

50 years now, and I've had riders of every description, and 'Ki' is really one of the best. I think he's going places in the horse world. He's putting all his effort into it, and it's hard to find people like him in the industry."

The South Florida music scene also embraced Ki-Juan and his sound, a blend of R&B with a Caribbean flair, and he found himself working with Forever Current, a studio on the lookout for young talent. Just as with horses, making music takes a good team, and he's happy to have found a group to work with.

But in both horses and music, Ki-Juan has decided to stay independent. He doesn't run his own farm—instead, he travels to his clients' homes to teach and ride their horses. He's also chosen not to sign with a record label, because making music independently gives him creative freedom and the ability to time his releases and performances around his competition schedule.

A LITTLE MORE MAGIC

Ki-Juan and Courtney, who works as a dietician, refer clients to each other with surprising frequency. But more importantly, they support each other's work.

"If I couldn't come home every day and strategize around how to balance the horse business and music with her, I would really be struggling," Ki-Juan said.

With his wife's support at home and his family's encouragement from Bermuda, Ki-Juan continues to stretch himself in both of his professions. While music and horses compete for his time, he has, sometimes, managed to bring the two together.

He's participated in charity performances like Equestrian Idol and American Equestrians Got Talent. He's sung the national anthem at big horse shows from New York to Atlanta to Las Vegas. It's not unusual to hear him singing aloud to himself on the show grounds, either.

In fact, his voice attracted the attention of Olympic dressage rider Robert Dover, who now considers Ki-Juan a friend.

"Ki has an incredible talent as far as a singer, one actually that truly should be on an international stage,

but for the fact that he has an equal passion for horseback riding, which has kept him from fully pursuing the career I believe that he could have had or could still have as a singer," Dover said.

Dover hopes Ki will be discovered by a manager and agency to promote his career as a singer.

Ki-Juan's career in the show ring is also on the rise, including a 2021 win in the USHJA National Hunter Derby at the ESP Summer II show in Wellington aboard Sand Dollar Farm LLC's Clintano. It was the first time he competed the horse.

"I'm so thankful for my clients who give me rides on such nice horses who enjoy their jobs," he said. "I've been working with Marilla Van Beuren for a while now, and I'm also developing great partnerships with Gigi Stettler and with Sand Dollar Farm."

Ki-Juan released an EP, "Elucidate," this fall. His music is available on all platforms.

"I'm excited to give people a taste of what I'm doing and how I'm evolving as an artist," he said. 🎵

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