

# Grandson of a Musical Legend: Antonio “Tony” Domino Jr. Scales the Heights of the Opera World

By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor

PHOTO BY HUEY MOSS II

As the 24-year-old grandson of Fats Domino, one of the most legendary architects of Rock & Roll, no one would have been surprised if Antonio Domino Jr. followed the same career path. Looking at an early photo of him as a very young child sitting at a piano next to his famous grandfather with his tiny fingers on the keys, an observer might have concluded that he was destined to go in that direction.

As it turned out, Antonio – who prefers to be called Tony – actually did pursue a musical career but it wasn't what anyone would have anticipated. Instead of going into Rock & Roll, R&B or Hip Hop, he followed his muse into a much different genre: Opera.

Interviewed recently while spending the summer with his parents in the Marrero house where he grew up, Tony, a vocal tenor who now lives in Houston, spoke enthusiastically about what steered him into an opera and classical career.

"Classical music just felt right to me," he began. "I've been in choirs most of my life and when I got to high school at Brother Martin, my choir director told me you should look into doing this. So I decided to be a music major going into college and about two years in is when I decided that classical music and opera were where I felt at home. That's where I really shine."

But, unlike most opera singers, Tony is multi-dimensional, occasionally singing jazz tunes, Broadway show tunes, pop classics and even covers of Fats Domino standards. During last year's dedication ceremony that changed the name of Caffin Avenue in the Lower Ninth Ward to Fats Domino Way, Tony sang several of Fats' best-known chart-toppers, backed up by several musicians who had accompanied Fats in his later years.

Growing up on the West Bank of Jefferson Parish, Tony attended the prestigious Arden Cahill Academy before moving up to Brother Martin where he sang in the school's choir. His next step was to enroll in the Music School at Loyola University where one of his teachers and mentors was

Dreux Montegut.

During his four years at Loyola, Tony had the opportunity to sing in the choir nearly every Sunday at St. Louis Cathedral, which was under Montegut's direction. "That was a lot of fun and a great experience," he recalled. "The acoustics in there are fabulous."

Also while still at Loyola, Tony sang in the New Orleans Opera Chorus in several mainstage productions. His last performance there was in "Joan of Arc," staged in early 2020.

After receiving his Bachelor's degree in Musical Arts/Vocal Performance, Tony went on to earn his Master's in the same discipline at Rice University in Houston in May 2023. In the fall he will begin a one-year artist residency at Portland (Oregon) Opera.

While a graduate student at Rice, Tony performed as Dick McGann in Kurt Weill's English language operatic version of the Elmer Rice stage play, "Street Scene." Some of his other roles included a Soldier in Claudio Monteverdi's "The Coronation of Poppea" and the lead role of Prince Tamino in a workshop production of Mozart's "The Magic Flute." He was also a participant in Houston Grand Opera's YAVA (Young Artist Vocal Academy) program in 2021.

Still young and in the process of expanding his repertoire, Tony is asked which tenor roles he is most anxious to sing.

"I would love to be Tonio in 'The Daughter of the Regiment,'" he replied, citing the romantic lead role in the 1840 Italian-language opera by Gaetano Donizetti. "That's one of my dream roles right there. I've studied the character of Tonio and his 'Ah my friends' solo is my favorite aria to sing."

Other romantic Italian-language roles he named included Ottavio in Mozart's "Don Giovanni" (Don Juan) and Count Almaviva in "The Barber of Seville."

Musically fluent in the three major languages of European opera – Italian, French and German – Tony has also sung in a series of Spanish-language art songs,



*Tony with his grandfather, Fats Domino*

PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY DOMINO

accompanied by only a piano. Eventually he envisions learning operas in the more difficult and less frequently performed Czech- and Russian-language repertoires.

When asked if he expects to one day be singing the strenuous heldentenor roles of Richard Wagner and other composers of that stature, Tony hesitates somewhat. "I'm not sure if my voice will ever get that big. I'm a light tenor," he replied but quickly added, "You never know, though. I could develop. It's some very powerful singing and the orchestration behind it is just beautiful."

High on his "things to do" list would be singing a major operatic role onstage in his home town in front of family and friends. And, his eventual ultimate goals, not surprisingly, would be leading roles at New York's Metropolitan Opera and some of the major houses in Europe.

But, for now, Tony is happy to have the opportunity to further hone his vocal skills as a resident artist at Portland Opera. This coming season he will sing a comprimario (supporting) role in "The Marriage of Figaro" and he expects to perform in some concerts and featured recitals.

On December 2 Tony will return to his



Tony Domino and Audrey Welsh performing in Kurt Weill's "Street Scene" for Rice University's Shepherd School in Houston. PHOTO BY JEFF FITLOW

home town for a salon recital at a private home, sponsored by the Musical Arts Society of New Orleans (location to be announced as the date gets closer). No other local appearances are scheduled for him but he is open to performing here again if his schedule in Portland allows for it.

Tony noted that he is often asked if he plays piano because of his family connection to Fats Domino. "I can kind of play piano but I won't be playing anything like Schubert or Beethoven anytime soon," was his response. And he further added, with a laugh, "I wish he (Fats) had taught me."

On the subject of teaching, Tony said, "I haven't branched off into that yet. I want to get more experience under my belt before I start coaching other people."

As for what he enjoys doing in his spare time, Tony mentioned traveling and reading – especially mystery novels. He's currently on the sixth book in the Sherlock Holmes series. He is also looking forward to traveling and exploring the upper Pacific Coast after he arrives in Portland.

And so it goes for the young, locally born-and-raised singer with the famous surname as he continues his journey in

the most challenging of all vocal music professions. With the ongoing encouragement from his parents, Nicko and Antonio Domino Senior, as well as his colleagues, mentors and many friends, the future is looking bright for this rising star of the next generation.



Tony Domino, Tessa Fackelmann and Mario Manzo perform a scene from "The Barber of Seville" for Rice University's Shepherd School in Houston in 2022.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY DOMINO



Tony Domino with Conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto at the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra's Opus Ball in 2022. PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY DOMINO



Tony Domino and Audrey Welsh performing in Kurt Weill's "Street Scene" for Rice University's Shepherd School in Houston. PHOTO BY JEFF FITLOW