



QNotes

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An interview with Cherry Jones

Out, award-winning and much acclaimed actress talks about life, love and why she's so happy

by David Moore . Q-Notes staff

Cherry Jones is talking to *Q-Notes* from a posh hotel room in Hershey, Pa., where she's currently starring in the touring theatrical production of "Doubt."

"It's a beautiful, chilly spring morning here," says Jones. "The sunshine is pouring through the windows, I just had a big breakfast and I'm going on a walk after we talk so I can get some exercise. I'd say everything is just about perfect."

It's hard to discern whether Jones' upbeat attitude came about from an almost charmed life or if the positive outlook begat her successful existence — both personally and professionally.

Jones isn't quite sure either — she just knows she's happy and lucky.

The role she's playing now, for example, she originally played on Broadway last year where she captured a Tony Award for her performance. It's not too often that you'll find a Broadway actress of Jones' stature accepting the touring company role.

"I'm just glad they didn't stick some '90s TV actress in the role," she says with a laugh. "People are usually happy to come to see these touring shows with their favorite from some show they used to watch. I've enjoyed having another shot at this role."

As for touring versus a regular production in the same venue night after night, Jones says the experience has been educating. "I've toured before — it's not like I'm some little touring virgin — but it is an interesting experience. Each new venue has its own personality and the audience does, too. When you're in the same theater month after month you create a familial world. On the road like this — you do it so many times in different places — I've talked about this with fellow cast members — we feel we could do "Doubt" at a giant stadium. I knew I wanted to tour with this play because it transcends the limitations that some other plays have. You don't have to see our faces — you just have to hear us. I've never seen a play that engaged an audience like "Doubt."

John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama is the story of a nun named Sister Aloysius who suspects that one of the charismatic young priests at her Bronx Catholic school is a pedophile.

"I love her vigor and her rigorous commit-

ment to her flock," Jones says of the character. "Doubt" is a parable. My character —



The consummate professional: Broadway legend Cherry Jones.

Aloysius — is certainly. As an actress that has played heriones so often — they are like an arrow shot from the bow and everyone on stage is an obstacle — they are the prey. In this case just the preist is her prey. She's absolutely certain he's guilty — although the audience is not."

It wouldn't be exactly appropriate to say Jones is a household name. She is a Broadway legend — many feel cast in the mold of a Helen Hayes or a Julie Harris — but she herself concedes that "there's only a small coterie of people in each town who have a clue as to who I am."

If you're gay or lesbian chances are you know who Jones is. She skyrocketed to national fame when she captured a Tony Award for her

role in the 1995 revival of "The Heiress." She made history by becoming the first award-winner to publicly thank her same-sex partner.

Of the award, she says: "On the one hand, winning it is like your own fourth grade dream come true. On the other hand, I know

the reality and the politics behind it. It's about promoting the show."

On outing herself on the 1995 Tony Awards and thanking her partner of the time, she's

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Artist says anti-atheist bias lead to blog suspension

Charles Merrill still defying IRS
by Donald Miller

HENDERSONVILLE, N.C. — Charles Merrill first came to the attention of *Q-Notes* two years ago when he sent out a press release announcing that he would not pay taxes because the federal government refused to grant him and his partner the same privileges afforded same-sex married couples.

"I have no intention of paying Federal and State Income taxes because my same-sex partner and I cannot ... receive the same-tax benefits as other married couples," Merrill explained. "We just want the same federal tax benefits afforded to everyone else. A marriage license in exchange for a tax payment — sounds reasonable to us."

Merrill describes himself as a "blue blood" and a "self-made millionaire" who reportedly

comes from the same family as the founders of Merrill Lynch & Company.

According to his own website he was once married to Princess Evangeline Johnson Zalstem-Zalesky, the daughter of the founder of the pharmaceutical company Johnson & Johnson.

To date, Merrill has continued to refuse to file a report with the IRS, which is with-

holding 28 percent of his income.

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Just call me the anti-christ: artist and wealthy gay eccentric Charles Merrill is hoppin' mad that a N.C. newspaper refuses to allow him to use the blog handle of his choice.

Five Equality Riders arrested at Mississippi stop

Group detained for a week; LGBT organizations protest

by Brandon Kneeful

CLINTON, Miss. — The Soulforce Equality Riders arrived at the Mississippi College campus in Clinton March 20 seeking to end religion-based oppression of LGBT people at Christian colleges across the country. The riders are attempting to engage in a dialogue concerning the harmful effects of policies that silence or exclude LGBT students. Twenty-five LGBT and allied young adults made the trip. Four of the group's members were arrested when they stepped off a public sidewalk and onto the grass in front of the college's administration building. The fifth was

arrested about an hour later for the same thing. The riders were given the choice of staying in jail for a week or performing three days of community service. They chose the latter and stayed behind in Clinton and reconnected with the bus in Alabama.

Authorities continued to harass the Equality Riders throughout the day.

Local



One of Soulforce's Equality Riders being taken away by police.

officers used harsh and intimidating language with the Riders.

SWAT teams from Clinton Township were also called in. The Soulforce Equality bus was continuously followed and forced to leave Clinton. As riders were waiting for some of the members of Soulforce to return a police vehicle approached the bus with its lights flashing, signaling the bus to move. The bus driver immediately turned down the nearest road and into a church parking lot to await the Equality Riders. The same officer once again followed them into the parking lot, with his lights on, and asked the driver to speak with him. The officer

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