

Jeff Around Town – July 29th, 2025

Jeff: Joining me on Jeff Around Town is Kyle Thomas. And Kyle, I know you primarily through Opera Omaha, where you are the Director of Marketing and Communications.

Kyle: Yep.

Jeff: But you do so much else, and we'll get to that in a second. Thank you for being on Jeff Around Town.

Kyle: Yeah, thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Jeff: You are also music director, choreographer, composer, director in theatrical productions and so many other things. I thought I was busy with creative projects, but you're doing a lot of stuff.

Kyle: Yeah, I think... so I definitely consider myself a multi-hyphenate, which I feel like is kind of a trendy buzzword. But yeah, back in high school, I was the musical theater kid, and I realized pretty quickly that I wanted to go into directing. And so, my next step was, okay, well, I want to be a director that can do all things and communicate all things, essentially, within the musical theater realm. So, I can talk dance, I can talk music, I can talk to an accompanist, or I can talk to an actor. And that's really kind of been my M.O., like, through life. And it also opens up more work, too.

Jeff: Yeah, so you're originally from Kansas City.

Kyle: Originally from Kansas City, yeah. I grew up there, and then I came and I did my B.F.A. in theater direction at Nebraska Westland. And that was kind of my first taste of Nebraska, and I learned about competitive one-acts, and I learned about show choirs, which I did not know about in Kansas City. And then, yeah, after school, I got married, and I lived up in the Twin Cities doing theater and stuff and doing the freelance life up in the Twin Cities. And then my wife and I, we had kids, moved back to Nebraska, and we lived in Lincoln and Fremont and Omaha now.

Jeff: In general, how do you find Omaha compared to... Because I think of the Twin Cities as being a powerhouse of creativity and all kinds of arts projects, as well as Kansas City. So how do you compare Omaha to these other places?

Kyle: I think the cool thing that I realized about Minneapolis is there is everything happening all the time on all scales. The Guthrie is a big major house, and they're doing stuff all the time. But you also have little theaters and little people working out of garages, and just inviting their friends for good stories, and everything in between. That's what I kind of love. There was so much work there. And I think Omaha has the same thing, but I don't think people look at the smaller and the midsize stuff as much as they... I don't think they realize it's there as much as it really is. I mean, we've got the big houses. We've got the Opera Omaha, the Symphony, and the Blue Barn, and stuff like that, but I think there's a lot even happening within that midsize, small-size artistry that is in this city, too.

Jeff: Do you think having the Guthrie is one of those things that just sort of ramps it up, though, in terms of awareness of theater, so there's more general awareness of it?

Kyle: Oh, yeah, 100%. I mean, it's a major, major house. And I think looking at Omaha, too, what I also love about Omaha is you look at the Blue Barn, which is our major theatrical house here, and, like, a lot of the people that I know that are in the Blue Barn or are working there is, you know, actors, stage managers, etc., designers. They're also working within the community in other places. They're not centralized to one theater, which I kind of love, is that they're kind of touching all bases here.

Jeff: Yeah, so many years ago, I had dreams of living in New York, as a lot of creatives do, and my band had played there a few times, and I had done some other things in New York. And I realized, though, especially when I was playing with my swing band, Prairie Cats, it was a challenge to play one gig, to load in, load out, and do the show. It was exhausting, and I realized in Omaha, I was still the cartoonist at the newspaper. I was able to do that. I was able to play gigs. I was able to work on a memoir, all these other things. So to me, it occurred to me that there's something about Omaha that's, you know, it's accessible and allows you... New York is going to eat you alive, and I'm not saying that's the case for Minneapolis, but I'm sure it's very competitive, but do you find that there's something about being in Omaha that allows you to... I'm looking at all the things that you're doing. You're doing a lot.

Kyle: Yeah. No, I think there's opportunities of plenty, which is what I love, and I think, I mean, part of that, I think it's also just, like, the Midwest culture and, like, the Midwest attitude is that we really do live at a little bit slower of a pace. I don't know if slower of a pace. Kinder of a pace, maybe, is...

Jeff: A little more forgiving, maybe?

Kyle: Yeah, in a way, like, and I think there's more kindness and more openness to experimenting with others, where I feel like in the major metropolitan hubs, and the friends that I've had that have gone to New York, or, like, you know, the Chicago's that are like, this is my one lane, and I'm also, you know, like a barista, but, like, I'm trying this one lane.

Jeff: Just one thing, in a place like New York, you couldn't be a multi-hyphenate.

Kyle: I mean, I haven't lived there, but I think it'd be a lot harder, yeah.

Jeff: Yeah, cool. Kyle, thanks so much for joining me on Jeff around town. I really appreciate it, and keep up all the creativity, and best of luck at Omaha.

Kyle: Likewise, thank you.