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Two Simbas Roar from The Company Acting Studio

By Spencer Moon

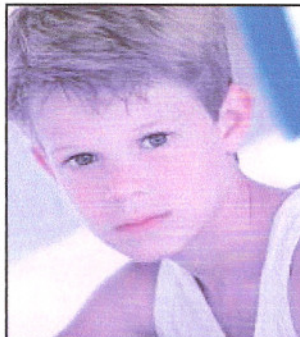
ATLANTA, GA (July 18, 2006)—Two young actors from Atlanta are both currently portraying the character of Simba from *The Lion King*: one in the Broadway version of the film, and another as the voice of Simba for a new line of Fisher-Price toys.

Nine-year-old Colin Ford will supply the voice for the toy Simba when the new line featuring *The Lion King* characters appears in stores this fall. Justin Martin (who is a ripe old 11) is playing the Broadway version of the adorable lion, doing four shows a week. Their resumes (resumes for nine and eleven-year-olds is quite a concept) would be the envy of actors three or four times their age. And their acting credits run the gamut -- theater, feature films, television, voice-over work, and commercials.

Read on for more information about Colin, [Justin](#), and [The Company Acting Studio](#) where they both got their start.

Colin Ford

Colin Ford is a former student of The Company Acting Studio. Because of Colin's success, his family has moved from Atlanta to Los Angeles. To his credit, this nine-year-old has more than a dozen feature films, more than a dozen commercials, a few television appearances (including a skit on the *Tonight Show* with Jay Leno and a guest part on *Smallville*), and over a dozen voiceover jobs. He is now the "Official Voice of Simba" for Fisher-Price toys as part of the hugely successful *Lion King* franchise.



It was only slightly intimidating speaking to this young actor by phone from Los Angeles.

How did you get started as an actor?

Colin: I was about three years old. One of my mom's friends said to her that I might make a good model. My mom asked me if I might like to be a model. A couple months later I was with a modeling

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agency. I was doing print jobs and stuff. Before I had an agent, I got a call for my first movie which was *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002) (age six). I later got with my agent.

How do you maintain school and keep such a busy work schedule?

Colin: When I'm at school, it's kind of weird because everybody I go to school with is not used to acting. And they will go "Colin where did you go yesterday, you weren't here? I always have to say I was filming. So they ask about school work and I tell them I have teachers on the set with me. I always have school work with me to do.

Describe a special moment in your career to this point?

Colin: I have two things. Last year I did a print ad for *W Magazine* with Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. It was a big promotion thing for **Mr. & Mrs. Smith** (2005). And becoming the new voice of Simba for *The Lion King*--it was very interesting becoming an animated character that was already well known. That was a lot of fun. My voice will be used for any upcoming projects they might have and I've done one thing for a new toy that has Simba's voice.

Do you have any things you've read that you'd like to portray on film?

Colin: I recently read all 12 books of the *Lemony Snicket: Series of Unfortunate Events* books. I really like the character of Claus. He was a very interesting and smart character. He always reads books; he is a child in the books. He is a bit older than I am. I think he is about 12.

What have you been working on recently?

Colin: I recently did a voice for an animated film titled **Who Stole Santa's Sack?** [note: to be released Christmas 2006. Co-stars include Jay Leno, Andy Griffith, Shirley Jones, Kathy Bates, and Ed Asner-- not bad company]. I play the character of Dart. If I could, I'd like to be Dart in real life. Dart is an energetic reindeer. I'm a pretty energetic boy. It would be fun to be him in real life.

I'd like to work with Reese Witherspoon again. I worked with her on **Sweet Home Alabama** (2002). I look up to her. She's a role model for me.

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Justin Martin



Justin Martin's career includes half-a-dozen feature films, television (co-starring on *Malcolm in the Middle*, and *The Bernie Mac Show*), commercials, and now Broadway, where he is currently doing four shows a week in ***The Lion King***. Justin is a young man who is not letting grass grow under his feet. He was on his way to some auditions by public transportation with his mom in Atlanta when we spoke. So, on his day off from Broadyway, which is closed on Monday, he flew into Atlanta

for two film auditions.

What are you auditioning for today?

Justin: One is a movie that stars Dakota Fanning and the other is for a movie that stars Queen Latifah.

I spoke to a friend of yours last week, Colin Ford.

Justin: Yeah I saw Colin last week he came to see me in *The Lion King*. We hung out with him and we went to the movies to see *Superman*. It was fun to hang out with him.

Colin and I started out working together in The Company Acting Studio. A whole bunch of us became friends and we went out to Los Angeles together to work. It's like one big family. I really respect the Company. If it wasn't for them, I don't think I would be where I am right now.

How did you get your started in acting?

Justin: I started acting in my church in an Easter play. The drama director of our church said I should try doing more things. So I got an agent and started working in Atlanta. Once I did all I could do in Atlanta my agent suggested I should go to Los Angeles for a couple of months to see how much work I could do. I worked with some

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other kids and we got trained for five months with the Company and after that we went to L.A. For me it was real special. From the time I got there, all I was doing was working, working, working. That's when I decided that's what I really wanted to pursue. I went back for a second time and all I did was work, work, and work. So it's been a real blessing for me.

How do you maintain school and keep such a busy work schedule?

Justin: The work schedule became pretty hectic so I started doing home school. They send me the work and I have a tutor while I'm working in the theater. My contract was extended through February, so I'm attending a performing arts school. So that's where I'll be going next year for seventh grade.

Describe a special moment in your career to this point?

Justin: One of the most special moments as an actor for me was right before I auditioned for the part of Simba in *The Lion King*. I did not have the role yet. I went to the theater and asked security if I could go stand on the stage real quick, so they let me. So I stood center stage and looked at all the empty seats. I just pictured myself on that stage one day and said, this is mine. I'm going to be in this place in the play one day standing in front of 1,800 people performing one day. That's when I claimed the part of Simba.

What roles would you like to play in the in the future?

Justin: I do like August Wilson and I've been studying his plays. His work is really good for people who are passionate for acting so I'd like to perform his work someday.

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The Company Acting Studio

These two budding stars got their formal training at Atlanta's own **The Company Acting Studio**, located at 500 D-1 Amsterdam Avenue. The school is "a professional training program in acting and audition for film, television, commercials, and stage." It was established in August 1996 by Lisina Longo, who is the owner/operator of The Company Acting Studio.

"I'm definitely a workaholic," said Longo. "I give everybody the benefit of the doubt and believe there are no shortcuts to success." Longo's background includes education and training with the Stella Adler Conservatory, The School of Performing Arts in New York, and Boston University School of Theatre Arts. She has been actively coaching actors of all ages since 1991.

When I asked her why she started an acting school in Atlanta, she replied, "It's something that has always been in the back of my mind -- having my own studio and a company of actors in training. I started in conservatory training programs at age 11. It was where I thrived. Acting has been a part of most of my life, so having a school of my own made sense to me."

"Atlanta happened by fate. I was traveling around the country working, wanting to hit as many of the great cities as I could. I wanted to try out their theater, film, and television communities, and learn and build my resume on the way. When I hit Atlanta, I had been living in Los Angeles for three years. Atlanta was a real relieve. It was closer to home, which is New York. The community embraced me very quickly and that's pretty much what did it. It was a community that said, 'You're here, you want to work, great, let's give you everything you want to do.' So for me, I think it was my personal fit. Atlanta had more opportunity to develop your own thing.



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On a business level it made a lot of sense. The community has embraced us, saying "Thank You, for doing it and don't leave."

When asked to describe the age range of her students, she said, "We start students in our adult program at age 16. There is an audition process to come into the school. Right now about 50 percent of our students are in the adult program and 50 percent are under the age of 16. We have more demand for the young actors to enroll in our program. It is much more difficult for an adult to make acting a career decision versus having a regular job and doing it as a hobby."

I asked her, what was the hardest part of her job/business? "The battle we have today between being a celebrity and the desire to be an artist. Society seems to make 'celebrity' a career choice, which is an odd one. So there are a lot of young people who have the impression that being famous without any artistic or academic merit is an option. I battle that a lot. The battle is between what people are told and the reality of a career in the arts. It makes it difficult on a business level, because what I sell is not always understood. What I do is train artists/actors to work as professionals for the rest of their lives. So that they're not flash in the pans or have short term goals. I battle against other resources that come up in the industry that allow people to become overnight celebrities. It is difficult when you've been raised in the craft with hard work like I've been. It's disheartening to see what celebrity has done to the acting community."

She went on to tell me about her goals for the school. "The long term goal for the school is to be able to not just train actors, but to train teachers. I have a very strong belief that you have to pass this information along. So in addition to producing actors who work consistently, I want to produce teachers who can do the same -- who can apply what they learn and have their own schools, and take that information elsewhere. That's definitely a consistent goal of the school."

"Our short term goals are the same with an attempt to step up the community involvement. We make efforts to do outreach to the school systems. Additional short term goals include more community outreach than our school has done in the past. We do a lot of workshops in middle and high schools, and we want to be more actively involved in that as much as possible in the next few years."

Longo's parting comments were, "Success is not won overnight. There are no short cuts to it. Acting and the industry of acting can be one of the most rewarding and satisfying careers you could ever want."

[The Company Acting Studio](#) is preparing for a tenth anniversary celebration that is to be an invitation only, semi-formal event, with a Hollywood-style reception. For more info, see www.thecompanyactingstudio.com.

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