

colgate scene

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Ivy Austin '79

From the very beginning, New York City-based actress, dancer, and singer Ivy Austin '79 has been destined for a life on stage. As a child, Austin spent her first five years on the road with her mother and father, a percussionist in Broadway orchestras. She got her first ballet lessons from a *My Fair Lady* chorus girl in a hotel room, and later went on to study dance, voice, and acting at the High School of Performing Arts (and other professional schools) in Manhattan.

Today, after spending much of [her career](#) in theater, on radio, and on television, the Brooklyn-born Austin is behind the scenes, pouring her creative energy into two ventures founded by veteran Broadway producers Bruce Robert Harris and Jack W. Batman. As an associate producer with Tony Award-winning [Sunnyspot Entertainment](#), Austin recruits and meets with potential investors for Broadway and off-Broadway shows. (The novice producer is in the midst of several deals she can't yet discuss.)

And as director of theatrical events and Broadway weddings with Sunnyspot Celebrations, she brings her own performance experience to plan and direct Broadway-style events, from costumed dream weddings to star-studded opening-night parties for producers, cast, crew, and their guests. "I've spent most of my life on stage, so I have an awareness of all the elements that make a wonderful production," she said.

"I'm a theater lifer," added the cheerful Austin, who followed her mom's advice decades ago to change her name from Epstein to something that came at either the beginning or end of the alphabet so she'd walk in first or last at auditions. The two of them decided on Austin, a street in the Queens neighborhood where she grew up.

Austin was the first in her theatrical family to attend college when she came to Colgate to study

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[biology](#), but she didn't feel like herself until she became involved with student theater, creating and starring in musical reviews. "That's when I felt at home at Colgate — when I could sing, dance, and act. That's what I do."

After graduation, Austin toured nationally in *They're Playing Our Song*, then debuted on Broadway in the title role of Raggedy Ann. She went on to do off-Broadway shows, then Broadway revivals at the [New York City Opera](#). The multi-talented performer is best known, however, for her four years as a singer-comedienne on Garrison Keillor's radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*.

"There's nothing else like that feeling of being on the edge," said Austin of live radio. "The words and music are going out to a national audience of three million and there are no do-overs."

The mother of two is also known for her songs and [voiceovers](#) on *Sesame Street*, where she performed such hits as "[A New Way to Walk](#)" by Soo-ey Oinker and the Oinker Sisters. And her role as the "Nerd Girl" lives on among rabid fans of the movie *Grease 2*.

"I'm always reinventing myself," said an exuberant Austin, who continues to audition for TV and radio voiceover work. "It's part of my 'just say yes' philosophy. As an artist, it's so important to keep pushing beyond your own comfort zone, and that's what I love to do."

— *Anne Stein*



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