

BYRON ALLEN PUTS STARS ON THE ICE



Byron Allen has a succinct description of his decades-long work as a behind-the-scenes impresario of IMG's "Stars on Ice," the premier North American ice-skating tour.

"My job is to hire talented people, and let them do their thing, whether it's choreography, or costumes, or another skill," he says. "Then, don't screw it up."

When I reach Allen in mid-March, he

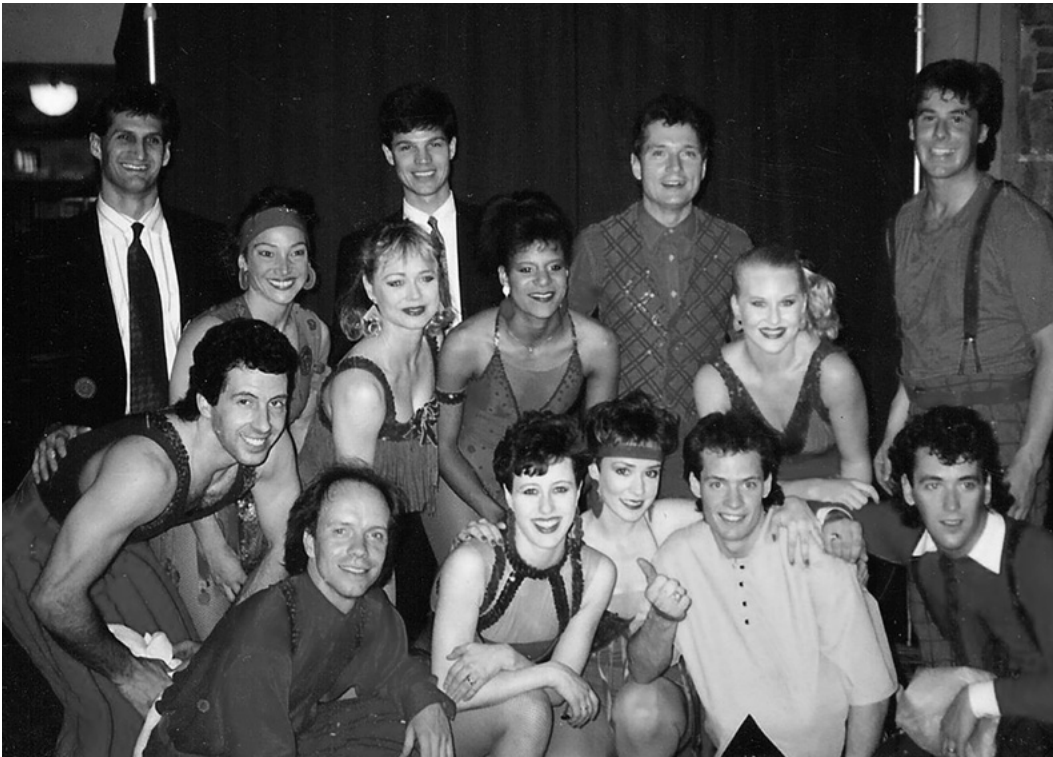
is deep into last-minute preparations for the 2026 edition of SOI, which will visit 28 U.S. cities with a cast featuring U.S. Olympians Alysa Liu, Ilia Malinin and Madison Chock and Evan Bates. While receptive to questions about his career, he doesn't see himself as worthy of Ice Theatre of New York's Arts & Business Award. He's simply a professional, doing a job he happens to love.

"I can't figure out why anybody wants to honor me, but I'm appreciative," Allen, a senior vice president at IMG Worldwide, says. "You know, we've had great choreographers, from Sandra (Bezic) to Chris (Dean) to Jeff (Buttle) and now, Kurt (Browning) and Alissa (Czisy). We've won Emmys for choreography and costumes (the late Jef Billings). You hire talented people, and you let them do their thing."

The New Jersey native's involvement in SOI dates back to its birth in 1986. After Scott Hamilton was unceremoniously fired by Ice Capades, he and his manager, Bob Kain, founded Scott Hamilton's America Tour, soon re-christened Stars on Ice. At the time, Allen was a recent college graduate, working in IMG's events division.

"Back then, it was a very small division, and people did lots of different things," he remembers. "I was working on tennis events, and I met Bob and Gary Swain, who was hired to run the tour. They asked me to help out with the marketing."

In May 1989, Allen was named SOI's producer, with the support of long-time IMG col-



league Jay Ogden.

“Quite honestly, it struggled at first,” he says. “We finally figured out the time frame to do it was in winter, rather than the fall.”

At its peak, the mid-1990s through the early 2000s, SOI visited close to 100 cities a year in the U.S. and Canada, bolstered by headliners including Hamilton, Browning, Kristi Yamaguchi, Katia Gordeeva and Sergei Grinkov, Paul Wylie, Tara Lipinski and many others.

“There were so many Olympic medalists, and they were the names that were so huge at that time,” Allen says. “Figure skating carries so many appealing aspects, with music, costumes, speed, intrigue: ‘Will he land that jump, or will he fall? How is she doing all that while being lifted in the air?’ When you put it all together -- when you’re able to take all the talent figure skating coaches around the world have developed -- you have a

pretty extraordinary show.”

In recent years, the tour has visited fewer cities, and it took a break from the U.S. in 2024. But in the post-Olympic glow, including Team USA’s team gold medal in Milano-Cortina, it has sold out several stops, prompting the addition of second shows in select venues.

“We’ve seen the highs, and we’ve seen the reversion to the mean,” Allen says. “Now we’re back at highs. (The current tour) has really been as successful from a ticket sales perspective as any tour in the last 25 years.”

Allen credits the charisma of Olympic and world champions like Liu, Malinin, and Chock and Bates, plus U.S. champions including Amber Glenn, Isabeau Levito and Jason Brown, with adding to SOI’s appeal.

“U.S. Figure Skating had developed these wonderful skaters, who then turned out to have fabulous personalities and are

interesting and different and relatable,” he says. “And NBC told their stories so brilliantly, not just during the two Olympic weeks in February, which was extraordinary, but over the last three or four years leading up to the Games. And we’re reaping the rewards of that.”

Sold out venues notwithstanding, Allen doesn’t think IMG’s role, and by extension his own, is solely to sell SOI tickets. Rather, it’s to build up the sport.

“This has been a long-term process for the entirety of the tour, and it’s really been my goal all along,” he says. “(Three-time U.S. champion) Michael Weiss said, ‘I knew I wanted to be a figure skater when I saw Scott Hamilton at center ice.’ That’s what I want, to have that girl or boy out there see our skaters and think, ‘I want to be him, I want to be her.’”



Congratulations to all the honorees and the many champions, visionaries, artists and supporters who honor Ice Theatre of New York by your presence and participation!

And a big thank you to tonight’s performers!

With appreciation and gratitude,

**Taffy Holliday
and Richard Katz**