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## The Roving Runner: One Actress, Many Characters

By **BRIAN FIDELMAN**

G. Paul Burnett/The New York Times Sarah Jones runs in Central Park with Brian Fidelman

It can be difficult to keep a straight face, or even stay upright, when you are running next to [Sarah Jones](#) and she suddenly becomes Chinese or Dominican or Kenyan. Or a Jewish grandmother.

Jones's [pitch-perfect accents and intonations](#), and her poignant take on the immigrant experience in her [one-woman shows](#), have [earned her wide acclaim](#) and a [Tony Award](#). It seems fitting, then, that she should be training for Sunday's New York City Marathon, a [race that showcases](#) New York's ethnic blend and includes thousands of runners from overseas.

Jones and I recently went for a seven-mile roving run through Central Park. We skipped the park's main asphalt loop and instead ran on the [soft bridle path](#), a surface Jones has been training on as much as possible to avoid injury. We began our run slowly near the beginning of the trail, in the southwest corner of the park near Columbus Circle.

It was cool and breezy, and dusk wasn't far off. Where, I asked, do those characters come from? Queens, of course.

"It started for me as a little kid," she said. "My grandmother on my mother's side of the family was very mixed up, in a great way. African-American, Caribbean, relatives in the Dominican Republic, and we'd all get together for Thanksgiving. German-American relatives, Irish-American, and the people I went to my first Seder with.

"The characters grow out of my experience as a New Yorker."

We continued along the path, establishing a nice rhythm as we passed through the dark tunnels under the West Side transverses and park entrances.

Jones, 35, is in the shape of her life. She finished the Staten Island half-marathon Oct. 11 in 1 hour 48 minutes, and typically trains at a pace of 8:20 to 8:30 per mile. She has a strong, fluid form. Except, that is, when she hunches over and runs like Lorraine Levine, the Jewish grandmother, with her legs kicking out.

"Sarah puts me in marathon, can you imagine?" she said in that spot-on voice, "and I says: Fine, I'll do it, I hope the weather isn't too bad. I love the running."

But for all the laughs, Jones has a serious commitment to social causes. She is running on the [Shoe4Africa team](#), which is raising money to build a public children's hospital in Kenya.

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### The Roving Runner

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Her coach, Toby Tanser, is the founder of Shoe4Africa, and one of her teammates is the actor Anthony Edwards, who played Dr. Mark Greene on the television series “E.R.”

The team also includes the Kenyan marathon great [Tegla Loroupe](#), whose [victories in New York](#) in 1994 and '95 made her a fan favorite.

“I get to run with [Tegla Loroupe!](#)” Jones said. “You won’t be able to see her, because I’m five feet wider and eight feet taller. But she’ll be there, running slowly with us.”

We ran under the park’s drive, then on the [outer path of the reservoir](#), curving east.

Jones would periodically break into character during our run, but it is something she does regularly. She said that typically she would pass someone, then say in her rapid-fire Dominican accent, “I think I recognize that guy from uptown.”

She practiced an Israeli accent and also presented a young Kenyan girl named Ana. As if she hadn’t covered enough ground, she said: “I’m working on Scottish. It’s very challenging.”

As we ran, Jones explained the difficulties in differentiating English and Australian vowels as she seamlessly moved from one accent to another.

“Watching too much ‘[Flight of the Conchords](#)’ is bad for your Australian,” she said in perfect Aussie-speak, before taking a linguistic turn to New Zealand.

We turned left at the northeast corner of the reservoir, passing the North Meadow before crossing back around to the West Side. It was becoming dark.

Every mile we ran, a beep would sound from Jones’s GPS device. She said she had been taking measure of her runs and plugging the device into her computer when she returned home.

Jones said we were running a bit slower than her normal pace, although we had picked up the pace from earlier. She had been out late the night before celebrating the opening of the one-man show “[County of Kings](#),” which her husband, Steve Colman, is producing.

We approached the bottom of the park but tacked on some distance to reach seven miles by following inner park paths and looping around the [Sheep Meadow](#). Jones was quickening the pace for our final stretch.

She described her toughest workout, when Tanser, her coach, surprised her by having her run hills when she thought she was finished for the day. A workout like that will remind her on race day that she has reserve fuel in the tank. But she knows that the marathon is about more than time and records.

“You’re putting forth this huge effort,” she said, in no particular accent, “and somebody you may never see again is yelling their heart out for you. They brought their kids out, and they have a sign, ‘You Can Do It.’ It’s really lovely.”