KEY PLAYER: KEVIN KINSELLA

The Industry's Top Showman ...

There may be a genetic explanation for why businessman Kevin Kinsella has earned a reputation as the "P. T. Barnum of biotech": His father was a Broadway actor, and his mother was a model with a top New York agency.

Kinsella, the founder of the La Jolla, California, genomics start-up Sequana Therapeutics and a raft of other biotechs, is one of the foremost popularizers of the genomics revolution. While many scientists seem compelled to show off the results of their hard labor with the most cluttered, confusing, and downright ugly slides imaginable, the 51-year-old Kinsella gleefully exploits the pop and sizzle of high-tech to make sure his take-home message is taken home. Consider his latest show for Sequana: With the help of a Power Macintosh computer hooked to speakers and a projector, he presents "From Gene to Screen," which includes excerpts from the movie *The Nutty Professor* and a photo of an island that morphs into a graph. During the presentation, he refers to the similarity between man and mouse as "the incredible likeness of beings" and the progress being made in genomics as leading to what he calls "the incredible shrinking genetic universe."

Whether Kinsella himself strains credibility depends, of course, on whom you ask. Tim Harris, Sequana's chief scientist and formerly director of biotechnology at the drug company Glaxo Wellcome, enjoys working with Kinsella. "He brings a lot of entrepreneurial flare to the operation," says Harris. "He said he'd raise the money if I put the science together. It's obviously more complicated, but it's a good paradigm: He doesn't interfere with what I do, and I don't interfere with what he does." One industry analyst who asks not to be quoted by name is less generous. "Sequana got put together by a marketing guy," says this critic, who calls Kinsella a "superhyper" and says his salesmanship has its limits. This analyst asserts, for example, that Sequana was too anxious to make deals with big drug companies and, in some cases, sold itself short.

DAVID STRICK/OUTLINE

Kinsella acknowledges that Sequana could have been more aggressive in some of the early collaborative deals it made, but the company—in part because of what *The New York Times* last June referred to as Kinsella's "great showmanship"—has fared much better both with pharmaceutical companies and on Wall Street than have several similar start-ups.

After earning an undergraduate degree in management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1967 and a master's from Johns Hopkins University in international relations, Kinsella raised millions as a fund-raiser for Tufts University and then MIT, which introduced him to the world of venture capitalism. In 1978, he moved from Boston to San Diego with, he says, "$250 to my name" and the dream of raising money to launch new high-tech companies. Kinsella finally became a venture capitalist in 1983, starting Avalon Ventures with a $400,000 loan from an old MIT friend. "In the space of 4 years, I had turned that into $4 million," boasts Kinsella in a two-page autobiography.

Avalon has started 16 biotechs, including Vertex Pharmaceuticals, Neurocrine Biosciences, and Pharmacopeia. When Avalon formed Sequana in 1993, Kinsella decided to run it himself, in part because he was tired of starting one company after another from scratch. Kinsella also was awed by the power of genomics. "Genomics," he declares with the heartfelt conviction of an impresario, "really is the foundation of all modern biology."

–Jon Cohen

KEY PLAYER: DANIEL COHEN

... And a Recent Recruit

Genome researcher Daniel Cohen has lived his life straddling different worlds. He is an accomplished pianist who has made his mark studying genes. He was born in Tunisia, but has spent the last 37 years in France. He built his career in the public sector, but has been criticized for trying to cut deals with industry. But last year, Cohen cast his lot with the private sector, joining the Paris-based genomics company Genset as head of genome research. "It was a problem to be on both sides," says Cohen. "You want at the same time to get the Nobel Prize and to make money. In the private sector, I'm much more relaxed and it's easier to do good science."

Cohen has been doing cutting-edge science since the early 1980s when, after completing his medical studies, he met the French physician and Nobel laureate Jean Dausset, and the two co-founded the Center for the Study of Human Polymorphism (CEPH) in Paris. As head of CEPH and, later, scientific director of the associated gene research lab Généthon, Cohen pioneered the use of automated techniques for mapping the location of genes on chromosomes at a time when many researchers were skeptical that this high-speed, "industrial" approach constituted real science.

The result of their labors—the first rough physical map of the human genome in 1993—sealed Cohen's reputation as a world player in this fast-breaking field. "Cohen is not a classic scientist," says a genome researcher who knows him well but asked not to be identified. "But most people would give him a lot of credit for the revolution in genome work."

C. VIOUJARD/GAMMA LIAISON

Last year, Cohen again made waves when he quit CEPH, which is supported largely by the French government, for Genset, an internationally prominent French biotech company that specializes in complex genetic diseases. Cohen says he decided to leave after budget cuts at CEPH: "I would have died scientifically if I had stayed." Indeed, his decision came after a number of unsuccessful attempts to keep the lab competitive through controversial collaborations with private industry (*Science*, 18 March 1994, p. 1552).

Cohen took most of CEPH's gene-mapping team with him to Genset, a move that involved delicate financial negotiations and considerable friction with his old mentor, Dausset. At Genset, Cohen says, he "will be able to really compete on a global level." The company has already raised some $100 million for genetic research through public offerings, and, with Cohen at the genetics research helm, it expects to raise more in the coming months.

Although Cohen finally has jumped with both feet into the private sector, his life still has its underlying tensions. No matter what he accomplishes scientifically, his real love remains the piano, he says. "In genetics there is no mystery, but music is all mystery." Still, he may be finding a way to resolve this conundrum too. Says Cohen, "I am the best geneticist of all musicians and the best musician of all geneticists."

–Michael Balter