

A Taste of Opera

Timeless music, drama earn some new fans

WHEN SHAWN ROY GRADUATED from UL Lafayette in 1980, he never dreamed he would someday return to the university to teach voice.

A talented bass baritone, he wanted nothing more than to sing professionally. He first toured the country with a



From left, Robin Gough, Shawn Roy and Michael Webb in Mozart's "Cosi Fan Tutte."

small opera. For the next 15 years, he performed extensively in the United States and abroad.

Roy was working in New York when he received a phone call in 1998 from an early mentor in Lafayette, vocal coach Pat Shelby. Would he consider applying for a faculty post at his alma mater?

By then, Roy was ready for a change. He applied and was hired as UL Lafayette's vocal instructor and director of opera and musical theater.

Roy is determined to keep opera alive on campus. It's probably the most challenging role of his entire career.

Last spring's triumphant performance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "The Magic Flute" by the UL Lafayette Opera

Theater and Acadiana Symphony Orchestra may have been a turning point. It was so successful that the university and symphony almost immediately decided to perform Gioacchino Rossini's "The Barber of Seville" in May 2007.

Lead roles for "The Magic Flute" had a UL Lafayette student cast, a professional cast and members of the community. Each cast was featured in two performances. The student cast also performed two shows for local school children, as well as all secondary roles. The opera was sung in English.

Roy is energized by students such as Corliss Smith, a UL Lafayette senior majoring in music education. "She walks around with the opera playing in her headphones all the time. She just loves it," he said.

Corliss had a supporting role in "The Magic Flute" and will perform in "The Barber of Seville." Her enthusiasm about opera is infectious.

She describes Mozart's "Magic Flute" as "awesome." And Rossini's "Barber of Seville"? It has "very flashy music," she observed. "It'll have a lot of little runs like..." She quickly trills a set of notes to illustrate her point. "It'll have a lot of little fast moving stuff like that."

Other students with parts in "The Barber of Seville" include: Nathan Abbott,

Stacy Broussard, Nicholas Manzo, Sasha Massey, Dana Donnell, Rafael Henry and Blake Duhon. It is the only scheduled opera performance in Lafayette in 2007.

Roy and Smith agree that performing an opera with professionals and a symphony is an invaluable experience for college students.

"It is especially a privilege to be able to do these operas as an undergrad. At larger schools, as an undergrad, you don't get to perform," Smith added.

Because an opera incorporates many art forms, its benefits extend beyond the Music Department. "The Magic Flute," for instance, was a



From left, Evan Melancon, Geraldine Hubbell, Birdie Koski, Christina Oliver, Brittan Blanchard and Joey Thibodeaux in "Cosi Fan Tutte" by Mozart.

production of the entire College of the Arts and the ASO. Students sang, danced, helped design and build sets, and assisted with lighting.

In the past few years, Roy has been



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first director. G. S. Beaman Griffin was the Guild's director from 1965 through 1985.

Operas such as Giacomo Puccini's "Tosca" and "La Boheme" once drew large audiences. More than 2,000 people saw Giuseppe Verdi's "Rigoletto" at the Lafayette Municipal Auditorium in 1962, for example. But opera's popularity had waned drastically by the time Roy began to teach.

"When I was a student

here, there was no symphony, there was no Performing Arts Society of Acadiana, no Broadway series. We had the Community Concert, with three events a year. USL's Opera Guild was the only one doing a show, a big opera or a big musical," he said. "One of our challenges now is attracting an audience because there are so many entertainment choices." The cost of mounting a full-scale opera has become an obstacle, as well.

But Roy plans to continue to introduce students to the beauty and power of a com-



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Performing in Mozart's "Magic Flute," were, from left: above, guest artist Andrew Funk; top right, Jennifer Mills and Corliss Smith; bottom left, Teri Anne Wyble, Kevin Lewis and Simone Sonnier; and bottom right, guest artist Matthew Edwards.

slowly rebuilding the opera program, collaborating with the Performing Arts Department and UL Lafayette Symphony Orchestra to offer contemporary musicals, such as "Les Miserables" and "Seussical the Musical." The Opera Theater and UL Lafayette Symphony Orchestra have performed operas every other year.

Collaboration with the ASO began when its music director, Mariusz Smolij, approached Roy about a possible partnership. Roy jumped at the chance. It would be the first large-scale operatic production on UL Lafayette's campus in many years.

Major productions such as last spring's "Magic Flute" were common at the university for about 25 years, thanks to the USL Opera Guild. The self-supporting organization was created in 1960 by Willis Ducrest, head of the School of Music from 1948 until 1977, and Bernard Erhart, the guild's



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plex art form that has been around since the late 1500s.

"It's a lot of work, but when you see students excited about it, about singing opera, it's worth it. It may be something they've never heard about. Then they get here, and by the end of the first year, they want to perform in one. And that's our job isn't it? As teachers?" ■

Back on Campus

What I learned after my first graduation from UL Lafayette • by *Katie Risher*

WHEN I WAS A KID, MY MOM and I played a little game. She would whisper in my ear, “Guess what day it is?” I would curl my ear into my shoulder against the tickle of her breath and, even though I knew the answer, I would whisper back, “What is it, Mama?” She always said, “It’s the first day of the rest of your life.”

Back then, I had no idea what she meant. It was just a ritual that we shared, but it still left a chill in my stomach. It was important, even if I didn’t know why.

Her words have stayed with me for all these years. What did she know that I didn’t? I think she was trying to tell me something she was only starting to grasp herself. That today, whatever day it is, can always be a new beginning.

It was a lesson I have taken to heart, and it is one of the reasons I decided to return to school last year as an undergraduate even though I already have a bachelor’s degree. I graduated from UL Lafayette in December 2000 in general studies, with a concentration in behavioral sciences and no idea what I would do next. It was not a pleasant feeling, but that was not entirely uncharacteristic of my college experience. I had several majors and many interests, but nothing stuck. I was a Jill of many trades, but a master of none.

I worked in social services for a while after graduation, applied to LSU’s School of Social Work, got in and turned the acceptance down. By then, I knew it was a terrible fit, career-wise and in all ways otherwise, for me. Nothing seemed to be working like I thought it should. I was in a state of flux and the uneasiness I felt would turn out to be something I had to learn to live with.

I spent the next couple of years trying to “find myself,” for lack of a

better cliché. And, if Dr. Cliff Huxtable is out there in the land of *Cosby Show* reruns asking his children how much “finding yourself” pays, I have the answer: not much. I worked in a pottery painting shop, learned how to meditate, wrote the first 200 pages of an as-yet

not using my intellectual potential and I was not preparing myself for a rewarding future. I wanted to be proud to say what my job was, and as time passed, doing so became increasingly more difficult.

His comments were not something I had not heard before. My parents supported me in my choices but their occasional questions and concerns let me know that they wanted something more for me. I was capable of something more.

I sent off for copies of my old GRE scores and started researching graduate programs that might suit me. I researched undergraduate programs, too.

I remembered a meeting with Dr. Phebe Hayes, dean of the College of General Studies, just before I received my first degree. I told her about my uncertainty about the future.

She suggested that I not rule out getting another undergraduate degree. I recalled her picking up her UL Lafayette course catalog, ruffling quickly through it and urging me to look at all the possibilities.

I was not ready for that then but four years later her voice came back to me and I picked up my course

catalog again. I spent weeks searching the Internet, making phone calls, going to meetings, trying to learn all I could about those possibilities. I eventually narrowed my choice to public relations. It was a field so very different from anything I had chosen years ago. But somehow, it fit.



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unfinished novel and got a dog. I was searching for something; I just did not know what.

One day, one of my best friends gently asked if this was to be my path. Was I going to continue to drift about, hoping to eventually find my way? I understood why he was asking. I was

I also learned that UL Lafayette has top-rated undergraduate and graduate public relations programs. I chose to become an undergraduate again because I felt like I had missed something my first time. I had been too shy, too obsessed with getting As, too afraid. I wanted a second chance.

It did not take long to realize that UL Lafayette would offer me that. It again said, "Bienvenue. We are glad to have you here."

I knew for sure that I made the right choice when I met Dr. Mike Maher, head of the Communication Department. His encouragement and knowledge of public relations were inspiring. He told me about internship opportunities and campaign class work. He showed me what my future could be if I should choose it.

I did choose it and it has been an amazing experience. I have heard profes-

sors explain communication concepts by describing their career experiences. I have professors and advisers who know me, encourage me, seek me out with new opportunities. I have worked in public relations with Hospice of Acadiana and the Games of Acadiana. I have this chance to work on a magazine. Several articles I have written are in print! It is everything I did not have the nerve to attempt before.

I am incredibly grateful for this second chance. A lot of the credit is due to my parents and family who have supported me in everything I have been through. Much is due, as well, to people at this university.

Writing this article has made me think about what I have learned from the curvy path I have taken so far. I learned that fear does not have to control my life. I know that I never want to forget where I come

from. And I learned that the game my mom and I used to play actually meant that each day holds a thousand second chances, a thousand opportunities for a fresh start. Now I know that even as I try to achieve balance, flux will always be there. The trick, I think, is to learn to embrace it.

I'm beginning to see promise almost everywhere I look lately. I see it in my new nephew and godson now. He was born in October, so I know he can't understand me yet, but for practice, the other day I held him close and whispered, "Just so you know, it's always the first day of the rest of your life." Then I pulled a little Ragin' Cajun cap, with its giant red pom-pom, onto his little head. No pressure, I promise. Just enthusiasm. ■

Katie Risher is student editor of La Louisiane.

STUDENTS' SATELLITE EDGES CLOSER TOWARD LAUNCH INTO ORBIT

AS LA LOUISIANE WAS GOING TO PRESS, the immediate fate of a small satellite built by UL Lafayette students was hinging on some final shakedown tests.

The device was undergoing tests in California to make sure it meets standards for vibration, heat and thermal extremes.

Best case scenario: the "picosatellite," which weighs about two pounds, will be allowed to take a ride on a Russian intercontinental ballistic missile in December.

"If we don't pass the tests, we don't go. I'm confident we'll make it," said Dr. Robert Henry, head of the William Hansen Hall Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at UL Lafayette. He has worked with the students on the Cajun Advanced Picosatellite Experiment for the past three years.

The UL Lafayette picosatellite was supposed to have been carried into outer space by an ICBM from the Republic of Kazakhstan this summer. But it got bumped from the flight.

That turned out to be a lucky break.

Henry explained that the ICBM had been launched

successfully about 200 times before. But in July, it crashed 200 kilometers down range of the launch site.

"If our satellite had been on there, it would have ended up in a crater in the Republic of Kazakhstan. So, in one sense, we were fortunate to be bumped," he said.



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"There were about 15 other satellites from around the world that went down in flames."

If the CAPE satellite makes it into outer space and settles into orbit, it will be the first working satellite to be designed, built and maintained by students at a Louisiana university.

It will circle the Earth every 90 minutes at about 17,000 mph while transmitting data. It will travel in Lower Earth Orbit, which is about 60 to 450 nautical miles above the Earth's surface.

The UL Lafayette students will track the satellite on a large display board that has been constructed in Madison Hall.

The CAPE is associated with programs at Stanford University and California Polytechnic State University. Cal Poly conducted the tests that would show whether the UL Lafayette picosatellite could withstand the launch without damaging the missile that would carry it. ■



A team of UL Lafayette engineering students has spent the past three years developing a small satellite with the help of some advisers. Shown, from left, are: Robert Brown; Nick Pugh, adviser; Jonathan Harrist; Jacob Delahoussaye; Jason LaBerteaux; Dr. Robert Henry, adviser; Jonathan Wagner; and Wade Falcon.

TRAVIS GAUTHIER

Good PR

Local groups benefit from graduating seniors' hard work • by Katie Risher

WHAT DO YOU CALL A THOUSAND lawyers at the bottom of the sea? A good start. Jokes such as this are familiar to most people. After all, nobody likes lawyers, right?

Not so, according to research conducted in the spring by UL Lafayette's senior public relations campaign management class.

The class worked with the Lafayette Parish Bar Association to help counter what the association believed was a negative opinion of local attorneys. Students' findings from surveys, personal interviews and focus groups, however, did not support that belief.

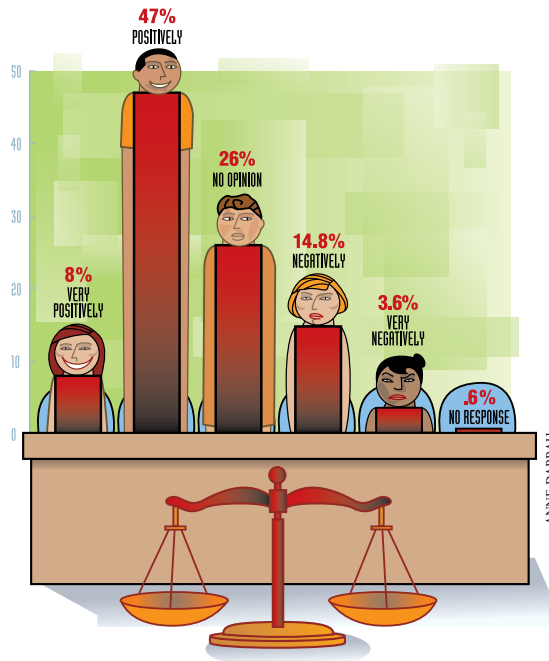
The class found that, in general, lawyers have a much higher status than the LPBA expected. Its research showed that attorneys are viewed "very positively" by 8 percent of residents, "positively" by 47 percent, and "neutrally" by 26 percent. So, a total of 81 percent of respondents had "neutral" to "very positive" impressions of lawyers.

Dr. Sandra Duhé, assistant professor and coordinator of the public relations program, led the class through the project. In a recent interview, she noted the necessity of research for successful campaigns.

"It really underscored the importance of research because had we just gone with intuition, we would have done something that was totally counter to what public opinion of attorneys and the association was. That's what happens when you guess, and that's why we preach research so much. Good public relations is based in research. It's always the first step."

The university's Institutional Review Board must approve all student research before it can be conducted.

In May, the senior class presented its findings and made recommendations



Local lawyers fared well in a public opinion poll conducted by a UL Lafayette public relations class earlier this year.

to the LPBA. They included implementing a biannual seminar to educate the public, using the LPBA web site to make it easier for the public to find an attorney in a certain field of practice, and beginning a job shadow program for high school students. Students produced campaign books for the LPBA that contained step-by-step guides for implementing the recommendations.

The campaign management class is a capstone course for graduating seniors.

"The idea is that it's not a lecture class, but rather, students are expected to come in, roll up their sleeves and apply what they've learned in their public relations studies so far," Duhé said.

After an initial meeting with a client, the class determines its main areas

of concentration. Once the client gives its approval, students follow the ROPES process, which means they first conduct research, then set objectives, design programming and follow up with evaluation. Stewardship is the final step. It is an often forgotten, but vital part of public relations that recognizes that it is easier to keep a friend than it is to make a new one, according to Duhé.

Throughout the semester, the class continues to meet with the client to ensure that its work is on target with the client's goals. "If the client says, 'There is no way we would ever invest the time to do that,' or it's logistically not possible, then it's off the table. We're not going to spend time developing something that's not going to be used," Duhé said.

Due to the quality of work done by these campaigns classes, there is usually a waiting list of potential clients.

Under Duhé's guidance, classes in the past few years have worked with UL Lafayette's Office of Academic Affairs, United Way of Acadiana, UL Lafayette's Center for Business and Information Technologies and the UL Lafayette Alumni Association. In Spring 2007, the class will focus on creating awareness for the new Family Justice Center, an outreach organization that will serve the needs of victims of domestic violence. It is modeled after a center recently established in Monroe and is the result of collaboration among many local agencies, including Faith House and Lafayette Consolidated Government. ■