

Stepping Out

Students sing, dance and animate their way into professional careers

By GAIL MATSUNAGA gmatsunaga@fullerton.edu

They have performed at the Hollywood Bowl, toured with Andrea Bocelli, pitched animation story ideas to Nickelodeon Studios, entertained concert-goers in Europe and introduced numerous Front & Center headliners through song and dance numbers. Not your typical laboratory and research settings, but for many students in the visual and performing arts, these and other performances and programs afford them opportunities to gain further 'real world' knowledge and experience that go beyond their daily curricula.

"The students who perform in Front & Center and Vision & Visionaries have to be very strong dancers and singers," said Susan Hallman, chair and professor of theatre and dance. "Those events are not part of the Department of Theatre and Dance season. The students audition for the events and rehearse around other department productions and classes."

Auditioning for the Chamber Choir, said Robert Istad, assistant professor of music, "is a very intensive process, very competitive."

The choir has performed at the Hollywood Bowl with John Williams, recorded music for an opera and toured — with the University Singers — with Andrea Bocelli and the Boston Pops. Next summer, they will perform with the Chamber Orchestra in



"Students are getting professional experience as undergraduates. Imagine being 20 years old and singing with the Boston Pops!"

— ROBERT ISTAD

Eastern Europe, making an appearance at the Liszt Academy.

Touring, Istad said, provides a realistic lesson about being professional singers.

"They get on a plane at 6 a.m., eat at the arena, then perform," he said. "It's a real eye-opener to see that professional musicians go from city to city and perform the same piece over and over. The students learn that they have to be hydrated and rested; and on this upcoming Eastern European tour, they're going to be reviewed."

Istad has been mentoring graduate student Marie Bucoy, who has been singing with the Chamber Choir since her sophomore year, and hopes to conduct at a university when she graduates. In addition to working closely with her mentor, the experience has allowed her an opportunity to conduct the group in performance.

Touring is also part of the jazz program, said Charles D. Tumlinson, professor of music and director of the program. The university boasts several jazz groups, but, Jazz Ensemble I, directed

by Tumlinson, and Jazz Combo I, directed by William Cunliffe, assistant professor of music, "get the lion's share of performances," Tumlinson said.

The groups have played at Steamers Cafe in Fullerton, one of the top jazz clubs in the region, and have won top honors at the Reno Jazz Festival. And, when the Los Angeles-based "Ellen DeGeneres Show" prepared to head to the Big Apple to tape some



Theatre and dance students performing at last year's Front & Center event.

PHOTO BY PATRICK O'DONNELL

shows, the Jazz Ensemble performed "New York, New York" during DeGeneres' send-off.

Animation students also are regularly exposed to professionals in their field. Last year, a handful of students took a rare opportunity to pitch their 60-second animated short ideas to Nickelodeon Animation Studios. Three Titans won scholarships to develop and produce their works, which have aired on the cable channel as one-minute "bumpers" between shows.

"We also get calls from small companies with specific needs or skill sets; positions that require more of a filtering process," said Dana Lamb, professor of art. "We'll reach out to certain students and send them to these companies."

"We do have faculty engaged in research, but much of the work here is different," said Jerry Samuelson, dean of the College of the Arts. "Some of our programs require internships, and we

bring in guest artists who work with students. Our theater and dance students did a staged reading of 'I Married Wyatt Earp' earlier this year, and the author was so impressed that we got to present the West Coast premiere. They're getting to work first-hand with the writer."

In October, Keith Brion, who specializes in recreating John Phillip Souza concerts, worked with the Wind Symphony and conducted them in a performance in Meng Hall.

Following the performance, Samuelson said, "one of the students said to me, 'I've been playing Souza all my life, but I learned more this week about Souza and his music than all the years playing him.'"

Added Istad: "Students are getting professional experience as undergraduates. Imagine being 20 years old and singing with the Boston Pops!" *inside*