“Con Brio” Volume 1

A publication of the MUSIC DEPARTMENT of FURMAN University Greenville, South Carolina
Welcome to the inaugural edition of “Con Brio,” Furman Music’s dynamic new publication designed to give prospective students and their parents, music teachers, alumni, friends and members of the community a glimpse into the lively, diverse musical life of our gifted students, faculty and alumni. The title, “Con Brio” (“With Spirit/vitality”) fits, as each year, from September until early June, Furman’s studios, classrooms, libraries, practice rooms, rehearsal halls, recital hall, auditorium, chapel, football field and amphitheater are filled with a dizzying array of musical activity.

From utterances of a complex, newly learned musical language in theory classrooms to focused development of technique and musical imagery in the applied music studios; from highly acclaimed premieres of new music to curious and creative student composers and researchers; from old-world surroundings and newly made connections to electronic sparks of digital studio and laboratory; from cool, intense jazz improvisation to compelling, pulsing sonorities of symphonic chorus and orchestra, Furman Music creates, re-creates, explores and performs “con brio.”

The magazine format, likewise, seems to fit. Because it would be difficult to include all aspects of our musical life in one publication, we have chosen to highlight representative happenings and people, and then encourage readers to explore our comprehensive, redesigned music Web site for more information. This attractive, interactive site contains details about degree programs, scholarship opportunities, audition and application requirements, musical opportunities for non-majors, faculty profiles, sound and video recordings of student and faculty performances, alumni activities and a schedule of musical events. Our hope is that “Con Brio” serves as a compelling invitation for you to come and take part, whether as a student or as an audience member, in the spirited essence of Furman Music.

William Thomas, Chair
Music Department
Furman University
Music for sophomore music education major Ben Moore is, first and foremost, a joyful noise unto the Lord. "I grew up in church because my dad is a pastor," he explains, "Now I'm the director of music at our church when I'm not at Furman." Ben credits the church for giving him his first exposure to music, and says he still loves Gospel music because "that's where my roots are."

Perhaps those church roots are what helped to inspire a strong desire to give back. Ben says that while he hopes to pursue a career as a classical vocalist, he would also like to teach high school chorus. "I did some student teaching when I was in high school, and I really enjoyed it," he says. "I've always loved kids. My mom ran a daycare center, so I've been around kids all my life." He believes in the importance of school music education programs, saying he views them not only as a way to plant music in a child's heart, but also as a way to instill values and morals. "Some kids aren't lucky enough to get that growing up," he says.

Since Ben arrived at Furman, the music department has helped him to grow through a mixture of encouragement and discipline. "I came knowing that, being a music major, I was going to have a very rigorous schedule and have to learn to budget my time. Since I've been here it's been more of a hands-on learning experience seeing what it takes to develop my talent and my art, but it's all worth it."

So what makes it worthwhile? According to Ben, it's the support of the Furman faculty. "Sometimes you may be feeling down and feeling like you're not going anywhere or improving like you need to, but then you go and your voice teacher encourages you. It's a great feeling."

But it's not all smooth sailing. The music department also has its share of hazards, which he says he's personally experienced. "I was in studio class for my voice lessons. There were 15-20 people there in Daniel Recital Hall and one of the teachers was having me do something to help me with my singing. She had me running up and down the steps, and I tripped and fell in front of everyone," he says, laughing.

It's a small price to pay, though, for all the opportunities the department has afforded him. During his freshman year, Ben was selected for a solo in the annual Church Music Conference hosted by Furman. And one of his fondest memories was when he had the chance to meet Daniel Washington, a Furman alumnus who is now on the faculty at the University of Michigan. He came back to Furman to teach a master class, and he worked with me. He told me I had a great voice and encouraged me to consider Michigan for graduate school," he remembers.

When he does have downtime from the rigors of the music department, Ben says he spends it hanging out with his friends. He also plans to get involved with the Heller Service Corps in a further effort to give back to the community, and he adds, "of course, there's always church on Sundays."

To hear vocal groups on-line, go to <www.musicatfurman.com> and click on mp3s.
What’s life like as a music major at Furman?
Mark: Busy.
Kelsy: It’s very difficult to balance everything.
Barret: You spend a lot of time in this building with the same people almost every day.
Ben: It’s more of a community than most other majors provide.
Barret: Our day is a lot longer than anyone else’s.
Mark: When other people are out playing Frisbee, you’re practicing.

What are you guys looking to do after graduation?
Kelsy: I’m going to grad school. I’m going to USC for music ed.
Barret: I want to go to grad school and get a master’s in performance.
Ben: Most of the students at Furman really seem like they’re looking toward graduate school. They’re pretty academically-minded.

What do you guys do outside of music?
(Kaughter)
Kelsy: Nothing…?
Ben: There are tons of clubs on campus.
Mark: Barrett and I play tennis... well, Barrett likes to play tennis.

What music class has influenced you the most?
Kelsy: My music instrumental methods class. It was in the fall of my senior year and it’s the class that tells you everything to do [as a teacher]. There were only four of us in there, and it was a whole lot of fun. Dr. Hicken was a great teacher. It incorporated a whole lot of different practical aspects rather than just history or theory.
Barret: for me it would be my private lessons with Dr. Malvern. You’d think we would go in there and just drill trumpet the whole time, but he can talk about pretty much any subject.
Mark: I think my favorite thing is not necessarily a class as much as playing in the saxophone quartet. That’s the kind of playing I really enjoy—getting together, working on some pieces, practicing as much as we want to, taking it to the level we want it to be.

What music faculty member has influenced you the most?
Mark: I’m taking lessons with Dr. Olson in addition to being in the jazz ensemble and the saxophone quartet. He’s definitely been the most influential, because he expects a lot out of people... which is a good thing. All times it can be taxing, but it’s the long run it’s been really good for me.
Kelsy: I’d say probably Dr. Hicken and Dr. Joiner, both the ensemble directors. Dr. Hicken really expects a lot out of you. You don’t really think about your ensemble being the primary thing you’re working on. You’d rather work on your solo stuff. And he really influences you to engage more in your ensemble stuff. I didn’t like Dr. Joiner at first; I thought he was mean. But as the years went on he was a really large influence. He’s a wonderful teacher.

Maggie: For me, it’s been Cynthia Hopkins. She’s taught me how to work hard. Like a lot of these other teachers, she expects a lot out of you. For her that means practicing at least three hours a day six days a week. I’ve never had that from a teacher before. And it’s made me a better player. I can’t wait to see how it turns out three years from now when I’m ready to take graduate school auditions.
Ben: I think Dr. Olson and Dr. Hutton. They show you they really love what they’re doing. They expect you to work really hard and just do your best and they’ll work with you.

What music majors offer a glimpse of what life is really like for those who inhabit the music building at Furman.

Maggie Stapleton ’06
Clemson, SC.

Ben Gaskins ’06
Duluth, Ga.

Kelsey Mennel ’05
Conyers, Ga.

Mark Langford ’08
Spartanburg, SC.

Barret Newman ’08
Salem, SC.

Maggie Stapleton ’06
Clemson, SC.

Ben Gaskins ’06
Duluth, Ga.

Kelsey Mennel ’05
Conyers, Ga.

Mark Langford ’08
Spartanburg, SC.

Barret Newman ’08
Salem, SC.

Maggie Stapleton ’06
Clemson, SC.

Ben Gaskins ’06
Duluth, Ga.

Kelsey Mennel ’05
Conyers, Ga.

Mark Langford ’08
Spartanburg, SC.

Barret Newman ’08
Salem, SC.

Maggie Stapleton ’06
Clemson, SC.
Mary-Mitchell Campbell

I have been fortunate to work with luminaries such as Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Jack Nicholson, Robin Williams and Paul Newman. As a music major I was required to take orchestration. Little did I know at that time that I would find myself orchestrating and arranging for conductors and shows in Broadway theatres. My theatre experience at Furman benefited me immensely as well. I started producing and directing student musicals during college to raise money for charities, and through these activities I really found my life’s direction. I discovered how important it was to use my musical skills to educate and raise money for worthy causes. While serving as a music director for large-scale benefits in places like Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall and the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles, I have been fortunate to work with luminaries such as Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Jack Nicholson, Robin Williams and Paul Newman.

Going to a challenging liberal arts college broadened my perspective on the world, which prepared me for the challenges of working abroad and immersing myself in a variety of foreign cultures. I learned how to focus at Furman, how to concentrate my creative energies. I am forever grateful for the education and experience I received during my time there.

Furman students have carried on the tradition of ambitious student-produced musicals started by Mary-Mitchell Campbell. Last year’s production was “Ragtime.” As for Mary-Mitchell, she recently embarked on a concert tour with Broadway and television star Kristin Chenoweth.

Most students bid farewell to Furman with a walk down the Mall and a flip of the tassel on their commencement day. That sort of ending didn’t sit well with alum Jay Bocoack. A true musician, he stepped back into the spotlight for an encore.

“I’ve been hooked on Furman since the first day I got here,” he says with a smile.

Bocoack completed a master’s degree in music at Northeast Louisiana University after graduating from Furman. He currently serves as director of Furman’s marching band, the Paladin Regiment. He credits his own student experience at Furman as a foundation for his role today:

“You definitely understand what the students expect of you,” he says. “That perspective comes from being on both sides, as a student and then an instructor.”

Bocoack feels strongly that the band program, and music in general, is an important part of university life.

“Our program serves three functions in the community. First, it’s academic in the sense of music education. Secondly, it’s a feature of the athletic component of the school’s mission. Most importantly, it’s a student activity that builds community, and students should really take ownership of music here. It’s part of the fabric of this school.”

Bocoack sees the high level of participation among students as an indicator of the program’s strength, especially given the numbers fielded by larger universities.

“Most students…bids farewell to Furman with a walk down the Mall and a flip of the tassel on their commencement day. That sort of ending didn’t sit well with alum Jay Bocoack. True musician, he stepped back into the spotlight for an encore.

“I’ve been hooked on Furman since the first day I got here,” he says with a smile.

Bocoack completed a master’s degree in music at Northeast Louisiana University after graduating from Furman. He currently serves as director of Furman’s marching band, the Paladin Regiment. He credits his own student experience at Furman as a foundation for his role today.

“You definitely understand what the students expect of you,” he says. “That perspective comes from being on both sides, as a student and then an instructor.”

Bocoack feels strongly that the band program, and music in general, is an important part of university life.

“Our program serves three functions in the community. First, it’s academic in the sense of music education. Secondly, it’s a feature of the athletic component of the school’s mission. Most importantly, it’s a student activity that builds community, and students should really take ownership of music here. It’s part of the fabric of this school.”

Bocoack sees the high level of participation among students as an indicator of the program’s strength, especially given the numbers fielded by larger universities.

“Most students…bids farewell to Furman with a walk down the Mall and a flip of the tassel on their commencement day. That sort of ending didn’t sit well with alum Jay Bocoack. True musician, he stepped back into the spotlight for an encore.

“I’ve been hooked on Furman since the first day I got here,” he says with a smile.

Bocoack completed a master’s degree in music at Northeast Louisiana University after graduating from Furman. He currently serves as director of Furman’s marching band, the Paladin Regiment. He credits his own student experience at Furman as a foundation for his role today.

“You definitely understand what the students expect of you,” he says. “That perspective comes from being on both sides, as a student and then an instructor.”

Bocoack feels strongly that the band program, and music in general, is an important part of university life.

“Our program serves three functions in the community. First, it’s academic in the sense of music education. Secondly, it’s a feature of the athletic component of the school’s mission. Most importantly, it’s a student activity that builds community, and students should really take ownership of music here. It’s part of the fabric of this school.”

Bocoack sees the high level of participation among students as an indicator of the program’s strength, especially given the numbers fielded by larger universities.

“Most students…bids farewell to Furman with a walk down the Mall and a flip of the tassel on their commencement day. That sort of ending didn’t sit well with alum Jay Bocoack. True musician, he stepped back into the spotlight for an encore.

“I’ve been hooked on Furman since the first day I got here,” he says with a smile.

Bocoack completed a master’s degree in music at Northeast Louisiana University after graduating from Furman. He currently serves as director of Furman’s marching band, the Paladin Regiment. He credits his own student experience at Furman as a foundation for his role today.

“You definitely understand what the students expect of you,” he says. “That perspective comes from being on both sides, as a student and then an instructor.”

Bocoack feels strongly that the band program, and music in general, is an important part of university life.

“Our program serves three functions in the community. First, it’s academic in the sense of music education. Secondly, it’s a feature of the athletic component of the school’s mission. Most importantly, it’s a student activity that builds community, and students should really take ownership of music here. It’s part of the fabric of this school.”

Bocoack sees the high level of participation among students as an indicator of the program’s strength, especially given the numbers fielded by larger universities.
Eric is hoping to be able to communicate with an even larger audience when he releases the CD he finished recording this summer. The CD is a collaborative effort with high school friend and keyboard player Jacob Craig. It's a project he says was a long time coming, but which was well worth the time and labor.

"Our main focus on this album was the arrangements," Eric says. "We wanted to do spiritual music, but not in a way people had heard it before. We took a bunch of old hymns and arranged them for a more contemporary feel." Eric wrote two songs for the album, and he and Jacob are now focusing on scheduling concerts in their area to promote the CD.

Eric became interested in jazz when he started improvising on the music performed by his high school marching band. "That was when I really started to love music," he confesses. Since Furman’s jazz program is fairly new, he says it has been an exciting experience to be a part of the early stages of a growing jazz program. He’s also enjoyed the opportunity to study under Matt Olson, director of Furman’s Jazz band. "He’s played with all the top bands in the Chicago and Greenville area. I’ve made such leaps and bounds since I started studying with him."

Eric hadn’t decided on a music performance major until after he’d already committed to coming to Furman. "It was a tough decision to make," he admits "because a lot of people told me there’s no future in jazz. I knew it was what I wanted to do, so I had to make the decision and take that leap."

Despite the risks, Eric feels his future will be relatively secure thanks to Furman’s liberal arts approach. "No matter what I end up doing, I’ll be prepared," he says.

If you’re a dedicated video-game player and like to hit the gridiron playing EA’s NCAA Football, you’ve already played, you’ve already heard Matt Olson. He’s one of the saxophone players belting out the Furman fight song when the Paladins score a touchdown. That may not fit your idea of what a typical college professor would be doing. But if you talk with him for long, you’ll find that there are two major themes in his life. "For me, it’s very simple," he says. "I like playing. I like teaching."

And that’s what he’s done. Originally from Wisconsin, he spent three years in Chicago as a freelance jazz musician, teaching lessons, playing gigs. He did recording sessions for Bud Light and EA Video Games, all while working on his doctoral degree in music at the University of Illinois, a DMA in ‘classical’ saxophone performance. On weekends you might find him around Greenville playing at festivals and clubs with a guitarist, bass player and drummer, all adjunct faculty members at Furman. He’s also just recorded a CD in Phoenix, which includes a couple of his own tunes, some standard jazz and some “not-so-standard repertoire.”

Olson is just finishing his fourth year at Furman, where his job has been “more or less to create a jazz program.” There had always been a jazz ensemble at Furman, but Matt is the first faculty member ever hired as a specialist in this important American music genre.

And the idea of jazz at Furman is taking off. The jazz ensemble has 18-20 students, and there are two or three smaller jazz combos as well. AFS (Association of Furman Students) has recognized the jazz ensemble as a student organization and provided funding for a jazz festival and extra equipment. "I think that speaks to the buzz on campus," says Olson.

In addition to directing the jazz ensemble and combos, Olson teaches several courses that focus on jazz. Those include an improvisation class, which usually has 10-12 students. "They play, get feedback, and learn," says Olson. The follow-up for that class is Applied Jazz Improvisation, which is basically private lessons, he says. The Jazz Age, which covers the history and styles of jazz, is tailored to non-majors and fills a general education requirement. Olson has had good response from students on this course, and he sees it as “building an audience for jazz.”

He also gets to know students during lessons. "We’re lucky; we do a lot of one-on-one teaching" he says. "Music students are dealing with more scheduling issues than any other students on campus. Some thrive in that; some don’t." Olson does teach a jazz class which covers the history and styles of jazz, is tailored to non-majors and fills a general education requirement. Olson has had good response from students on this course, and he sees it as “building an audience for jazz.”

When you talk with him, you can tell Olson has a passion for jazz and a passion for teaching. "I have a pretty good idea of what it takes to play this music. And that’s what I try to get students to do," he says. "Jazz is an old-fashioned handed-down craft. I had a whole lot of teachers who have shared it with me; I’m now in a position to share it. There’s a responsibility to pass it on, to keep it alive and viable."

"That’s what jazz musicians do — we share what we’ve learned."
If you wander into Daniel Chapel, the Hartness Organ is sure to catch your eye. This magnificent instrument, Opus 121 of the renowned C.B. Fisk Organbuilders, was custom built and voiced for a room described by the legendary conductor Robert Shaw as “one of the most acoustically outstanding performance spaces in America.”

The Hartness Organ features three manuals (keyboards) and pedal, and has 42 stops (or voices) drawn from a number of historical organ building traditions. It employs direct mechanical or “tracker” key action, which affords the organist the most precise control of the speech of the pipes. The instrument’s stoplist provides for outstanding performance of solo organ literature from all historical periods; colorful, dynamically flexible accompanying of voices and instruments; and strong leadership of congregational singing.

From the ethereal whisper of the voix céleste stop to the floor-rattling splendor of full organ, the Hartness Organ sounds forth every year in exciting solo recitals by university organist Charles Boyd Tompkins and prominent guest artists. Organists of national and international reputation appear as part of the Posey and Jean Belcher Endowed Organ Recital Series, and in conjunction with the annual Furman University Church Music Conference. Recent recitalists have included Todd Wilson, virtuoso American organist and Chair of the Organ Department at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and Andrew Henderson, Director of Music at New York City’s Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church and First Prize Winner of the 2003 Royal Canadian College of Organists National Organ Playing Competition. Opus 121 is also heard regularly in concerts with choirs and instrumental ensembles, in the weekly university worship service, and in special settings such as Furman’s beloved Service of Lessons and Carols, held each December.

The Hartness Organ was provided by Tom and Edna Hartness, generous friends of Furman and its music program.

Furman’s spectacular C.B. Fisk pipe organ is housed in a freestanding organ case made of African mahogany. Construction of the instrument encompassed more than 24,000 hours of work, voicing (the adjustment of each of the 2,900-plus pipes for proper volume and tone color in the chapel’s acoustics) was accomplished over six months. The 2004-05 dedication season of the Hartness Organ included recitals by renowned organists Olivier Latry (Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris), David Higgs (Eastman School of Music), John Ferguson (St. Olaf College), and Furman alumna Edie Johnson ’96 (St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Indianapolis). The dedication year concluded with the South Carolina premiere of Olivier Messiaen’s monumental masterpiece Meditations on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, narrated by J. Michael Barone, host of American Public Media’s Pipedreams radio program.

Charles Boyd Tompkins, professor of music and university organist (pictured at the organ console), is one of the outstanding concert organists on the American scene today. He received the doctor of musical arts degree in organ performance, and the prized Performer’s Certificate, from the Eastman School of Music as a student of the late Russell Saunders.
MUSIC LIBRARY
One of Furman Music’s main attractions, the library 
offers extensive research tools, including indices, music 
dictionaries and encyclopedias, composers’ catalogues, 
and six online databases.

It’s strange that, for all the obsessing I do about subject 
matter and teaching, my most vivid memories of 
Furman concern the students themselves. When I 
took a job interview, for instance, I discovered 
that some of my students actually cared about what 
I said to them. I mean, we treated them like 
fraternity brothers, and they actually cared about 
what we said to them. It was strange.

In my early days, students still celebrated “surviving” sophomore theory each spring. And 
at the end of my first year of trying to fill the shoes of my predecessor (the esteemed pedagogue, Charlotte Smith), I first generation of 
sophomores created a feature-length video montage (read “roast”) 
chronicling the anticipated whereabouts and fates of my charges 
twenty years hence, as well as detailing a few of my idiosyncrasies. 

In 2002 Mark Kilstofte was one of two American composers awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome (Rome Prize), which allowed him to live, 
work and study in the Eternal City for a year. Sponsored by the American 
Academy in Rome, the Rome Prize 
provides fellowships for American 
artists and scholars in a variety 
of fields. Kilstofte, pictured here 
with his wife Leslie, joined the 
Furman music faculty in 1992 
and has won a number of major 
composing awards.

Furman is a unique place. With just 2800 students, 
the small liberal arts school supports exceptional 
academics and a nationally known music program. They 
make the most of the skilled and knowledgeable faculty 
and students in the nation; and Furman graduates have a 
very successful track record in their graduate studies at 
some of the finest schools in the country.

Graduates from last year’s class are attending graduate 
programs at Boston University, Yale, New England 
Conservatory, Florida State University, University of Colorado, 
Northwestern University, among others. Furman, in short, 
takes her music seriously, and that requires not only the 
talent, but also the resources to turn out highly trained 
and prepared graduates.

From the new Fisk organ, to the comprehensive music 
library, to the state-of-the-art, multimedia Harper 
Hall, Furman has endowed its music department with 
incredible facilities. These resources, combined with a 
superb educational program, arm our students with 
the skills and experience necessary to compete with 
musicians on a national level.
A Beautiful Life. And sure enough, just past the Roman Aqueduct they discovered the beautifully restored buildings that house McGehee’s brainchild, a facility founded specifically for American college and university study-abroad programs in the fine arts. Since this 2004 visit, a sea of administrative and logistical details has been successfully navigated, and the Academia’s first fully music-oriented program is set to take place next fall.

“Guido lived here”

Any student of music history will recall at least a mention of the gifted, groundbreaking monk, Guido d’Arezzo. Living around the turn of the 11th century AD, Guido is credited with creating a system of musical notation and syllabication that became the basis of our current system of scales and music staves. So it is more than fitting for Music 41 (“Antiquity through 1750”), the first upper-level course in Furman’s music history sequence, to be taught in the region that is home to many of the seminal developments of early Western music. Frequent day trips to nearby Tuscan hill towns and to Florence, Rome and Sienna will give students a feel for modern Italian life as well as a historical cultural context. Overnight outings to concerts, operas and recitals in Milan, Venice and Lucca will further enrich the cultural feast. Furman faculty members Christopher Hutton and Gary Malvern, who will switch places at mid term, will lead the music history seminar, direct independent studies and accompany the students in their Italian explorations.

Applied music instruction for all students will be provided by Italian music teachers, likely including members of the faculty at the conservatory in Florence, a 45-minute train ride away. Chamber music and solo performances will be presented in a variety of beautiful venues, including historical churches, theaters and opera houses in the region. The term abroad will also include Music 37 (“Basic Conducting”) and an intensive five-week immersion course in Italian.

Furman music faculty members agree that this study abroad experience fills a long recognized void in Furman’s music offerings. Initial response from the students has been very positive, and the hope is that demand will be sufficient to allow offering this experience annually, primarily to students in their junior year.

Imagine a crystalline fall morning and a panorama of the timeless hills of southern Tuscany—olive groves and vineyards bathed in the region’s legendary golden light. Imagine the sounds of a lively Italian town coming to life in the distance, and the hum of a farm tractor pulling a grape-laden wagon from the vineyard across the ridge. This very scene, just outside the ancient town of Arezzo, snug in its Roman walls, is the perspective from the 14th century Villa Codina, summer home to a succession of powerful bishops, and the current home of the Academia dell’Arte, setting of Furman’s newest study abroad program—a music-oriented fall term in Italy. Twelve fortunate Furman juniors and seniors, chosen by a rigorous application and interview process, and two Furman faculty members will make up the inaugural group that will spend the 2006 fall term in Arezzo.

“Turn right just past the aqueduct” was the final line in the directions that Scott McGehee, the director of the three-year-old Academia dell’Arte, had provided Music Department Chair William Thomas and his wife, Jane, last March, as they navigated their way from the sleepy Chianti village where they were staying through the (relatively) bustling mid-sized city of Arezzo, from where the Academy Award-winning film, “A Beautiful Life.” And sure enough, just past the Roman Aqueduct they discovered the beautifully restored buildings that house McGehee’s brainchild, a facility founded specifically for American college and university study-abroad programs in the fine arts. Since that 2004 visit, a sea of administrative and logistical details has been successfully navigated, and the Academia’s first fully music-oriented program is set to take place next fall.

STUDY ABROAD

To learn more about the Study Abroad Program in Arezzo, go to <www.furman.edu/depts/music/studyabroad.htm>
Thomas Joiner joined the Furman faculty in 1994 and serves as professor of violin as well as area coordinator of Strings and Orchestral Studies.

There is nothing like opening night at the opera. On May 3, 2005, the combined forces of the Furman Symphony Orchestra, the Furman Singers, the Furman Men’s and Women’s Chorales, twelve student soloists and an expectant audience of 1,200 joined conductor Thomas Joiner for an evening of orchestral, solo and choral highlights from the world of opera. The concert, a year in the planning, concluded the 2004–2005 Sound Quality concert series sponsored by Furman’s Department of Music.

Early in the planning stages professors Thomas Joiner (Furman Symphony Orchestra), Bingham Vick (Furman Singers) and Bruce Schoonmaker (Furman Opera Theater) worked closely to select appropriate operatic choruses, solo arias, and duets. On March 23, more than thirty singers auditioned in McAlister Auditorium for eight faculty in hopes of singing in front of the Furman Symphony Orchestra. Twelve soloists were selected. For six weeks, the orchestra and chorus rehearsed separately while the soloists worked with their voice teachers to polish their arias. Seven days prior to the concert, everyone assembled in Harper Hall for the first rehearsal of all the performers. Furman’s marketing department had asked us to “dress up” for our final rehearsal in McAlister Auditorium in order to shoot promotional video and audio. We attempted to make the dress rehearsal look as much like the actual concert as possible. This enabled the camera operators to walk around on stage and get shots that would be impossible at the concert.

A large, enthusiastic audience of students, family and opera lovers gathered on Friday night for the gala event. As the chorus, soloists and orchestra finished the opening numbers, it became apparent the evening was going to be special. Each soloist received two or three curtain calls from the excited audience. The energy in the hall was palpable. The student musicians experienced a rarity, even in the professional musical world: a concert where literally every aspect of the experience worked as a unified whole.

As music teachers we often recall the experiences, and in some cases a single experience, of our own past that opened the pathway to our life’s journey in music. Our hope is to recreate this type of seminal experience for our students. A Night at the Opera will long be remembered by everyone present that Friday night at McAlister Auditorium.
T
he Biblical line immortalized in one of Handel’s 
Messiah choruses—“Their Sound Is Gone Out”—
captures the essence of Furman Music’s goal of 
taking their “sounds” on the road.

On Furman’s Music Web site one learns that the 
department offers more than 200 on-campus, open-to- 
the-public concerts and recitals each year. While that 
statement is true, it stops far short of telling the full story of 
where and how often Furman music is heard well 
beyond the front gates. Furman students and faculty are 
veritable music evangelists, spreading the gospel of 
music performance far and wide and taking seriously 
the charge of the department’s mission statement to 
“actively extend these experiences beyond the Furman 
University community.”

Always active in local musical endeavors, such 
as playing in area orchestras and leading myriad 
community and church music activities, Furman’s faculty members now regularly perform in a variety of regional, national and international venues. Pianist Derek Parsons, with former Furman faculty member Clifford Leaman, recently returned from a performance tour of China. Dan Koppelman, Furman’s music technology professor, regularly performs original compositions of electro-
acoustic music in such far-flung locations as San Diego and Stockholm. Soprano Tamara Mathews carries on an active singing career with a regular residency in France, oratorio appearances in Taiwan, and a recent Brahms “Requiem” at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, S.C. Pianist David Gross regularly performs recitals and 
concerts in his native Germany, as well as programs 
throughout the Southeast. Since his recent year-long 
residency in Rome, composer Mark Kilstofte has been 
mostly at home in Greenville, but his music is reaching 
an ever-widening audience through its performances by 
major orchestras and choral ensembles, including the 
renowned Dale Warland Singers’ final concert. Mark 
Bett’s work as a member of the Zephyr Trio and as 
director of the Palmetto Possaunen has taken him and 
his trombone from Georgia to Chicago, and many places 
between. Organist Charles Tompkins, in the midst of the 
buzzy dedication year of Furman’s new C.B. Fisk organ, 
found time to do several off-campus recitals, including one in the chapel of Duke University.

In an effort to make Greenville music lovers more 
aware of Furman’s musicians, a series of concerts is 
being presented in the Gunter Theater, a marvelous 
venue at the Peace Center for the Performing Arts in 
downtown Greenville. Concerts scheduled for this 
year include a combination of faculty and student 
performances.

With several hundred participants each year, 
our student ensembles are on the move, too. The 
“flagship” of our touring ensembles is the Furman 
Singers. Each spring sees Bingham Vick and the “troops” load the busses for a weeklong series of 
sacred choral concerts in churches up and down the 
eastern seaboard. Alternate summers, members of the Singers take wing to European destinations —Russia in 2004 and Italy in 2006. Thomas Joiner and the Chamber Strings made a circuit of 
central Carolina last spring, and the Wind Ensemble and Les Hicken left a lasting impression on the music 
educators gathered to hear their concert in Charleston last winter. Matt Olson and the Jazz Ensemble make 
regular forays into the surrounding area, including the popular “Main Street Jazz” event in downtown 
Greenville, and the Harness and Gladden string 
quartets continue to represent Furman throughout 
the surrounding community. The annual Lessons 
and Carols service presented by the Chamber Choir is 
broadcast statewide on public radio, and this choir 
regularly presents concerts and service music at 
churches throughout the area.

The visitation of its performing artists has 
contributed to a growing awareness of the quality and 
diversity of Furman’s music program, and has helped to 
reinforce the department’s well-deserved reputation 
as one of the country’s premier undergraduate music 
schools. For information on hosting a concert by 
Furman’s faculty members or one of its student 
ensembles, contact William Thomas, department 
chair, at <bill.thomas@furman.edu>.

To hear the singers on-line, go to <www. musicatfurman.com> and click on “mp3s.”

T
o hear the singers on-line, go to <www. 
musicatfurman.com> and click on “mp3s.”

Discipline. Excellence. Beauty. The mantra of the Furman 
Singers has served them well over the last 59 years.

Established in 1946, the Singers are Furman’s oldest 
choral ensemble and have made a name for themselves 
as one of the nation’s premier collegiate choirs. The 
group performs on-campus concerts and tours annually 
throughout the country. In the spring of 2004, the Singers 
traveled to New York City for two performances, stopping 
to sing in Philadelphia along the way. Last year’s tour 
destination was Dallas, and included stops in Houston, 
Baton Rouge and Birmingham.

Beginning in 1974, the Furman Singers have traveled to 
Europe biennially during the summer. Typically two weeks 
long, these trips allow students to sing in some of the 
world’s greatest venues including Notre Dame Cathedral 
in Paris, St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice, and the Cathedral 
of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London. Concert tours also 
have taken the group to Scotland, Wales, Austria, Germany, 
Denmark, Romania, Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, 
Finland and Estonia.

Furman Singers is one of the oldest traditions on 
campus. This 100-voice ensemble fosters a true sense of 
family through social activities like tailgating, Christmas 
caroling, and annual banquets. 
Membership is open to all students and is by audition.

With several hundred participants each year, 
our student ensembles are on the move, too. The 
“flagship” of our touring ensembles is the Furman 
Singers. Each spring sees Bingham Vick and the “troops” load the busses for a weeklong series of 
sacred choral concerts in churches up and down the 
eastern seaboard. Alternate summers, members of the Singers take wing to European destinations —Russia in 2004 and Italy in 2006. Thomas Joiner and the Chamber Strings made a circuit of 
central Carolina last spring, and the Wind Ensemble and Les Hicken left a lasting impression on the music 
educators gathered to hear their concert in Charleston last winter. Matt Olson and the Jazz Ensemble make 
regular forays into the surrounding area, including the popular “Main Street Jazz” event in downtown 
Greenville, and the Harness and Gladden string 
quartets continue to represent Furman throughout 
the surrounding community. The annual Lessons 
and Carols service presented by the Chamber Choir is 
broadcast statewide on public radio, and this choir 
regularly presents concerts and service music at 
churches throughout the area.

The visitation of its performing artists has 
contributed to a growing awareness of the quality and 
diversity of Furman’s music program, and has helped to 
reinforce the department’s well-deserved reputation 
as one of the country’s premier undergraduate music 
schools. For information on hosting a concert by 
Furman’s faculty members or one of its student 
ensembles, contact William Thomas, department 
chair, at <bill.thomas@furman.edu>.

To hear the singers on-line, go to <www. musicatfurman.com> and click on “mp3s.”

Furman music on the road

Furman Singers

by Kelly Jakes ’06

Furman Singers

Discipline. Excellence. Beauty. The mantra of the Furman Singers has served them well over the last 59 years.

Established in 1946, the Singers are Furman’s oldest choral ensemble and have made a name for themselves as one of the nation’s premier collegiate choirs. The group performs on-campus concerts and tours annually throughout the country. In the spring of 2004, the Singers traveled to New York City for two performances, stopping to sing in Philadelphia along the way. Last year’s tour destination was Dallas, and included stops in Houston, Baton Rouge and Birmingham.

Beginning in 1974, the Furman Singers have traveled to Europe biennially during the summer. Typically two weeks long, these trips allow students to sing in some of the world’s greatest venues including Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice, and the Cathedral of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London. Concert tours also have taken the group to Scotland, Wales, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Romania, Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Finland and Estonia.

Furman Singers is one of the oldest traditions on campus. This 100-voice ensemble fosters a true sense of family through social activities like tailgating, Christmas caroling, and annual banquets. Membership is open to all students and is by audition.

To hear the singers on-line, go to <www. musicatfurman.com> and click on “mp3s.”
From its position as a top-ranked independent, coeducational liberal arts college of 2,600 students, Furman takes great pride in its beautiful 750-acre campus, its gifted student body, its distinguished and active faculty and in the many notable accomplishments of its alumni. Furman emphasizes engaged learning, a hands-on, problem-solving and collaborative educational philosophy that encourages students to put into practice theories and methods learned from texts and lectures. All Furman’s programs are designed to develop the whole person—intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

Furman University

21. ALUMNA PROFILE

Meredith Pittman’s ability to sort out what she wanted to do after graduating and to pursue her love of music, or perhaps because of that Pittman remarks, “Furman was, for me, the perfect undergraduate experience.”

Pittman also sees an intimacy in the Furman’s music department that furthers both friendships and progress. “Music students in general are very driven but also tons of fun,” she says. Despite bucking the normal dual-focus class schedule, Pittman said she changed her mind into a variety of activities. “I was able to take part in a wonderful string quartet—which was absolutely the best musical experiences I have ever had—play great orchestral repertoire, travel to Cuba on a foreign study trip during winter term with the Spanish Department, travel to Bolivia one summer as an internships opportunity in medical mission through the Furman Advantage program, take part in Chamber Strings tours ... and the list could continue.”

Despite building the normal academic track to med school to pursue her love of music, or perhaps because of that, Pittman remarks, “Furman was, for me, the perfect undergraduate experience.”

1. To see, hear and experience the full scope of music at Furman, go to www.musicatfurman.com and click on mp3 and video clips.

Furman University

From its position as a top-ranked independent, coeducational liberal arts college of 2,600 students, Furman takes great pride in its beautiful 750-acre campus, its gifted student body, its distinguished and active faculty and in the many notable accomplishments of its alumni. Furman emphasizes engaged learning, a hands-on, problem-solving and collaborative educational philosophy that encourages students to put into practice theories and methods learned from texts and lectures. All Furman’s programs are designed to develop the whole person—intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

Furman University

From its position as a top-ranked independent, coeducational liberal arts college of 2,600 students, Furman takes great pride in its beautiful 750-acre campus, its gifted student body, its distinguished and active faculty and in the many notable accomplishments of its alumni. Furman emphasizes engaged learning, a hands-on, problem-solving and collaborative educational philosophy that encourages students to put into practice theories and methods learned from texts and lectures. All Furman’s programs are designed to develop the whole person—intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

Furman University

From its position as a top-ranked independent, coeducational liberal arts college of 2,600 students, Furman takes great pride in its beautiful 750-acre campus, its gifted student body, its distinguished and active faculty and in the many notable accomplishments of its alumni. Furman emphasizes engaged learning, a hands-on, problem-solving and collaborative educational philosophy that encourages students to put into practice theories and methods learned from texts and lectures. All Furman’s programs are designed to develop the whole person—intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.