

Thursday, April 3, 2008

Three OU students participate in professional conference

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

Three students from Oakland University's **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** were selected to participate in the American Choral Director Association regional conference in Grand Rapids in February. The students participated in the 160-student conference chorale and helped demonstrate the different ways that collegiate choral students learn and the different methods for teaching them.

OU students Heather Mitcham, Matthew Smith and Caitlyn Byrne were selected from more than 300 applicants from 29 universities across the Midwest to participate as part of the collegiate chorale. The students applied to OU professors and they were rated based on sight reading, work ethic, attitude and musicianship. Then they were selected by the conference choir coordinator. The OU students attended the conference with Professor of Music Education Deborah Blair.

The students were conducted by Maria Guinana, a Venezuelan conductor who specialized in multicultural music and is internationally known for her choral expertise.

"The conference was about having tools and learning how to approach teaching your choirs music. They gave us 12 pieces of music and we just worked through them and learned them together. It was a lab setting for the other teachers to come in and learn about ways to approach teaching a collegiate choir," said Byrne.

Byrne, a junior, aspires to continue her vocal performance studies once she graduates from Oakland University. She said the conference gave her an opportunity to network with other schools, talk to other students and learn more about what she wants out of graduate school.

"It was interesting to see how different the university teaching approaches are. Some schools use drills. Oakland is more about getting inside of the music and breaking it down, understanding it on a simplistic level and then building up from there," Byrne said.

Byrne said the student performers were asked to try new things, and some of those things were really outside of her comfort zone, which taught her that she needs to be adaptable and flexible.

"The conference was a lot of fun. There was always something to go to and something to see. This also was the first time I had ever gone to a music conference on a professional level. It was interesting to have that experience," Byrne said. "Anybody interested in becoming an educator in music in a choral field should attend this conference. Often, you feel isolated from the rest of the education world and being able to regroup with those who are going through the same things as you in the classroom—well, it's like a weekend at the spa."

For more information on OU's music education program, visit the **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** Web site.



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SUMMARY

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