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MTD students earn impressive honors

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Many students find inspiring academic opportunities in Oakland University's **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** (MTD). In 2002, more than 2,000 students, or 13 percent of the student body, took courses in performing arts areas. The number of students claiming a major in the performing arts area has increased every year for more than 10 years, with a more than 200 percent increase since the fall 1995 semester. And student ensembles and productions in 2002 involved both MTD majors and non-majors and included more than 500 students on the stage and behind the scenes.

MTD students benefit greatly from such experiences and have earned a number of impressive achievements over the years. And many MTD graduates carry such success into their professional lives.

Lisa Agazzi, a vocal performance major and 2000 graduate, has experienced great success since earning Bachelor and Master of Music degrees at Oakland. As a winner of the 1999 Friedrich Schorr Prize in Voice, she was a featured soloist with the Adrian Symphony Orchestra and portrayed Hansel in the symphony's production of "Hansel and Gretel." In 2000, she performed the role of Lola in "Cavalleria Rusticana" and Briida in the world premiere of "The Children of Keweenaw" with the Pine Mountain Music Festival in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Agazzi completed an apprenticeship with Indianapolis Opera in its 2000-2001 season and performed main stage roles with the Utah Opera in Salt Lake City and the Dorian Open Theatre in Iowa. In 2002, Agazzi was a "Borsa di Studio" winner in the Riccardo Zandonai International Competition for Young Opera Singers. That same year, Agazzi was a winner in the San Diego district for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She subsequently joined the San Diego Opera ensemble where she sang in "Cosi fan tutte" and "Carmen."

"Lisa has a very beautiful and compelling mezzo-soprano voice. She's also a very interesting actor as well. She's continued to grow in that regard. Lisa really gained those skills here at Oakland," said Professor of Music John-Paul White, who was one of Agazzi's voice teachers at OU. "When she first came to us, she wasn't a great actor or singer. She worked with both (Adjunct Assistant Professor of Voice) Edith Diggory and (Associate Professor of Theatre) Michael Gillespie extensively. Lisa worked very hard and gained incredible skills. You can't manufacture a great voice, but the basic sound was there."

Speaking of her singing engagements, White said Agazzi continues to advance professionally.

"Her jobs in Indianapolis, Utah and San Diego are very well-respected. She just goes from one plum job to the next," White said. "Most singers work with opera companies in guest spots. But in San Diego, she was engaged for a season to perform various roles. This gives her more stability and a chance to grow within the company and as a performer."

Jacquelyn Wagner, another vocal performance major who graduated this spring, is headed in a direction similar to Agazzi's.

In 1999, Wagner was named Michigan's top high school vocal student. Since coming to Oakland to study with Diggory, she has earned many awards and competitions, including the Meadow Brook Music Festival Scholarship, Elizabeth Gardner Competition, Madrigal Choral of Southfield, and the Jenny Lind Scholarship. In 2002, she won the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra Mozart competition and received the Matilda award for Most Outstanding Student in Voice Performance. She also won the OU Concerto Competition in 2002 and 2003 and received the Distinguished Musicianship Award – the department's top honor – at the 2003 Matilda Awards ceremony.

"Jacquelyn came to us with a beautiful voice," White said. "The first time I heard her sing as an incoming freshman, I was blown away. She has a vocal and artistic maturity – a way of singing not just the notes, but also the music."

Wagner's skills also caught the attention of top graduate schools around the country. After some deliberation, Wagner has chosen to study with internationally renowned opera star Mignon Dunn at the Manhattan School of Music in New York City.

"Though she has yet to prove herself as Agazzi has done, I have no doubt Jacquelyn will have success," White said. "It's hard to say how her career will unfold, but with the beauty of her voice and the artistry, I have no doubt she will have a rewarding career in singing."

"I think she benefited from our combined department with music, theatre and dance instruction because she was able to develop her stage presence. We actually encourage our students to take acting classes and other (MTD) courses so they can learn other performance skills. Students at Oakland are able to gain a lot of skills programs at other universities don't teach.

"The student population level has increased over the past few years and our department's reputation continues to grow because of the success of students like Agazzi and Wagner. They are two exceptional talents, but there are more coming down the pipeline."

Agazzi and Wagner's achievements represent just a few of the honors MTD majors and graduates have earned over the past year. Some others include:

- Musical theatre graduate and former member of the Meadow Brook Estate, Sgt. Aaron Talley, was named Best Broadcaster for the Armed Forces Network worldwide in September 2002.
- Theatre graduate Kim Lucius was cast in the Minnesota Classical Festival in September 2002.
- Theatre production senior Cindy Lim won top honors in the make-up competition at the American College Theatre Festival in January 2003. Lim transferred to Oakland in 2002 from Victoria College of Art in Melbourne, Australia.
- Out of a field of more than 200, sophomore musical theatre major Catherine Lutz was one of 12 finalists chosen to compete for the Irene Ryan Scholarship acting competition at the American College Theatre Festival in January 2003.
- Five OU students received awards at the spring auditions held by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) - Great Lakes Region at Michigan State University April 5, 2003. The student singers performed and received feedback from association instructors. The winners include Anastasia Krentz, Ann Marie MacFarlane, Renee Turner (second place), Jason Wickson, and Michael Wilanowski.
- Theatre graduate Esau Pritchett (BAPA '99) was cast as Tom in the Vermont Stage Company's production of "To Kill a Mockingbird." The production runs through May 18, 2003.
- The cast of Meadow Brook Theatre's spring 2003 production of "Romeo & Juliet" included OU theatre students Phill Harmer, Pat Butcher and Drew Starr and OU theatre graduates Travis Walter, Joey Bybee and Kim Lucius. The technical crew included OU theatre students Holly Lloyd and Amy Thompson as well as theatre graduate Corrie Beth Shotwell as the assistant stage manager.

These and other student achievements also reflect well on the skill and expertise of the MTD faculty, White said.

"For a long time, I've been extremely proud of the full-time and adjunct faculty we have here," White said. "Speaking for our voice instructors, we have as good or better voice teachers of any school our size. Our students receive great training."

The Department of Music, Theatre and Dance is fully accredited by the National Association of Music, National Association of Theatre and National Association of Dance. The department offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

For more information on courses, majors, faculty and performances, visit the [Department of Music, Theatre and Dance](#) Web site, or contact them at (248) 370-2030 or mtd@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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