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Law Faculty Give Students an Earful

By Tony Bohnenkamp

Lady Justice may be blind, but she certainly isn't deaf as evidenced by the talents of the Drake Law School faculty. Professors Cathy Lesser Mansfield and Jerry Anderson are just two of the faculty members who modestly admit to having and expressing different musical abilities.

"The law requires us to use the left side of our brain almost exclusively," says Anderson. "In many areas, such as drafting contracts or even writing briefs, excessive creativity is frowned upon. There is a certain form of doing things that must be followed. Therefore, I think many of us long to exercise the right side of our brains and use our pent-up, creative energy."

A native of Kansas, Anderson began performing as a junior high school student. "I sang 'Gentle On My Mind' in the seventh grade talent show, so I guess you could say I had no qualms about embarrassing myself in front of large groups of people, even then."

He dabbles with playing the piano, but concentrates mostly on singing in various choirs, and even just for fun with other faculty and students. "Two years ago, some of the faculty performed a few musical numbers at a fundraiser. This year, we plan to do it again," says Anderson. "Cathy (Mansfield) and I will do a spoof of the song 'Picture' by Kid Rock and Sheryl Crow, singing about professors frustrated with their unprepared students and students afraid of being called on in class."

Anderson has also tried his hand at composing, applying wit and creativity to address legal issues. "I made up a song to the tune of 'King of the Road,' called 'King of the Torts.' It makes fun of lawyers who care more about making money than doing good legal work," he says.

Anderson's lyrics go: My briefs are always small/'Cause I don't use no cites at all/Saves strain on judges' eyes/I never have to Shepardize/I don't bother with all facts/or relevant circumstance/I'm a lawyer of means by no means/I'm King of the Torts.

Like Anderson, Mansfield began singing at a tender age growing up in Cleveland. "I sang in a children's chorus from age 5 until I was 14. We performed all over the world, and with Bob Hope and Wayne Newton," she says.

She was also active in the musical activities at her school and synagogue as a singer, accompanist and conductor. By the ninth grade, Mansfield added thespian to her list of talents and has been participating in numerous productions throughout her educational travels, both as a student and a professor. She recently starred as the lead in "That's Entertainment," which tells the story of the holiday of Purim in an irreverent and funny way.

"The cantor at the Temple (B'nai Jeshurun) re-wrote the words to Broadway hits to use in the musical, and the result is hilarious," says Mansfield. "It's the first time I've sung in a show since 1987, and it's also the first time I've performed with my twin daughters who have now, it seems, been bitten by the showbiz bug as well."

And, as if teaching, parenting and performing aren't enough, she's also continuing to write an opera she's been working on since high school. It tells the story of a fictitious Jewish family living in Berlin just prior to and during World War II. After the family goes into hiding, they pass the time by telling the biblical story of Job, which happens to almost mirror their own lives.

Not only has writing the opera been a source of joy, but Mansfield has also received enormous personal satisfaction from the process. "My work on this project, which is so important to me, has become a combination of all the skills I've developed over the course of my life," she says. "I have interviewed and become friends with a few holocaust survivors in the course of doing research for my story. My hope is that everything that happens to my fictitious family in the opera will come from something that is documented to have happened to actual Holocaust victims, and I envision the audience getting a program with footnotes so that the sources of the story are clear."

So, where will Mansfield's production debut? With tongue planted firmly in-cheek, she boldly states, "Broadway—just kidding. I'm hoping a concert version of it might someday be performed at Drake, after which I can work some of the musical kinks out." One unintended benefit of performing at Drake has also helped Mansfield and Anderson work out classroom kinks.

Both sing in the Drake Community Choir, and most recently performed in Mozart's Requiem conducted by Aimee Beckman-Collier, Associate Director of Conducting and Director of Choral Activities. And, both Anderson and Mansfield say they have used the methods of their conductor to try and improve their skills in the classroom.

"I have been in many choirs, and Aimee Beckman-Collier is one of the finest conductors I've ever known. Her conducting has informed my teaching," says Mansfield. Anderson whole-heartedly agrees adding, "I have learned a lot from Aimee just by watching her, about how to bring out the best in students and how your energy and enthusiasm can infect your students."

Does that mean the performing professors plan on pairing up for classroom duets anytime soon? The jury's still out on that one.