

Witty Fools, Foolish Wits

APRIL 1 IS KNOWN AS APRIL FOOL'S DAY in many parts of the globe. It's a day when anything goes—a phony phone call, rubber roaches in the bed, or just about anything that will make people laugh. That was no exception at the CBU theatre on April 1 at the first annual “Fool-o-Rama.” CBU faculty and staff, along with students from Holy Names Catholic School, dazzled the audience with an unusual array of talents as they performed in this inaugural faculty/staff talent show. The purpose of this “fool-o-rama-ishness” was actually noble—to raise scholarship money for students at Holy Names School.

The “Fool-o-Rama” kicked off with a sale of books and CDs, along with a silent auction for items such as computers, pictures, gift certificates, ladies' accessories, musical instruments, and a Sony Playstation (just to name a few). John Baptist de La Salle's spirit of “serving” obviously spoke to those who donated items for this fundraising event—including Brother Jim Roszak, Dr. Juliana Starr, Dr. Pong Malasri, Vance Academy, Dr. Paul Shiue, Leslie Dunn, Dr. Kris Pruitt, O'Kypos Greek Restaurant, John Ventura, Boscoss Squared, CBU Bookstore, Beth Whitehead, Dr. Peter Limper, CBU ITS, Brother Justin Lucian, and Dr. Asit Ray. Aramark Food Service also donated pizza, which was sold for donations.

CBU students and co-workers got a rare glimpse of a different side of professors. Usually regaled with professorial expertise on quantum physics, Shakespeare, or cell structure, a rare student (abandoning social niceties) may covertly peek at the classroom clock. But there were no clock-watchers at the “Fool-o-Rama.”

The curtain opened and the audience waited with bated breath for what would soon be labeled (at least by talent show performers) as the “pinnacle of live, Memphis entertainment.” Dr. Tracie Burke (Behavioral Sciences) introduced herself as the mistress of ceremonies. This tiny titan of ticking TNT then proceeded to exude enough kinetic energy to light up half the campus.

Students from Holy Names opened the program with an interpretive dance to the song, “My Life, My Love, My All.” To be sure, the girls set a high standard for the less-seasoned acts that followed them. Dr. Leigh Becker (Math) took the stage next with his rich baritone rendition of “If Ever I Would Leave You.” Despite his wife's attendance at the show, more than one female in the audience swooned at the sound of his velvety voice. (With the help of several off-duty paramedics, the women were resuscitated, and the show continued.)

Turning in a different entertainment direction, Dr. Peter Limper (Philosophy) took the stage with his comedic interpretation of a monologue from *The Matchmaker*. Any prior questions about this earnest philosopher's sense of humor were instantly laid to rest.

Rounding out the first act were two musical entries, the first of which was a guitar duet of Elvis Presley melodies by two gifted engineering professors, Dr. Pong Malasri and Dr. Neal Jackson. To no one's surprise, these two were promptly offered a \$100,000 recording contract with the King's old label, Sun Records. However, not even Elvis would have left the building for the musical extravaganza that followed.

All were transfixed as three willowy figures coolly stood on the stage waiting for the music to begin. Karen Conway (Dean of Students), Sister Dolores Montini (Campus Ministry), and Dr. Mary Ogilvie (Biology) became the embodiment of

Motown sound as they sang and boogied through “Stop in the Name of Love” and “Ain't No Mountain.” Each of these sexy babes wowed the audience with their sinewy moves, but Sister Dolores was in a class all her own as she shimmied, swayed, and shoo-shoo-bopped in ways that the original Supremes could only have dreamed about.

The second act began impressively with Messiah Praise, a Christian band to which Dr. Beth Nelson (Behavioral Sciences) belongs. The group shook the rafters as they rocked to the accompaniment of drums, guitars, keyboard, and tambourines. Next, father and son engineers Pong and Kriangsiri Malasri gave a virtuoso guitar and violin performance of Pachelbel's classic *Canon in D*. Their artistic accomplishments were enthusiastically rewarded with a standing ovation. (Emcee Tracie Burke wryly remarked that since the young Malasri was on spring break from his master's degree studies, he was a perfect example of “an aerospace engineer gone wild.”) Not to be outdone, Dr. Asit Ray, (Chemical Engineering) gave the audience a blistering tutorial on Indian drums. Who'd have thought that this renowned academic would be such an accomplished musician?

On a sillier note, School of Arts professors with a not-so-secret yearning for a taste of show biz, eagerly piled on stage, accompanied on the ivories by the esteemed Dr. Vincent O'Neill (English). Androgyny was the name of the game as eight lovely ladies clad in men's attire (Burke and Nelson, Dr. Juliana Starr (Languages), Dr. Ann Marie Wranovix (English), Dr. Mary Cargill (English), Dr. Kris Pruitt (English), Dr. Margie Miller (Behavioral Sciences), and student Deborah Nelson emoted brilliantly as they performed “Brush Up Your Shakespeare” from the musical *Kiss Me Kate*. Perhaps the most shocking moment of the night was the discovery that one shapely giant of a woman, replete with pumps, hose, and parasol, was actually Dr. Max Maloney (Philosophy) who threw the 4'11” Burke over his shoulder and strutted offstage.

Always eager to get as much exposure as possible, those stage-struck starlets and Christina Aguilera-wannabes, Karen Conway and Mary Ogilvie, finished the evening with the always admirable Neal Jackson. The starlets harmonized to “Victory in Jesus” and then sang backup as Jackson brought a tear to the eye of those “mature” enough to remember the old gospel standard, “Turn Your Radio On.”

Perhaps carried away by the treasure trove of talented teachers who'd laid bare their timid (well, maybe that's going a bit overboard) hearts for the sake of amateur theatre, emcee Burke performed two feats of such unabashed daring that all who witnessed them could only gasp. At the goading of the audience, not once but twice, she painstakingly lowered herself to the floor in what is all-too-appropriately called “the splits.” Sadly, as this article goes to press, she still suffers from an arthritic hip that will never be the same.

The show was a success by any standard. “Although the event was a fundraiser for Holy Names School, raising \$1,300, it was also a great excuse for CBU faculty and staff to get together for a night of fun and laughter,” said Dr. Evelyn McDonald, vice president for student life.

“The talent show was a sensational performance by the faculty and staff,” said



A couple of the more serious moments in “Fool-o-Rama”: **b** Dr. Pong Malasri and his son, Kriangsiri, perform a classical duet of Pachelbel's *Canon in D*; **c** Dr. Asit Ray gives a blistering lesson in Indian drumming.



...and the less serious moments: **d** The Bards of the Arts give a gender-bending performance of “Brush Up Your Shakespeare”; **e** Dr. Tracie Burke proves to be a very flexible master of ceremonies.

A Supreme-ly original act: Dr. Mary Ogilvie, Karen Conway, and Sister Dolores Montini



Yuri de Souza, a first year student from India. “It was a tasteful blend of laughter, music, and drama. Nothing would have made for a more enjoyable evening.”

Wilson Phillips, also a first year student, added, “The Show was quite entertaining. Everyone seemed to have a great time, sharing their talents with the students. And the money raised went to a good cause.”

Dr. Tony Aretz, academic vice president and one of the judges for the event, remarked that he was surprised to see “so many hidden talents” from CBU faculty and staff. Other judges were bookstore manager Charlie Coleman, athletic director Joe Nadicksbernd, campus minister Brother Rob Veselsky, and maintenance director Phil Yelvington.

Even those who did not win one of three coveted titles—Best Overall Act (Pong and Kriangsiri Malasri), Most Original Act (The Supremes 2005), and Most Flamboyant Act (Bards of the Arts)—walked away wanting one more shot at it next year.

Holy Names School is the sixth of nine Jubilee Schools to be reopened in the Memphis area. Located in one of the poorest zip codes in the state of Tennessee, it serves elementary and middle school students (grades 3-7 currently, with the addition of 8th grade next year). According to Principal Didier Aur, 100% of its students qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. The students at Holy Names bring with them all the burdens, both academic and emotional, that living in and around poverty create. These same students also bring something not so easi-

ly measured on standardized tests or personality surveys: enthusiasm, deep spirituality, and immeasurable potential.

“Money received from the talent show will be used as an academic scholarship—the CBU Faculty/Staff Scholarship—for one of our deserving students for the 2005-06 school year” explained Aur. “Holy Names would like to thank CBU and its wonderful faculty and staff for putting the vision of St. John Baptist de La Salle into practice with your ‘direct service to the poor.’”

The idea for a faculty/staff talent show emerged from the creative genius of Kris Pruitt, outgoing dean of the School of Arts. Pruitt explained that she thought the university needed more activities to bring faculty, staff, and students together outside the classroom and more opportunities for the students to see faculty and staff take risks and have fun. Once she brought up the idea, interest grew. Soon after, Pong Malasri (also an outgoing dean... coincidence?) took the reins and formed a planning committee consisting of Benjamin Head (Plough Library), Ken Massa, (Human Resources), Jerry Swanberry, (Multimedia Services), Dr. Anna Ross (Biology), Aur, and eventual participants Conway, Ogilvie, Starr, and Burke.

Malasri was especially intrigued with the opportunity to support Holy Names since he, Ogilvie, and Conway participate in the Lasallian Leadership Institute (LLI). LLI is a three-year commitment designed to assist individuals in exercising effective Lasallian leadership in the Christian Brothers schools, and to help them grow spiritually, professionally, and personally. “One of the aims of LLI is to assist participants in integrating and promoting the Lasallian heritage in their personal and professional lives and to become catalysts for the future development of this heritage within their respective communities,” said Malasri. As such, “Fool-o-Rama” and its support of Holy Names seemed a fitting extension of LLI’s mission.

“The Holy Names family sees education as a mission,” Aur agreed. “We all look upon education and reading in particular as the best way to become the people God has created us to be. Like CBU, we repeat the following motto at Holy Names: ‘Enter to Learn, but Leave to Serve.’” ■

For more photos of the “Fool-o-rama” talent show, visit Dr. Anna Ross’ website at www.cbu.edu/~aross/biodept/Talent-2005/index.htm.