

features



I DO: WEDDING INSURANCE EXPANDS AS NUPTIALS GET PRICIER **COURIER-JOURNAL.COM/EXTRAS**



IF YOU GO

What: "Don Giovanni" by Mozart.
 Performers include students from the University of Louisville's School of Music and Poland's Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music.
When: 8 p.m. Friday and 2 p.m. Sunday
Where: Brown Theatre, 315 W. Broadway
Cost: \$20, \$10 for students
Information: (502) 584-7777, www.kentuckycenter.org and louisville.edu/music/events.

▶ BACKSTAGE VIEW

See a video about how "Don Giovanni" was produced and learn more from the directors of the University of Louisville's opera program.

musical journey

Polish opera students visit U of L to collaborate on 'Don Giovanni'

By Elizabeth Kramer | ekramer@courier-journal.com | The Courier Journal

It all started with messages from a stranger.

An American with links to Poland contacted Mike Tracy with concerns about a Polish saxophone student in the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in the southwestern city of Katowice, less than 200 miles from Warsaw.

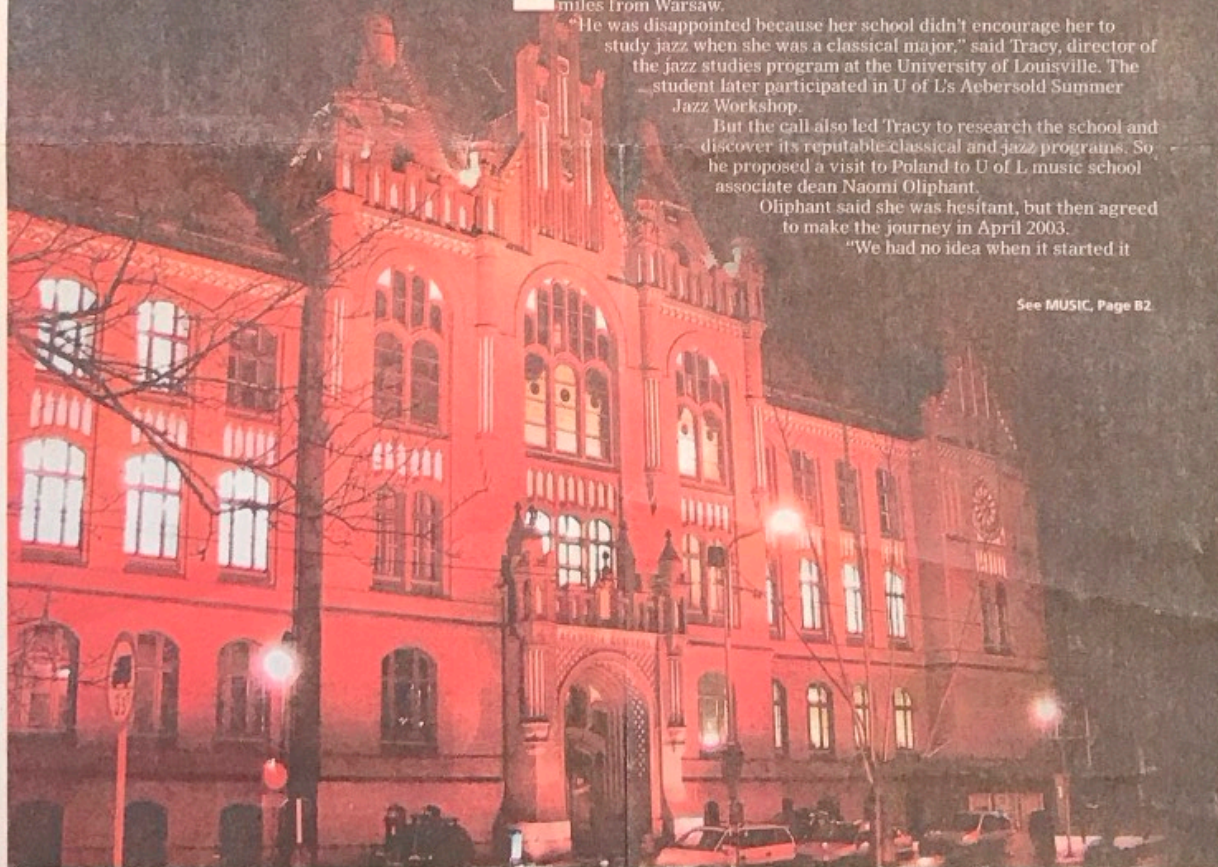
"He was disappointed because her school didn't encourage her to study jazz when she was a classical major," said Tracy, director of the jazz studies program at the University of Louisville. The student later participated in U of L's Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshop.

But the call also led Tracy to research the school and discover its reputable classical and jazz programs. So he proposed a visit to Poland to U of L music school associate dean Naomi Oliphant.

Oliphant said she was hesitant, but then agreed to make the journey in April 2003.

"We had no idea when it started it

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Top left, Emily Howes and Jacek Pacholski perform during a rehearsal of "Don Giovanni" at the University of Louisville School of Music. Kimcherie Lloyd, top right, conducts. The large photo shows the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, Poland. REHEARSAL PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CLEVENGER/THE COURIER-JOURNAL

MUSIC: 'Don Giovanni' part of long collaboration

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would grow to be such a fruitful exchange," she said last week.

During a November 2003 trip to Poland that included more faculty members, the two music schools signed an official letter of agreement to collaborate in their various programs.

These days, Tracy can't even remember the name of the man who called on him more than a decade ago. Nonetheless, both schools have participated in exchanges involving 31 faculty, 86 students and eight others, including staff and donors to the school. Faculty members have taught classes, students from both schools have been part of stints overseas at their partner school, and both groups have given concerts and other performances. Each school's music education program has participated in exchanges.

"When we first met with them," recalled Oliphant from the 2003 visits, "the school did not have a music therapy program. But later, one of the academy's graduates came and spent a year studying here. She went back to work in Warsaw, but is now leading the music therapy program at the academy."

The latest collaboration is a production of Mozart's 1787 opera "Don Giovanni" performed in Louisville by vocal students of both schools and accompanied by the U of L Orchestra. The production ran last November in Poland to sold-out performances.

Last week, the Polish students arrived in Louisville and started rehearsals with the U of L singers and the orchestra.

"You need to be super sensitive to your dynamics," said Kimcherie Lloyd, U of L music school's director of the school's orchestral and co-director of opera theater programs.

She was standing, baton in hand, in front of the student orchestra that was rehearsing for the first time with the cast that included the Polish students. Each singer stood when his or her time came to sing. When Polish soprano stood to sing, a line of vocal students sitting behind her exchanged glances. Some raised their eyebrows as their mouths fell open.

Another soprano singing at the rehearsal was U of L graduate student Emily Howes,



Faculty and staff from the University of Louisville School of Music and the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music gather in 2003. COURTESY U OF L SCHOOL OF MUSIC

who spent the fall in Poland working on the production.

"This is much bigger than any operas I've done in the past and a huge leap from anything I'd done before," she said, adding that it was her first time traveling outside the United States.

"The Polish students are often older than their American counterparts and have had more training," said Michael Ramach, the other co-director of U of L's opera program. He is the opera's stage director, fight director, choreographer and costume and set designer.

This production of "Don Giovanni" isn't the first collaborative opera production for Ramach or his colleagues. In 2007, the schools teamed up to produce Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro," with performances first in Louisville and then in Poland. That effort led to the documentary "Figaro" that followed the leaders and students as they put the pieces together.

Ramach, who in the 1980s oversaw international tours for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, said the logistics involved not only set and costume design but securing the needed insurance, visas and customs clearances.

"The logistics were killer, given that the classical opera has the most moving parts of anything we've done," he said. Both productions took nearly two years to get off the ground.

The differences between the two programs and cultures have also presented the most opportunities for growth. He said he has seen students learn how their common musical language helps them overcome the language barriers that they often face when they start working together.

Howes said she was

surprised that the language barrier wasn't an issue.

"We were all so familiar with the score that we could point and use facial expressions to communicate," she said.

Oliphant said students from many different programs in the music school have had similar experiences — ones that she thinks are important in the modern world.

"I think we live in an international culture and so many students from Kentucky have not been beyond the region," she said. "Sometimes, it's the first time they've had to get a passport."

She added that the opera productions have given the American students the opportunity to sing in European opera houses.

While the decade-long partnership between both schools has included so many programs and other facets of each school, Oliphant said U of L's music school doesn't carve out a specific budget for it each year. Instead, the two schools meet nearly every 18 months to plot out future collaborations and begin looking at the costs.

"If we see a good project, the dean finds additional funding to support it," Oliphant said. "And each year we try to do something different and give different people the opportunity to go."

Sometimes the dean allocates some money for projects from the music school's budget, but he and others also solicit donors for contributions. Sometimes students earn scholarship money to support their studies abroad. And both schools also look within the ranks of their own faculty and students to save money.

"Usually for the Polish students who come here, we try to see if they can live with a U of

L student, especially if the visit is just for two or three weeks," she said, adding that the Polish academy makes the same efforts.

Many of the academy's students have come to Louisville to earn post-graduate degrees. They also have a faculty member in composition who graduated from the academy before the schools began working together.

Oliphant said she likes not only to look back on what the relationship between the two schools has accomplished but also to think about what else can flourish.

"I hope in another 10 years, this will still be going on and that there are more opportunities for both their students to come here for a second degree and for our students to do the same there," she said.

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