

Friends

January 2006
Winter

Mason Capital Campaign closes with major gift to the arts

An aura of excitement and anticipation filled the air the evening of Sept. 24, 2005, as over a thousand students, faculty, alumni and friends gathered at

the Center for the Arts to celebrate the conclusion of George Mason University's first comprehensive capital fundraising campaign. They watched a performance hosted by CNN special correspondent and GMU professor

Frank Sesno and President **Alan Merten** that included student dancers, musicians and actors, as well as lively interviews and recognition of major donors.

The campaign was publicly launched in 2002

and raised \$142 million, \$32 million over the campaign's goal. There were 45,000 donors who contributed to this effort.



The Center shines at the campaign closing celebration.

One of the event highlights of particular interest to arts patrons was a surprise announcement that **Donald** and **Nancy de Laski** were donating \$3 million to fund the expansion of the performing arts' academic facilities on the

Fairfax campus. The de Laskis have been longtime supporters of the university's performing arts programs, and this gift brought their total campaign support of the Arts at Mason to more than \$4 million. They had already

See Campaign, page 3

IN THIS ISSUE

- ◆ Mason capital campaign - 1
- ◆ Board nominations - 1
- ◆ Leadership Corner - 2
- ◆ TFA's *Icarus and Me* - 2
- ◆ Future events - 3
- ◆ Arts at Mason series - 3
- ◆ Event pictures - 4
- ◆ Behind the Scenes - 5
- ◆ Calendar - 6

Board nomination process begins

Nominations are being accepted now through March 10, 2006, for membership on the FCFA Board of Directors. The three-year terms begin in July 2006 and will run through June 2009. "We're looking for enthusiastic individuals who are willing to devote some time and energy to supporting the Center for the Arts," said **Shirley Joyce**, member of the Nominations Committee. Among other responsibilities, board members are expected to keep their FCFA membership

current, attend performances at the Center for the Arts and serve on an FCFA committee. The nominations committee will meet with prospective board members throughout the winter and spring. If you are interested in learning more about the nomination process or the role of board members, contact Shirley Joyce at sjoyce41@cox.net or 703-323-8869 to schedule a meeting. ■

Communications strengthens FCFA

How do we define “communication”? Sociologists tell us that we humans have developed the most complex and sophisticated forms of communicating of any living creature.

While our ability to communicate is a necessary part of our lives, it’s also an important part of the Friends of the Center for the Arts. Each of us becomes a transmitter of information about our organization and

the most credible source for explaining our commitment.

As indicated in the fall newsletter article on our 10th anniversary, this organization has played a key role in the growth of the Center as shown by the tremendous increase in our membership and contributions. And the momentum for

continued support and growth continues.

Sustaining and expanding the Friends organization is more than just attending performances and events. It’s participating by visually showing our support for one of the most exciting enterprises in our community.

The next time you talk with your neighbor or visit with colleagues, take a moment to explain the value you give – and receive – as a Friends member. Talk about member benefits of advance ticket selections, of parking privileges, of attending special pre- and post performance events, of enjoying special lectures and discussion groups. But most of all, talk about how your support is benefiting the Center for the Arts.

Stop by the information table in the lobby and speak with Friends members before and during intermission of any performance. Pick up a membership brochure and learn more about why your support is so important. Enjoy a complimentary cup of coffee or tea before the performance or during intermission, and look for the little gold lapel pins that identify Friends.

Then put your communications skills to work, helping the Friends of the Center for the Arts to grow as it continues its support for the arts in our area. ■

*John Nash
Vice President for
Communications*



John Nash

Theater of the First Amendment modernizes ancient myth

In *Lift: Icarus and Me*, the Theater of the First Amendment presents a retelling of

the ancient myth of high-flying Icarus and his father, the genius Daedalus, and is set in the East Texas dunes to rag-time music, Texas swing and rodeos. The world premiere of the family-friendly musical by the award-winning team of **Mary Hall Surface** and **David Maddox** will be performed in the Harris Theater between Jan. 19 and Feb. 5 before traveling to the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland.

The production was co-commissioned by Theater of the

First Amendment and the Clarice Smith Center. Tickets are available at the Center for the Arts box office, 703-993-2787. ■

Damon’s Grill Opens on Fairfax Campus

Looking for a great place to eat before a show at the Center? Park your car in the Center’s parking garage before the crowd arrives and walk over to Student Union Building I for a delightful casual meal at the new Damon’s Grill. The restaurant is fast catching on for students and staff as well as campus visitors.

Damon’s is open Monday through Wednesday, 11 a.m. to midnight; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 2 a.m.; Saturday, noon to 2 a.m.; and Sunday noon to midnight. See you there! ■

Performance Information

Lift: Icarus and Me

Jan. 19 - Feb. 5

Thurs. & Fri. at 8 pm

Sat. at 2 & 8 pm

Sun. at 4 pm (except Feb. 5 at 2 pm)

Tickets are \$30 Fri. & Sat. at 8 pm

\$25 all other performances

What's happening, Friends

Opera Brunch – Saturday, Feb. 18

The annual opera brunch will be held on Saturday, Feb. 18, the weekend of the two *Marriage of Figaro* performances. The event will begin with a talk by the Virginia Opera's Artistic Director **Peter Mark** and a backstage tour, followed by brunch in the Center's grand foyer. Tickets are \$30 for FCFA members and \$34 for non-members. Mrs. **Pat Carroll**, event chair, says that you should respond quickly to your invitation since the event is always a sell-out.



Russian National Orchestra – March 10

Look for your invitation in early February to a sparkling post-performance reception following the Russian National Orchestra's performance on March 10. FCFA will host a special event that will include European pastries and flavored coffees, with sophistication and a Russian flair. **Eileen Duggan**, chair of the event, states that the tickets are \$20 for FCFA members and \$22 for subscribers and non-members.

Arts at Mason Sunday Series: Understanding the Arts

On Sunday, Oct. 30, 2005, in the first of three lectures in the Sunday Series, Associate Dean and Professor of Theater **Rick Davis** gave a stimulating, knowledgeable and entertaining lecture on the Age of Enlightenment. Political revolutions in France and America paralleled big changes in the arts world and had a strong impact on Mozart and his contemporaries. Davis focused on Mozart's great opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, which the Virginia Opera will perform in February. Davis believes that this opera closely reflects Mozart's views and used two arias from the opera to illustrate his point. A lively crowd of close to 50 people enjoyed light refreshments before the event.

The second in the three series, on Sunday, Dec. 4, focused on the many uses of Shakespeare's story of the "star-crossed lovers." Following the Virginia Opera's afternoon performance of "Romeo and Juliet," an interdisciplinary panel, including Virginia Opera's artistic director and conductor, **Peter Mark**; **Ed Gero**, professor of theater; and **Linda Miller**, professor of dance, presented vivid examples of the wide range of interpretation that the original play engendered.

The final lecture will occur on Sunday, March 19, at 7 pm and will focus on "Arts, Culture and Communities in the 21st Century." Public policy experts will examine the effects of the arts on our lives and communities. All members of Friends organizations are welcome to attend this final event. The cost is \$10 per person. For more information, call or email **Megan Thornton**, 703-993-4188 or mthornto@gmu.edu. ■

Thank you to the following chairpersons and other volunteers who helped make the fall 2005 FCFA programs and activities a success:

- ♦ Carole Scanlon and Joseph Adams
- ♦ Charles and Eileen Duggan
- ♦ Lynn Gramzow
- ♦ Judy Weltz
- ♦ Brenda Forsley

Also, a special thank you for the generosity of the following community businesses that have provided in-kind gifts or discounts for our programs:

- ♦ German Gourmet-Falls Church
- ♦ Heidelberg Bakery-Arlington
- ♦ Costco of Fairfax

Campaign, from page 1

established a scholarship endowment for music, dance and theater students and had helped launch the Potomac Music Academy, a summer program that began in 2003 for music educators and middle, high school and college students. Don de Laski is a George Mason University Foundation trustee, and Nancy serves on the Arts at Mason Board.

The \$3 million gift will create large classroom, performance and rehearsal space for music and dance, as well as new lobby and exhibit space for the performing arts building. ■

Pictures of events

Not only do Friends of the Center for the Arts enjoy great performances, but they also enjoy social and educational experiences as well. Often, there are pre- and post-performance receptions or lectures and discussions to put performances in perspective. Here are photographs from two popular events this fall: the reception following the **Marvin Hamlisch** performance and Professor **Rick Davis's** lecture as part of the Sunday Discussion series. Plan to participate in one of our spring activities and get even more value for your membership.



Marvin Hamlisch performed at the Center for the Arts and then entertained Friends who attended an on-stage post-performance reception.

The new piano was dedicated at that time.



Rick Davis, associate professor, gave a lecture on the Age of Enlightenment that was enjoyed by more than 50 Friends. He discussed the influence that politics of the time had on Mozart, using *The Marriage of Figaro* as his example.



Backstage at the Center for the Arts

Ever wonder how the ushers know when to open the doors to the Concert Hall? It's not done by walkie-talkies but by a small, inconspicuous set of lights on either end of the lobby horseshoe that is controlled by the stage manager backstage.

Jessica D'Angelo, a backstage theater and opera buff ever since childhood, is CFA's enthusiastic, indefatigable stage manager and assistant production manager. While working on a Master's degree in Arts Management, she handles three to four events a week on average at the Concert Hall. On a typical recent weekend, she and the production crew worked on Friday from 9 am to 7 p.m., Saturday from 9 am to midnight, and Sunday from 6 am to 11 p.m. There is no guaranteed time off for the CFA staff, but they love their work, they like having full-time employment in a freelance world, and they do get a break in the summer when the Concert Hall is less busy.

According to the CFA's Operations Manager, **Julie Thompson**, there are about 500 events a year in the Center. Most performances are touring shows, and most groups bring their own technical staffs, including a stage manager.

However, they provide the CFA with a list of requirements so that the staff can prepare the stage in advance of the artists' arrival. Some of these requests end up in **Carrie McVicker's** inbox. As head of artist services, she

during the season. The local freelance community of backstage technicians supplements these full-time employees as needed.

While the Production Manager supervises the staff's preparations for the

requires only one or two spotlights. That can lead to trouble when the artist can't find the mark on the stage where he has requested the spot to shine and the master electrician finds himself on the computer madly trying to get the spot to track the star. A computer controls all the lights and backdrops in the fly while a gigantic console handles the audio.

The audio plot diagrams where the "talent" will be, where microphones should be placed, and whether the performers are going to hear themselves through stage floor or earbud speakers. Singers can't hear themselves sing without help. The house amplification system is directed toward the audience, not toward the stage or the chorus, which is often lined up in the wings or backstage, cued by a TV monitor so they can see the conductor. The audio engineer's task is to minimize the difference in the sound the audience and the performers hear and ensure that the sound in the "nosebleed" section of the balcony is as high in quality as center orchestra seats.

Many times in the course of the season there is very little time between events, and the staff finds itself practically living backstage. Thus they are very grateful that the architect included a restroom in the plans. ■

There are about 500 events a year in the Center.

is responsible for arranging local transportation, hotel reservations, dressing room amenities, and in general making the artists feel welcome.

Some of the Concert Hall activities are "rentals" which outside groups use for an event. Korean pop stars appear frequently, drawing a large crowd from the local Korean population. The GMU student body's Persian Club hosts an annual variety show with songs and comedy all in Farsi. On those occasions, the staff relies on bilingual students to interpret for them so they know what is happening on stage. Another event, The BodyRock Health and Fitness Expo, has been held at the Center for six consecutive years.

The Production Manager, **Rob Auchter**, supervises the Concert Hall production staff that includes Master Electrician **Matthew Pepper**, Master Carpenter **Kevin Smith**, and Audio Engineer **Billy Kessinger**. Each of them, along with Jessica D'Angelo, has an assistant

event, once it occurs, the Stage Manager is in charge of everything and serves as a traffic cop for all movement and communication. If anything goes wrong, it is her job to fix it on the spot and issue the orders to the crew through an in-house communication system, backed up by portable two-way radios. She decides when the artists are ready, signals the ushers to open the doors, and drops the house lights prior to the start of the performance. She has two TV monitors at her workstation behind the set, one using visible light, the other infrared so she can see in the dark. Since the production staff live so much in the dark, they develop excellent night vision and can sense each other's presence even when dressed totally in black on a dark stage while changing sets and props or fixing a problem.

Most performances require at least 150 lights, a number that can be doubled, but the occasional solo artist



Center for the Arts
George Mason University
4400 University Dr., MS 4C1
Fairfax, VA 22030

For more information,
please call
703-993-4188

or visit <http://fcfa.gmu.edu>

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Calendar of Events: Great Performances at Mason January-February-March

- Jan. 19 - Feb. 5 (Thurs - Sun), **Theater of the First Amendment: *Lift Icarus and Me***, Thurs. & Fri. at 8 p.m., Sat. at 2 & 8 p.m., Sun. at 4 p.m. (except Feb. 5 at 2 p.m.), Harris Theater
- Jan. 20 (Fri), 8 p.m. **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra: Charles Dutoit, conductor**
- Jan. 28 (Sat), 2 & 8 p.m. **The Black Watch and Band of the Welsh Guard: *The Pipes, Drums and Highland Dancers of 1st Battalion***
- Jan. 29 (Sun), 7 p.m. **Keyboard Conversations® with Jeffrey Siegel: *Mozart and Chopin: Virtuoso Variations***
- Feb. 4 (Sat), 8 p.m. **Ahn Trio**
- Feb. 10 (Fri), 8 p.m. **Mark Morris Dance Group: *25th Anniversary National Tour***
- Feb. 11 (Sat), 8 p.m. **Mark Morris Dance Group: *25th Anniversary National Tour***
- Feb. 17 (Fri), 8 p.m. **Virginia Opera: *The Marriage of Figaro***
- Feb. 19 (Sun), 2 p.m. **Virginia Opera: *The Marriage of Figaro***
- Feb. 25 (Sat), 8 p.m. **Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble: *The Impermanence Project***
- Mar. 4 (Sat), 8 p.m. **Susan Marshall & Company: *Return to Intimacy***
- Mar. 10 (Fri), 8 p.m. **Russian National Orchestra**
- Mar. 11 (Sat), 8 p.m. **Metropolitan Jazz Orchestra**
- Mar. 18 & 19 all day, **Theater of the First Amendment: 6th Annual First Light Festival**
- Mar. 24 (Fri), 8 p.m. **The Actors' Gang: *The Exonerated***
- Mar. 25 (Sat), 8 p.m. **Russian National Ballet: *Sleeping Beauty***
- Mar. 26 (Sun), 2 p.m. **Russian National Ballet: *Swan Lake***

