

Clicking at Carnegie Hall: Michael Cundari, '99

At Carnegie Hall in New York, the 2,000 people in the audience stand and applaud at the conclusion of an inspiring Easter Sunday performance of Vivaldi's *Gloria*. Beaming with pride from the audience is Michael Cundari, who as director of the Franklin Middle School concert choir in Nutley, N.J., has spent three months planning the collaborative performance with the White Middle School concert choir in Henderson.

Cundari, who received his bachelor of music degree from UNLV in 1999, was a student-teacher at White and worked with Randy Pagel. "Pagel directs one of the most accomplished school choirs in the country," Cundari says. "We have kept in close touch since I graduated. When he was invited by MidAmerica Productions to come to Carnegie Hall and conduct his choir with the New England Symphonic Ensemble, he suggested that we collaborate."

Mentor and protégé spent countless hours on the phone working out the details. At the Sheraton Hotel in New York two days before the performance, their choirs finally joined forces. And, just hours before taking the stage, the combined choir of 247 singers practiced for the first time with the ensemble and two professional vocal soloists.

Says Cundari, "*Gloria* is a difficult piece for junior high school students because it's in Latin and contains 12 contrasting movements that are filled with passionate phrases, staggered entrances, and pulsating rhythms. It challenged the kids and pushed me as a teacher, but as Jocelyn Jensen, one of my former UNLV choral directors, used to say, 'No risk, no art.'"

Cundari took a circuitous path to concert choirs. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America in 1994, a stint at the Rainbow Room in New York convinced him that a career as a chef wasn't for him. He enrolled in UNLV's College of Hotel Administration to study restaurant management, but still floundered for direction.



Choir director Michael Cundari, center, brought together students from his Nutley, N.J., middle school and from Clark County to perform at Carnegie Hall.

"I sometimes sought comfort by finding a piano in a practice room in the music department," he recalls. "Carol Stivers, who is the piano department's coordinator, heard me play and encouraged me to audition for a scholarship. I didn't need much convincing."

Cundari, who describes himself as a "music generalist," never had much interest in singing, but his scholarship required participation in a choir. "I went from being a cut-up in class to the guy who, three years later, directed the university choir when choral director David Weiller had a conflict," says Cundari.

He credits Weiller for turning his focus to choral studies. "The high when I'm part of a choir that is clicking is unexplainable, and it's something I wanted to pass on to kids. I couldn't be happier doing it."

The Nutley schools couldn't be happier to have him. In three years, Cundari's middle school choral groups have grown from 50 to 285 students – just under half of the school's entire population. He also started an acclaimed madrigals group and directs the high school choir, which performed in the second half of the Carnegie Hall program.

"Concert choir teaches music, but it also teaches discipline, focus, and teamwork and provides a tremendous sense of accomplishment," explains Cundari. "I feel that kids leave my classes as better people, and what could be more satisfying than that?"

— By Bill Glovin

sports fan, he is married and has two daughters.

Nicole K. Dircks, '98 BA Communication Studies, recently received her commission as a naval officer after completing Officer Candidate School at Naval Aviation Schools Command in Pensacola, Fla. In addition to a rigorous physical program, her training included navigation, engineering, naval warfare, and management.

Tony Letendre, '98 BS Hotel Administration, is senior assistant golf professional at The Reserve in La Quinta, Calif. He is working to become a full member of the Professional Golfers' Association.

Mark Metheny, '98 MBA, is an information technology architect specializing in the telecommunications industry for International Business Machines in Denver.

Greg Orr, '98 BA Music and '01 MBA, is manager of information systems at WorldDoc Inc., a Las Vegas company offering online health decision support and value-added benefits for employees. He oversees online development and site implementation.

Christine Robbins Fiske, '98 MBA, is a financial analyst for State

Street Corp. in Boston. She and her husband are expecting their second child in October.



Dubin & Wiede

Elliot Dubin, '99 BS Hotel Administration, and **Allison Wiede**, '99 BS Hotel Administration, were married in August 2001. He is the guest services manager at the Renaissance Chicago North Shore Hotel. They live in Wheeling.

Michelle Foumberg, '99 BA Film Studies, is a casting director for MTV's highest-rated show, *Becoming*. She began working at MTV as an undergraduate intern when the cable television station was filming in Las Vegas. She credits film professor Francisco Menendez with much of her success.

Sylvia Lyly Wang, '99 BS Hotel Administration, is the human resources coordinator at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco and was recently married.

Marty A. Weinberg, '99 BS International Business, is a financial adviser with Merrill Lynch in Las Vegas. A die-hard Rebels fan, he is a member of the Annual Giving Council of the UNLV Foundation and an inaugural member of the College of Business Alumni Association.

■ 2000s

Delia Georgiana "Jo" Hadesan, '00 BA Economics and History, is a program associate in the environmental section of the United Nations Development Programme in her native Romania. She coordinates environmental projects and manages the communications operations for the office. She recently drafted a proposal for collaboration between the business community and the U.N. ambassador. She lives in Bucharest.

Scott Ramin, '00 B.S. Culinary Arts Management, is the kitchen manager for UNLV's William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration. He is also pursuing a master's degree at UNLV.

Bobbi Youngblood, '00 MA Political Science, is director of human resources for Konami Gaming, Inc., a manufacturer of gaming equipment.



Bobbi Youngblood

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