

BRENAU

WINTER 2008

Window

**San Francisco Soprano
Kristin Clayton Knezevic**

also inside:

Brenau's political connections

Roots of African dictatorship

At home with artist Sarah Lamb



Feeding Democracy's Habit

My generation revels in the conceit that we were the political activist generation. Student-led “power” demonstrations and younger voices heard from the ballot box had “the man” up against the wall. We stopped the Vietnam War, ended the draft, lowered the voting age, saved the environment, elevated the status of women and created momentum for transferring our raw political power through future generations of young people.

Or, so we thought.

The 26th Amendment, ratified just before the 1972 presidential campaigns, added 11.5 million voters to the rolls. Still, only 55 percent of those under 30 actually voted. In 1996 only 31.2 percent of registered 18-to 20-year-olds voted. In 2000 only 36 percent of those under 30 voted – 26 percent less than the over-30 turnout. Programs like “Rock the Vote” wooed three million more young voters to the polls in 2004, the largest increase since the ’70s. The 18-to 24-year-old turnout increased 11 points to 47 percent compared with the four-point jump to 64 percent overall.

For the sake of our democracy, I hope the last numbers signify a trend. I believe the most important thing Brenau University could do to change the world is teach students the value of their vote, the rewards of embracing citizenship responsibilities and consequences of not doing so.

As we enter the important 2008 election year, we will strongly encourage our students toward democratic participation. In addition to making it easier for them to vote, we will try to increase their interest in the political process with programs like the sure-to-be-exciting April campus visit by husband-and-wife pundits James Carville and Mary Matalin.

We all know one vote matters. We all know that the 2000 presidential election hinged not on millions of votes around the nation, but only hundreds in one state. “Experts” still play the game: what if the youth voter turnout in Florida in 2000 had even approximated ’72 percentages?

For those of us on campuses of colleges and universities, “what if?” is the wrong question. We should be asking why more college-aged citizens are not engaged in the

process. We need to energize efforts that will help them seize the concept of personal power and responsibility in the American democratic system. We must pass on to our young people that what we do, or neglect to do, as a country and as communities will have global ramifications. Consequently it is increasingly important whom we elect as decision-makers and legislators at every level of government.

We see three levels of political commitment among students today. A small percentage is deeply engaged, more often than not, in galvanizing, emotional issues or out-of-the-mainstream political factions. Second are those who inherited political philosophies from their parents. The third and largest group is the apathetic.

It would be easy to dismiss apathy as a symptom of youth. Associated with myriad distractions like text messaging, iPod downloads, social networking Web sites and other “new media,” this leaves our young people – if you will indulge me one Jimmy Buffett paraphrase – so connected, yet so alone. Apathy, however, is a gravely dangerous habit, one easily manipulated by the wrong influences. What was Nazi Germany if not the evil of a few mobilizing the apathy of many under the shroud of national and political isolation?

Some political scientists argue that young people will not vote unless there is something in it for them, like ending the draft and lowering the minimum age for buying beer were issues for our generation. These experts overlook one factor from the latest data: When new voters in 2004 and 2006 were asked why they participated, most said it was because somebody asked them to.

All this is compelling evidence that students want to be involved. Our challenge is connecting them with the habit of voting. Our task is encouraging them to connect.

Join me in asking.

Ed Schrader, Ph.D.
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AND IF ELECTED...

Although it seems it has been going on a lot longer, 2008 is presidential election year. Technically speaking, if you factor in biannual contests for congressional and state elections and odd-year municipal and local elections, just about every year is election year somewhere. And, there is a growing number of Brenau alumni who are either running for office themselves or closely involved with someone else who is.

That's nothing new, just judging from former trustees. Barbara Stockton Perry, WC '47, in 1984 became the first woman ever to run for lieutenant governor in North Carolina. Nan Jared Powell, WC '64, and Nancy Wofford Moore, WC '60, currently neighbors in Cambridge, Md., became part of the family that helped elect Jimmy Carter governor of Georgia and then president of the United States. Although the two Brenau grads won't claim any visible role, their husbands Jody Powell and Frank Moore, were key players in the Carter White House.

Many thought Lilibet Hagel, A '72, this year might have been thrust into the relentless spotlight as a "candidate for First Lady," if her husband, U.S. Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Nebraska, had entered the presidential race. But, she confesses, she enjoys a good campaign – as long as she's not the person out front. "Chuck's first senate campaign was wonderful, just a fabulous experience. I was definitely his chief supporter, definitely a sounding board, but not really a surrogate. I think I gave two speeches, which wasn't my favorite thing to do, and still isn't." Don't count the Hagel family out just yet, however.

Perry, who decided after her unsuccessful '84 campaign to stick to practicing law, says she's still very interested in politics, "but it's a hard, hard game." You don't have to sell that notion to Stephanie Triko-Seleyo, WC '92, of McKees Rocks, Pa., who is having a tough first term as chair of the Robinson Township Commission in the rough-and-tumble Pittsburgh area political scene. Also, in any of 159 counties generally one of the most significant, hotly contested local campaigns is that for sheriff. In some jurisdictions sheriffs only oversee jails and courthouse security. In others, like Hall,

the county in which Brenau resides, the sheriff has extensive police and law enforcement powers.

Hall Sheriff Steve Cronic – Georgia's 2007 "sheriff of the year" – is one of many Georgia sheriffs with at least one Brenau degree who are facing an election. Others include Thomas E. Brown, EWC '90, of DeKalb, Chis Houston, EWC '98, of Greene, Jerry Modena, EWC '86, of Bibb, Jeff Wigington, EWC '92, of Rockdale and Myron Freeman, EWC '81, '83, of Fulton.

Georgia State Rep. Tommy Benton, EWC '83, a Jefferson Republican, was first elected to the legislature in 2004. Democrat Terry Coleman, EWC '81, the former speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives and long-time chairman of the powerful Appropriations Committee, already was a well-established legislator when he got his Brenau degree.

"If it had not been for that Brenau program, I would not have an undergraduate degree today and I would not have been able to go to law school and get a law degree," says Coleman, now an assistant commissioner in the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Coleman retired from the legislature after a 34-year career in 2006 following Republicans' capturing the majority and stripping him of his power.

Don't count Coleman out, either. The elected Agriculture Commission post will be up for grabs in 2010 and Coleman acknowledges he is already "talking to some people" who are encouraging him to run. "In politics," he says, "persistence makes up for a lot."

As you will see from the sampler on the next pages, Brenau folks bring some interesting perspective – and interesting experiences – to the political arena.



2008 for Terry Coleman is so 'this year.' He's looking to 2010.

Lilibet Hagel's personal politics

After about three decades of watching politics up close and personal, **Lilibet Ziller Hagel, A '72**, says she would encourage her teenagers, daughter, Allyn, and son, Ziller, to get involved and stay involved with the political process, hoping they "find people they believe in and can support, and have some fun."

That's hard to do in Washington these days. The nastiness of today's politics probably turns young people off to the whole process, says Hagel, and she speculates that coming generations will be less-apt to tow the party line, more independent thinkers who will find someone they believe in who appeals to their independence and energy.

"I don't know who or when," she says, "but I think that's what it's going to take to get young people engaged."

Many observers thought that the "when" was this year and the "who" would have involved the Brenau graduate and her husband, Chuck, the outspoken maverick Republican U.S. Senator from Nebraska. In September, however, with his wife and kids at his side, Hagel told the world not only that he decided against running for president in 2008, but also planned to make good on a campaign promise to step down from the Senate after two terms.

If the former senator's wife has anything to say about it, the September announcement will not mark Chuck Hagel's last hurrah. "The issues are too important for him to just walk away," she says, adding that she believes ex-Sen. Hagel will wield considerably more influence as a Washington outsider. With the vitriolic nature of Washington, the Senate has become "say what you are supposed to say, then sit down, and that's not Chuck."

Their new-found independence will give them a chance to work on some more recent passions, like the Scholar Rescue Fund, which seeks to combat repressive governments that she says "target the intellectual capital of a country" by imprisoning and occasionally executing top thinkers, and the United Nations humanitarian relief organization. Meanwhile, she plans to keep teaching English as a second language two days a week. Her current class in Washington's Virginia suburbs has 12 to 15 people from eight different countries.

Lillian Beth Ziller wasn't much interested in politics when she came to Brenau Academy from her native Mississippi in the 1960s. She engaged in all the usual high school high jinks, including cutting English class by slipping out a classroom window and skulking over the North Hall roof after roll call. Still, she speaks with reverence of teachers like Bernice Cox of Gainesville and the late Mrs. Robert Turnipseed, who required students to read *Time* magazine each week to keep up with world events. "Most people are lucky if they can feel that they had one or two great teachers who influenced

their lives. We felt that way about them all," she says. "For me it was a wonderful 2½ years."

Later, as an American University graduate literature student in Washington, she picked up what she thought would be a part-time job as an intern with her hometown congressman. She stayed on for five years, ultimately working as a speechwriter and press secretary for U.S. Rep. Sonny Montgomery on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. At a portrait hanging honoring her boss, she met a Veterans Administration assistant secretary, Chuck Hagel. They went out the next night, continued a courtship for two years and married in 1985.

As for that 2008 presidential campaign that didn't happen, "There is a time for everything, and I don't think this was the time for him," she says. "He's had a great career by not forcing things. We just have to wait and see what his destiny is."



"Still waters run deep and it's best not to disturb them," says Lilibet Hagel on her husband Chuck's thoughts on a future presidential campaign. "But," she adds, "life is unpredictable."

Ringmaster for a media circus

Few small-town mayors ever receive the kind of international media attention accorded in the spring of 2005 to **Shirley Fanning Lasseter, A '66, WC '70**. Given a choice, the Duluth, Ga., mayor says she would have preferred acclaim for, say, dealing with runaway growth in the Atlanta suburb.

Instead there's Lasseter on all the networks dealing with "the runaway bride."

By now this is a familiar story: Jennifer Wilbanks disappears virtually on the eve of her "high society" wedding. Fearing kidnapping or murder, the mayor and city leaders turn out the entire police force to find her. The young woman turns up in New Mexico a few days later suffering from little more than a case of cold feet.

Although many of the city's 26,000 citizens expressed anger, outrage and many other emotions over what the episode put them through, and what it cost the city in hard dollars, "In the final analysis," the mayor says candidly, "it was a very good thing for Duluth." The ordeal proved people and multiple governmental jurisdictions could work together in a crisis, Lasseter explains. Media exposure introduced the city, its people and its small-town charm to the world.

"If I could point to anything that prepared me for my time as mayor and [the Wilbanks affair], it would be my Brenau education," she says. "In three years living on campus at the Academy and four years as an education major, I learned how to deal with a variety of people on sensitive matters, working out problems on my own and synthesizing solutions with others."

Brenau and the city's top political post have some history. In 1922, Duluth voters elected Georgia's first female mayor, Alice Harrell Strickland. Three years earlier Strickland's 16-year-old daughter, Ellyne, graduated from Brenau Women's College en route to a brilliant legal career as a U.S. government tax lawyer who practiced before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Lasseter taught school for close to a decade before taking a break for her own family. After a divorce, she worked in marketing and public relations for the city and, she says – like Strickland had seven decades earlier – "I just saw things that needed to be changed." The Republican entered the mayoral contest against an incumbent in 1993 and won by 12 votes. Although she has had little opposition in all re-election bids since, she chose not to run in 2007, opting instead for a shot this year at an open Gwinnett County Commission post.

"Politics and teaching school are not all that different," Lasseter says with her robust laugh. "You're still working with children, just bigger ones."



Shirley Lasseter gave up her Duluth mayoral post to run for county commission in Georgia's fastest-growing region.



A Red State/Blue State He Said/She Said

As the 2008 presidential campaign moves into the home stretch, Brenau University on Friday, April 18 will host the husband-and-wife team of James Carville, who engineered Democratic candidate Bill Clinton's successful campaign, and Mary Matalin, who worked at the same time for the Republican President George H. W. Bush. Carville will meet with students for a question and answer session at 5 p.m. before the duo's presentation, "All's Fair: Love, War and Politics," in Pearce Auditorium at 6 p.m. The session, held in conjunction with reunion weekend, is open to the public. The speakers appear courtesy of the Kay and Douglas Ivester programming series.

Sheriff of the Year excels in 'family business'

WHEN STEVE CRONIC, EWC '90, '95, completed his undergraduate degree in criminal justice and began his MBA at Brenau University, he was chief of security for one of Georgia's highest-flying high-tech companies. Following a half-billion-dollar merger deal, the company moved to Seattle, and Cronic decided to enter what amounted to the family business – Hall County politics and law enforcement.

This year Cronic, 50, will campaign for his third four-year term as sheriff of one of Georgia's fastest-growing counties. Last year he was elected by his peers as the state's "sheriff of the year." He was appointed by Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle to the Georgia Board of Public Safety. His department has received numerous plaudits, including both state and national awards for traffic safety accomplishments.

Cronic's dad, Clyde Cronic Jr., was a long-time sheriff's deputy. Political genes for the most part skipped a generation, coming to Republican Cronic from his grandfather, whom the sheriff describes as a "yellow-dog Democrat... who taught me everything I know about politics." Mr. Clyde, as he was known, ran a barbershop in Gainesville that was a veritable forum for political debate and for vetting local, state and national politicians. Long-time Georgia congressmen Phil Landrum and Ed Jenkins were more likely to take the pulse of the public at Mr. Clyde's barbershop than at city hall.

Much of his success Cronic also attributes to those seemingly disparate Brenau degrees. Hall's top cop shoulders responsibility for all crime-fighting police work not covered by the county's municipalities. He also runs what amounts to a \$23 million-a-year enterprise with 500 employees and close to 180,000 "customer" service calls annually.

Of the MBA, he says, "I use it every day. Everything I do is business based. The good-old-boy, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants days are over" for modern law enforcement. Cronic's latest initiative is opening a new 1,026-bed jail, which will be the state's third largest. The business-savvy sheriff brought the project in under budget and ahead of schedule. He says it will provide about \$5 million a year in relief for local taxpayers because the department not only will avoid paying other counties to house inmates it could not squeeze into the old facility, but it will also collect revenues for housing prisoners from other jurisdictions.

Ever the politician, Cronic takes no credit. "It's my job to make promises," the sheriff says. "The men and women around me are the ones who have to keep them."

Drawing of his dad by Sheriff Cronic's son Cody, now 12.





David Larned

At Home with Tradition

BY DAVID MORRISON

For a traditional realist painter, southeastern Pennsylvania probably is as great a base as any. The region produced a whole gallery of Wyeths who from their roots in Chadds Ford provided an influential counterpoint to modernist-trending American art in the 20th century, starting with N.C. Wyeth and continuing through his children Andrew and Caroline, and Andrew's son, Jamie.

The place also has had something of a siren's call for **Sarah Lamb Larned, WC '93**. When she was about 12, she recalls seeing the "three generations of Wyeth" exhibition at a Washington gallery. That hooked her on realism. She and her husband, portrait artist David Larned, moved to Chadds Ford shortly after they were married and since 2006 have lived in nearby Downingtown. Their beautifully restored 300-year-old farmhouse, once owned by the actor Claude Rains when he was rounding up the usual suspects in *Casablanca*, is in a setting that could easily inspire countless more generations of budding Wyeths with its vista of rolling pastures, a spring-fed pond, ruins of an ancient barn and specimen trees.

"It's a pretty good place to work," says Sarah. "And it's a really great wintertime house."

Publications like *American Artist* and *Southwest Art* have featured the artist, who uses the "brush name" Sarah Lamb, as one of America's most talented young painters. Atlanta artist Christine Bray wrote on her blog after taking a workshop in New York from Sarah last summer that the Brenau alumna "is a fantastic artist and wonderful teacher."

You might suspect that a pair of artists would fill the walls of their home with their own works, but that's not the case at the Lamb-Larned manse. When they do display their own paintings, there's a reason. Two pieces David did as a student hang, Sarah says, "because they seemed to go with the feel of the room." They share space with works by friends and, in one instance, a painting she and David bought in Ireland as an "engagement present" to each other.

"We weren't technically engaged then," Sarah corrects herself, "but we knew."

The artists have converted a former carriage house/garage on the property into two separate studios. When they work, the door between them "stays closed," says Sarah. David listens almost subconsciously to soft classical music. "I like a little distraction," says Sarah, who tunes to radio talk shows and fusses with Weezie, their mischievous pug who always seems to be into something. David's subjects primarily are people, and he works a lot from photographs. Sarah's métier is the still life, paintings of food, floral arrangements, model boats and other inanimate objects, which she continuously arranges to get the best play of light. One rare time they collaborated on a project for the Delaware-based Dogfish Head brewery.

Her "keenness of eye and joyful brush make the whole enterprise feel freshly alive as she reminds us what the really wonderful things in life are."



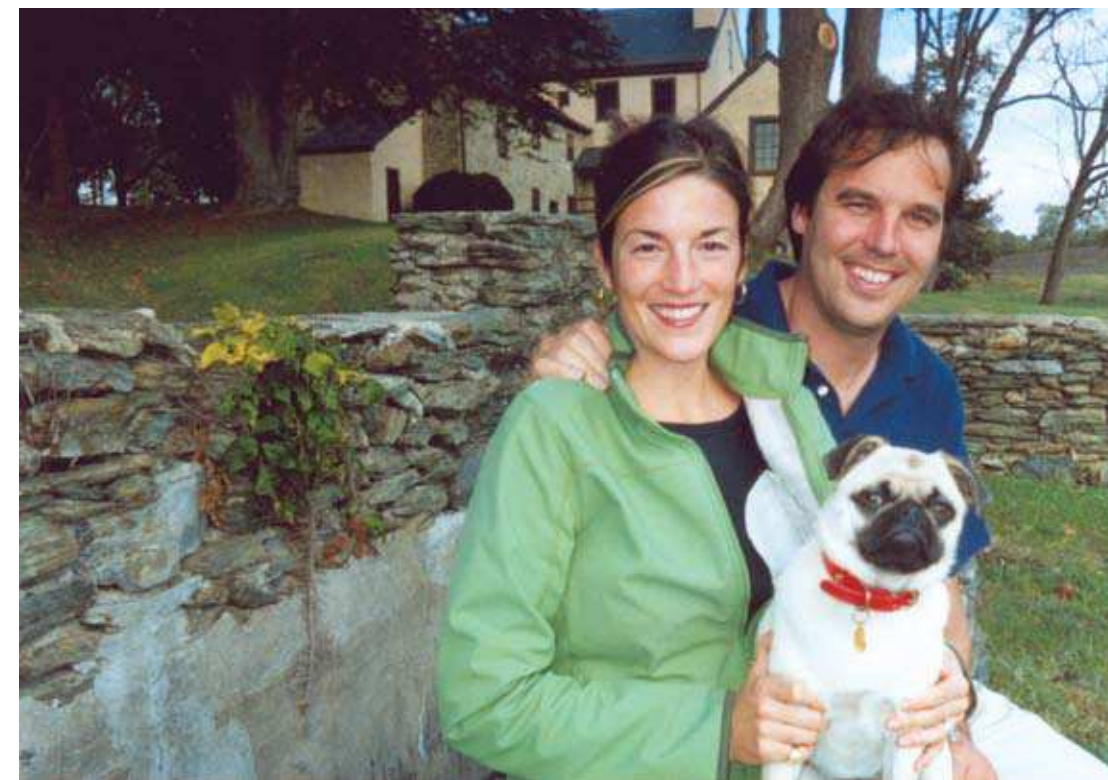
Peonies, 2007, oil on linen, 16" x 16"

David did a whimsical portrait for the label of its Black & Blue ale while

a Sarah Lamb still life graces the label of its lighter Red & White product.

Brenau currently has only one Sarah Lamb painting on display – her senior project work, which is a still life of a blue shirt draped on a chair back. It hangs in the outer office of the president. The university would do well to hold onto it. She concentrates these days putting together enough paintings for a scheduled May show in San Francisco while keeping the galleries in New York and other cities that deal her work with enough stock to sell at prices ranging from \$6,000 to \$30,000. If other artists are good indicators, her work will only appreciate in value. In a 2006 profile, the British-born artist and critic John A. Parks wrote that "Sarah Lamb brings to her work a robustly sensual grasp of the world." Her "keenness of eye and joyful brush make the whole enterprise feel freshly alive as she reminds us what the really wonderful things in life are."

Says her husband, the painter David Larned, "Sarah's the rock star in the family."



David Morrison

Sarah with husband David Larned and Weezie outside the 300-year-old house once owned by actor Claude Rains. Sarah represents the fourth generation in her family to attend Brenau following her mother, Glee Boyle Lamb, WC '67, of Atlanta, grandmother, Sarah Byers Boyle, WC '43, and great grandmother, Mildred Pyles Byers, WC '18.

Back in the Briar Patch



As one White County commissioner chewed tobacco during a recent work session in Cleveland, Ga., another ranted about evil-doers at the state capitol in drought-thirsty Atlanta who would dare tell mountain folk what they could do with streams on their own land. Taking it all in was 56-year-old Billy

Chism, EWC '01, the newest publisher and editor of the weekly, 2,600-subscriber *White County News*.

As a representative of the third generation of his family to run a weekly paper, Chism knows he not only must listen carefully in such circumstances but must also master nuance. His predecessor tried to be funny when writing about the age-old private property rights issue and ticked off just about everybody. It didn't help his case that in trying to one-up his politically conservative readers he mounted a moral high horse and banned birth announcements of kids whose parents weren't married.

For a small town, the local paper is a vital news organ for club, school and church activities and other information. "We're what everyone goes to once a week," he says, "and we try to provide leadership when we can."

The jury's still out on whether Chism will succeed in his new role. About the best one wag would say was that, since Chism took over, people have stopped talking about how much they hate the paper. Judy Walker, president of the White County Chamber of Commerce, did observe that now the content "is not all negative," focusing more on human interest stories. "You can see his excitement when he attends events here," she adds. "He really gets what a small town is all about."

He ought to. Chism earned an MBA and subsequently taught management classes as an adjunct instructor on Brenau's Gainesville campus. The scion of a family that owned the *Pelham Journal* in south Georgia for 64 years, Chism previously studied journalism at the University of Georgia and went to work as a reporter for the Toccoa Record.

That's when he got side tracked for, well, about three decades. He rose through the ranks at the textile firm Coats and Clark. He got elected to the Toccoa's city commission. After having to lay off several hundred people at Coats and Clark a couple of years ago, he started looking for other things to do. In spite of dire prediction for the future of print media, when he got the chance for the *News* job, he took it.

"I didn't want to wait until I was 66 to say, 'man, I wish I'd gotten back in the newspaper business,'" he laughs. "I think this is where I need to be, but I feel like I've been thrown in the briar patch."

— Linda M. Erbele

Down-to-Earth Diva

The San Francisco opera singer Kristin Clayton Knezevic ticks off the great roles she has yet to perform, including Violetta in *La Traviata* and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*. “Above all, I dream of singing Tosca before I die,” Knezevic says with a wry smile. “She’s the epitome, I guess, of the jealous, raging operatic role.”



by Maria Behan
photography by Sheila Masson

On stage, the 1990 graduate of Brenau University’s Women’s College may indeed appreciate – and deliver – scenery-chewing histrionics like that of Puccini’s tortured heroine. The off-stage Kristin, however, is the total opposite of the hysterical diva. She’s as grounded as her lyric soprano voice is soaring.

“It’s important to keep expanding and getting new influences,” she says. “It’s good to know where home is.”

During childhood and adolescence in Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia, Knezevic discovered her passion for drama and musical theater. She enrolled in Shorter College in Rome, Ga., focusing on acting and singing with “hopes of performing on Broadway,” she recalls. Enthusiastically plumbing the range of her musical pipes, she tackled the intricacies of operatic *lieder* in daytime voice lessons, then at night belted out songs for theater productions like *Man of La Mancha*. “My voice teacher said he appreciated my enthusiasm for all kinds of music, but that the popular music was undermining what he was trying to teach me,” she says. Consultation with others, including a music-savvy aunt, convinced the young singer that her voice was better suited to classical music.

“I felt a little sad about that,” she confesses. “I didn’t grow up listening to classical music. My dad’s family was tobacco farmers who’d sit on the porch playing guitar and singing Johnny Cash and Jim Reeves, while my mom was from New York and a big fan of Neil Diamond and Barbara Streisand. Opera was another world to me.”

The young singer soon came to appreciate that other world and its rich possibilities. “I loved acting and really delving into a character,” she says. “I eventually figured out that there’s much more depth in opera, so you can go further into a character than you can in musical theater.”

During a break from Shorter while she considered her musical and educational options, her development took an unexpected turn. Her mother pointed out that there was a great school for music in the town where the family had recently moved: Gainesville, Ga. She applied, auditioned and received a full scholarship to Brenau. “I fell in love with the place,” Knezevic says. “I liked the idea of a women’s school – and I loved the feminine power I

felt at Brenau.”

Shorter had more of a conservatory approach, tightly focused on music and drama, but Brenau’s broader curriculum helped Knezevic round out her studies and experiences. “For instance, Leslie Storms Talbott’s world civilization and poly sci classes were eye-opening for me,” Knezevic recalls, adding that the former professor’s confidence and intelligence were inspiring: “She was a big influence on me as a woman; she was the right teacher at the right time.”

Knezevic developed her classical music chops, too. She credits “a wonderful soprano, Laura Reesman,” her Brenau music voice teacher who is now

The Rocky Mountain News called one of her performances “brilliant, vocally and dramatically.” *The Denver Post* remarked about her “pleasing, unaffected voice and natural acting.” *San Francisco Classical Voice* called hers “a beautiful voice, expressively used.” With a career that by some music standards is really just beginning to mature, head-turning reviews and gala performances in opera houses from Denver to Brazil, Kristin Clayton Knezevic, WC ’90, has begun playing the diva role, all right, but she’s doing it with humility and a sense of humor.

director of youth and adult music at the Buford Presbyterian Church in Georgia, as a significant influence. “She was a big disciplinarian, which was a great help to me at the time, and she helped me prepare for my auditions for grad school.”

Armed with a vocal performance degree from Brenau and aided by a full scholarship and stipend, Knezevic completed her master’s at the University of Cincinnati. In 1993 a friend suggested she apply for the San Francisco Opera’s Merola Program for young artists. Knezevic was one of 22 students from all over the world picked for the prestigious program.

It was a great proving ground: not only did Knezevic study and perform in San Francisco; she also went on a three-month bus tour around the United States, performing in a wide range of venues

before a variety of audiences. “It was a wonderful chance to experience different circumstances,” she says. “You learn to go with the flow.”

Knezevic thrived under the program, so much so that she was one of nine singers chosen for the San Francisco Opera’s prestigious Adler Fellowship, which afforded her more opportunities to receive coaching, get involved in community outreach programs, and play a range of operatic roles.

In her 1994 dream-come-true debut with the San Francisco Opera, Knezevic worked with soprano Renée Fleming, baritone Thomas Hampson and mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade on the premier of Conrad Susa’s *The Dangerous Liaisons*. “The composer was in rehearsals, making changes as we went,” Knezevic says. “It was amazing not only to work with those people, but to be part of that creative process – working together to make something that never existed before.” To cap it off, the opera was broadcast on PBS.

The San Francisco Opera has been pivotal in the singer’s personal life as well. She met and in 1995 married bass baritone Bojan Knezevic, a Belgrade native. They have two children, Maia, 12, and Max, 3.

“We come from such different cultures,” Knezevic says, “I sometimes joke we’re kind of the yin and yang of the world. Bojan and I understand each other so well as people and as artists, including how our careers sometimes require us to devote all our time and energy to a single detail.”

Then there’s the travel thing: “Sometimes I have to just up and go – for instance, I’m just back from Brazil – and I can leave Bojan to run the household. We’re a real 50-50 partnership,” she says. “The key to that, I think, is good communication – and letting go of the things that aren’t really important.”

At the San Francisco Opera, Knezevic also met another pivotal person in her life, the SFO’s resident composer Jake Heggie, a nontraditionalist whose operatic themes have addressed modern issues like spousal abuse and capital punishment. The two have been friends since Knezevic first

started with the company and Heggie, the proverbial undiscovered talent, still slaved away in the opera’s publicity department. Fast forward to 2005: Heggie had been commissioned by Opera Colorado to do a piece for Fleming for the grand opening of Denver’s new Ellie Caulkins Opera House. When Fleming decided to pass on the role because of illness three weeks before the opening, Knezevic stepped into the difficult task of carrying a 20-minute, one-character mini-opera, *At the Statue of Venus*, a musical monologue by a woman awaiting the arrival of a blind date at an art museum.

In addition to great reviews in both Denver newspapers, the Web magazine *FanFaire* described her performance this way: “Statuesque as a statue of Venus, she moved on stage as a natural actress with a gift for comedy and a voice to match – a beautiful, robust soprano that hits all the right

notes, agile and confident.”

“She brought the house down,” Heggie said in a previously published interview. By his telling, however, Knezevic had a head start on preparation because whenever he writes a new piece, he tries it out with her. They have worked together refining numerous compositions, including Heggie’s 2000 opera *Dead Man Walking*. As a new mom, Knezevic’s vocal range dropped into the mezzo range, which enabled her to help Heggie work out the pivotal role of Sister Helen Prejean, the real-life Louisiana nun who worked with death row inmates.

Knezevic reprised her celebrated *Venus* performance in Brazil last fall. She collaborates with Heggie again in the Houston debut of his new work, *Last Acts*, Feb. 29 through March 15. That performance also will reunite her with von Stade, for whom the piece was written.

When Knezevic’s not working on operatic roles, she performs with a group called Teatro ZinZanni, which she describes as “a cross between a circus, dinner theater and a cabaret.” She originated the role of The Diva in 2000 and returns to it whenever her schedule permits. “It’s great fun to have that kind of direct contact with an audience,” she says, adding that it’s also a novel experience for audience members to be so close to an opera singer: “I might be singing right over your table.”

As The Diva, Knezevic makes the most of the chance to expose a broader audience to opera. She chooses arias that may be familiar from popular versions of the music or pieces adapted for TV commercials. “Introducing people to great music is a thrill,” she says. “When you perform a piece of music that’s a little familiar to them, people get excited. I think it’s great when those amazing melodies hit people in all different ways and forms.”

She says she also gets a kick from working with circus types, a refreshing change of pace from opera singers. “Since we carry our instruments in our bodies, singers by necessity tend to be self absorbed,” Knezevic observes. “It’s all, ‘My voice! My voice! Is my voice OK?’ Circus performers tend to be much more relaxed. They’re highly skilled and very disciplined, but they’re generally calmer and more confident.” They even bring their kids to rehearsals, which inspired Knezevic to follow suit. That lightens the mood backstage – as does sharing a dressing

room with acrobats warming up with back flips.

Knezevic returned to Brenau in 2002 for the inaugural recital marking the opening of the John S. Burd Center for the Performing Arts. “I thought the new facility was amazing,” she says. She’s also excited about another development in the music department



since her days at Brenau: the arrival of William Fred Scott, formerly artistic director of the Atlanta Opera, as the director of Brenau’s International Opera Center. “Fred’s a great asset,” she says, “and I’m sure he’ll spur Brenau’s opera program into exciting new directions. I’d like to go back again soon and see more of what’s going on there these days.”

During that last campus visit Knezevic met Brenau’s director of music, Michelle Roueché, who had studied piano with the accompanist for tenor Luciano Pavarotti. “She’s an amazing performer with an absolutely gorgeous voice,” says Roueché, who accompanied Knezevic in her Brenau performance. “Kristin just loves music, and she shares that love with her audience. There’s nothing pretentious about her. I think that’s one of the reasons that audiences really relate to her. She’s one of the most down-to-earth people I’ve ever met.”

– Freelance writer Maria Behan lives in San Francisco.



A Gift for Language

Joseph McCabe left Notre Dame before World War II for a job at the *Chicago Sun-Times*, hoping to make a career out of the newspaper business. During wartime service in the U.S. Navy, he worked for the military newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*, but after returning home, never really got back into the game.

That was a shame, says his daughter, **Erin McCabe Seng, EWC '93**, because her father, who died in 1977, loved writing and using languages. In spite of the Irish surname, he was also fluent in French. Seng's parents insisted that she and her siblings study French as well. When she and David, her husband of 40 years, decided to make a gift to Brenau University, creating a new kind of language lab in honor of her father was the perfect fit.

Starting this year, Brenau students will be able to hone their skills in French, Spanish, Chinese and Italian in the new \$100,000 Language Bistro in the Trustee Library. Unlike the sterile rows of impersonal cubicles normally associated with the rote and repetition of language laboratories, the bistro encourages learning languages the way you're supposed to – in face-to-face communication with other human beings. The brainchild of Brenau Provost and languages professor Helen Ray, the bistro employs 24 laptop computers connected wirelessly to the latest language software and a teaching podium. IT's Cody Benson was instrumental in making it work. Students sit facing each other in groups of four at small, round tables. A bright-colored floor-to-ceiling mural of a café front, replicas of street gas lampposts and a mix of natural and artificial light add to the ambiance of a conversation-friendly Parisian sidewalk café.

"Although he's no longer with us, I'm sure he's looking down on this," Seng says. "He would be pleased."

Seng grew up in Evanston, Ill., and earned a degree in education at Barat College of the Sacred Heart. She has taught at both the elementary and pre-school levels.



She and her family moved to Georgia in 1971, living in the Atlanta suburb of Dunwoody.

What makes the Language Bistro an even better fit for the Sengs' generosity is this: after her youngest child got old enough for her to consider a second career track, Erin enrolled in the interior design program Brenau offers at its Atlanta campus. After completing a bachelor of fine arts degree, she ran her own design firm for a decade. That the bistro relies so heavily on décor for its innovative approach is for her, as the French-influenced Cajuns say, just *lagniappe*.

When David retired as chief operating officer of the investment firm Montag & Caldwell, Inc., the Sengs relocated to the Dawsonville side of Lake Lanier. By then, however, they'd already been hooked on Brenau, primarily through Erin's continuing relationship with her interior design professor, Lynn Jones. Erin served one term on the university advisory board and in 2004 became a member of the Brenau board of trustees.

"I'm really aware of what the university's needs are," she says. "I know what it is going to take for Brenau to be all that it can be."

Through their family foundation the Sengs already had made substantial contributions to the University of Notre Dame and other organizations when they committed to supporting Brenau substantially in its upcoming capital campaign. As plans for the Language Bistro began taking shape, however, they decided to move ahead with their Brenau gift now.

The bistro was an idea that, well, spoke their language.

– David Morrison

ROOTS of Dictatorship?

BY DAVID MORRISON



Soft-spoken Gnimbin Ouattara with a fullback physique and a dazzling, ever-present smile, arrived in the United States on a Fulbright fellowship in 2001 hoping to become a latter-day de Tocqueville, studying democracy in America so he could take lessons learned to his native Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) in West Africa. Instead, the 35-year-old assistant professor of history and international studies at Brenau University has become a political refugee, residing since 2005 with official asylum from the "civilian dictatorship" of his homeland. Along the way he learned something interesting: roots of the government that forced his exile probably originated not too far from the Brenau campus among Cherokee Indians.

Ouattara joined the Brenau faculty last fall from Georgia State University where he fleshed out that theory in about 400 pages of a doctoral dissertation. The primary focus of Ouattara's continuing research is the interdenominational American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and how its work among the Cherokee Indians in the early 19th century became a springboard for its missions in West Africa two decades later. Ouattara is convinced that his country's leaders learned their dictatorial, paternalistic, militaristic ways over the last two centuries from the educational philosophies those early missionaries instilled in the core philosophies of African education systems today.

Founded in 1810, the New England-born ABCFM established its first mission among the Cherokee in Tennessee in 1817. The idea was to "civilize the Cherokee and then Christianize them," says Ouattara. By the 1830s, when the U.S. government removed thousands of Cherokees from their Appalachian Mountains home to Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears," the ABCFM turned its eyes on Africa.

Part of that "civilizing" plan involved deployment of British educator Joseph Lancaster's method of mass producing educated, civilized Christians with an almost militaristic approach, rigid curriculum, an enforced-from-the-top classroom hierarchy in which older students policed younger students, and a sometimes dehumanizing reliance on corporal punishment. The ABCFM believed that the Lancastrian model worked so well with the Cherokee nation that – with the appropriate modifications to suit each colonial scheme – it became the template missionaries used in Liberia and elsewhere on the West African coast. That, Ouattara maintains, is where the continent's problems with democracy all began.

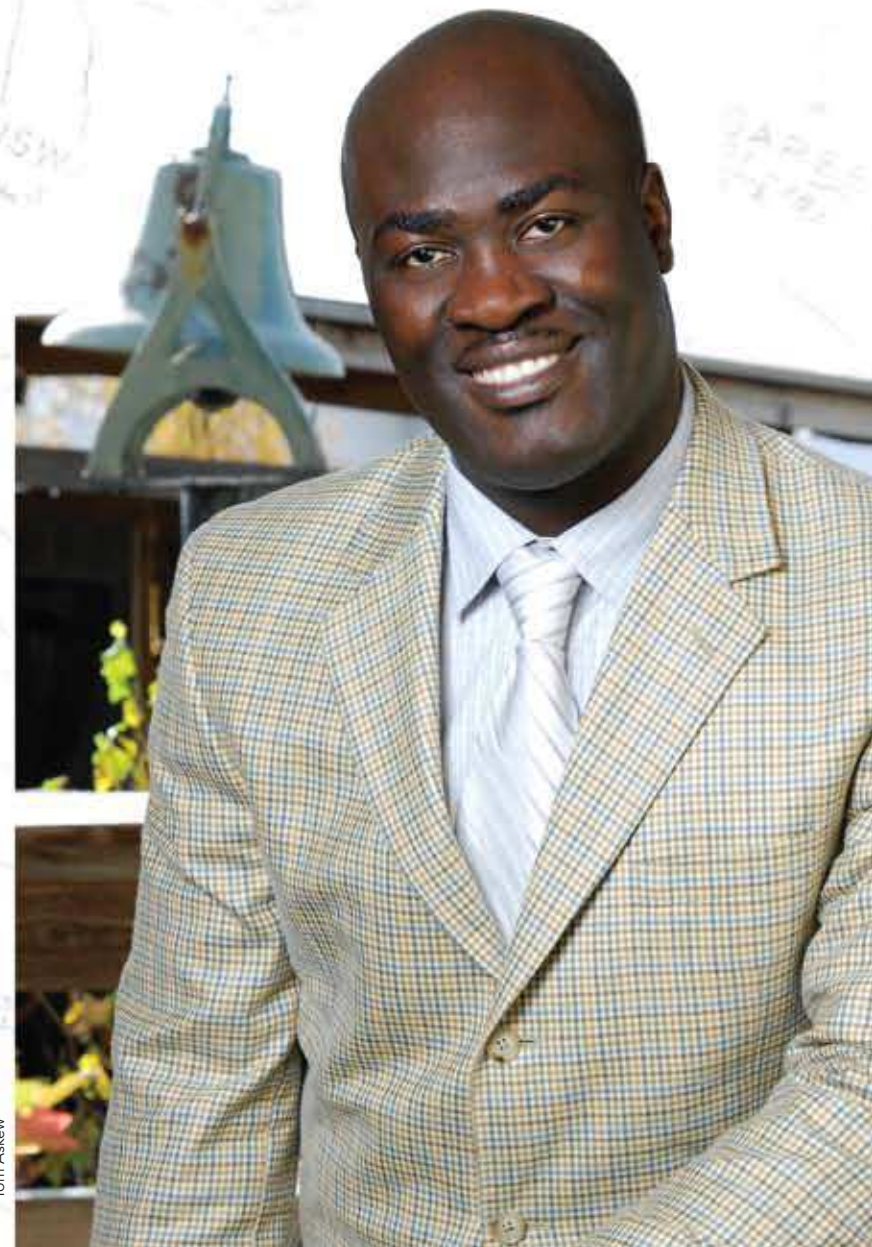
"I'm not making a value judgment on missionaries. In fact, as far as Africa is concerned today, we are not talking about missionaries anymore. We are talking about African politics and governance," says Ouattara. And yet, "If you want to understand the modern political system in Africa or the roots of African dictatorships, you need to first understand the African modern education system. This task necessarily leads you to missionaries. That is when you may realize that the most educated Africans were educated in some form of Lancastrian missionary schools."

"The education system the missionaries established was anything but democratic," Ouattara says. African leaders who graduated from these schools are so steeped in aversion to contradiction and consensus thinking that "they don't find anything wrong with what they are doing," he adds. "In a democracy, the people have the power. But our leaders say, 'No, we are the power.' Where did they get that idea? From the missionary schools. The closer you look at the education system, the more you understand why Africans cannot practice democracy."

French nobleman Alexis de Tocqueville was five years younger than Ouattara in 1835 when he published his broad, almost prescient

work on the infant American democracy and problems that would haunt it as it matured. Now, focusing on roughly the same period in history as de Tocqueville, Ouattara is the first scholar to note the striking similarities between the legacy American missionaries left on his homeland after first imposing it on the Cherokee people. He has presented papers on the subject in a dozen scholarly forums in the United States and abroad; he's in discussions with two book publishers; and, as a former film student, he wants to produce a documentary on his research.

Like de Tocqueville, Ouattara has some unsettling news as well: "The longer dictatorships prevail, the more poverty you will have," he asserts, warning of mass illegal migrations of poor Africans to other continents, or even more dire consequences. "Dictatorships in Africa are no longer an African problem. They are a global threat."



Tom Askew

Golden Girl

XI WANG, WC '07, grew up in Zhengzhou, not far from where China's fledgling free enterprise system exploits rich gold deposits. She attended Brenau, the very name of which celebrates the first U.S. gold strike in nearby Dahlonega. Now she's studying in San Francisco, a city built in no small measure on the success of "the '49ers" gold prospectors.

Just turning 25, Xi (pronounced "she") Wang is well on her way to striking a different kind of gold with an amazing lyric soprano voice that's attracted attention in some of opera's highest circles, including the cognoscenti in Brenau's music department who were blown away the first time they heard her sing.

"I thought, this is one of the most beautiful voices I've heard in a lifetime of listening to beautiful voices," says William Fred Scott, the director of Brenau's International Opera Center. High praise indeed, considering that Scott's 30-year career in managing and conducting opera companies in Boston and Atlanta put him frequently within hearing of Beverly Sills, Kiri te Kanawa, Magda Olivero and other top operatic sopranos.

Wang is now working on a master's at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, but she has been singing as long as she can remember. She grew up loving opera and performing on stage; her debut was in a children's opera program in her hometown. She spent three years studying music at Zhengzhou University before she came to Brenau.

"I wanted to go to the West, since that's the home of so much classical music," Wang says. "I was very excited to study abroad."

Scott and Wang arrived on the Gainesville campus in 2005, and they formed a strong music-centered bond that transcended language barriers. "I was looking for a kittenish quality for a Rossini aria she was singing, so I learned the Chinese word for 'cat,'" Scott recalls. "Xi knew I was making an extra effort to reach her, and she appreciated that."

"He helped me so much," Wang says of her Brenau mentor. She adds that she also received valuable instruction and encouragement from her voice teacher, Dian Lawler-Johnson, and her English tutor, Dudley Davis, who brought her entire family to all of Wang's concerts in Gainesville. "I'm still in touch with them all," Wang reports. "They were so good to me; I can't stop thinking about them. I made lots of friends at Brenau, especially in the choir. We met every day, so we all became buddies. I'm sad to be so far from Gainesville."

Wang has excelled in a range of competitions, including three sponsored by the Metropolitan Opera: During her last year at Brenau, she won the Metropolitan Opera's Georgia district audition competition. In the fall, she entered the same competition in San Francisco and won that, too. She advanced to the higher-level regional competition in Los Angeles, where she came away with an Encouragement Award from the New York-based company.

Wang capped her first months in San Francisco by also landing the plum part of Pamina in the San Francisco Conservatory's December production of *The Magic Flute*, which she lists with Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Gilda in *Rigoletto* as her top three dream operatic roles.

"I feel so lucky," Wang says, but by the way things are panning out for the young woman with the exquisite voice and engaging stage presence, luck probably has very little to do with it.



— Maria Behan