

OnCampus



Dr. Claudia Stevens depicting moral dilemmas of the Holocaust in *An Evening with Madame F*.

Singing to Survive Amid the Holocaust

Millsaps students and the Jackson community came together in February for *An Evening with Madame F*, a wrenching one-woman show about the choice-less choices faced by victims of the Holocaust. The production was sponsored by the Millsaps Faith & Work Initiative, the Millsaps Jewish Culture Organization, the Chaplain's Office, and the Millsaps Arts & Lecture Series, as well as Beth Israel Congregation and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

Created and performed by Dr. Claudia Stevens, the piece was originally commissioned by the Richmond, Virginia, Jewish Federation. *An Evening with Madame F* has been performed in more than 100 communities, featured on radio broadcasts, and produced for television by PBS. The piece, at once provocative, insightful, and heartbreaking, riveted the audience at Millsaps just as it has riveted the nation.

An Evening with Madame F tells the story of an elderly Holocaust survivor,

a gifted musician who survived the atrocities of the concentration camp by being selected to perform in a "concentration camp music ensemble" for Nazi officers. The issue of providing music for their brutal oppressors as their friends and family were murdered, rather than going to their

own deaths, is the driving moral dilemma of the piece: Was "prostituting their art" a crime, or did these artists simply do what they needed to do to survive? No easy answers were provided, forcing the audience to wrestle with the horrors of that reality.

There was little background or context provided within the performance. The piece clearly assumed some knowledge about the Holocaust on the part of the audience. However, even observers without prior knowledge of the Nazi horrors would be touched by the pain and power of the narrative.

Music was woven through the

narrative—the same music actually played and sung by those women inmates. Stevens provided all the music, playing the piano, even taking up the drums when her character was forced to expand her repertoire or face extermination. Stevens's voice was equally as powerful an instrument, lending nuance to her character and ranging from a soaring operatic aria to raggedly whispered, hushed tones as her character reached the brink of death.

Though Stevens's background is primarily musical, her acting is truly to be commended. With an impeccable French accent, flawless mannerisms, and incredible intensity, Stevens's portrayal of a survivor haunted by her own memories was believable and mesmerizing. Each moment was thoughtfully rendered. Moving deftly from defensive to pleading, being on the verge of breakdown to gathering a quiet inner strength, the emotions registered in Stevens's character were clear in her face, her posture, and her voice.

Stevens, herself a daughter of Holocaust survivors, gave a sensational performance.

Though the stark truths about such tragedy are difficult to encounter, a message of hope in the face of terror and survival against all odds shone through the piece. *An Evening with Madame F* will long linger in the minds of all who sat in the auditorium and witnessed Dr. Claudia Stevens's opus.

—Beth Kander, an actor, playwright, and theatre critic.

REVIEW

Cocooning

Nicole Marie Walter, B.A. 2005, of San Diego beneath one of her sculptures for her senior art exhibit. Tentatively entitled *Cocoon*, the sculpture is made of newspapers and other discarded materials to reflect the artist's interest in recycling. She also said she wanted to make sculptural forms reminiscent of cocoons, pods, nests, and other natural forms.

—J.Y.



Arts & Lecture Series 'Best Ticket in Town'

The Millsaps College Arts & Lecture Series, the longest-running cultural events venue in the city of Jackson, continues its outstanding tradition of entertainment and enrichment with a stellar lineup for the 2005–06 season.

This year's series kicks off the season on September 29 with its traditional salute to Southern writers, featuring Mark Childress and Inman Majors. Childress, a native of Alabama, completed high school in Clinton. His novels include *A World Made of Fire*, *V for Victor*, *Tender*, and *Crazy in Alabama*. Poet and novelist Inman Majors has been published in literary journals including *Antioch Review*, the *Connecticut Review*, and the *Laurel Review*. He is the author of two novels: *Swimming in Sky* and

Wonderdog. He teaches creative writing at Hollins University.

At a date in November yet to be announced, the art of forensic science will come under investigation when Dr. Louis Cataldie, coroner for Baton Rouge parish for over 10 years, comes to campus. Cataldie, the author of *Coroner's Journal: Stalking Death in Louisiana*, worked on such high profile cases as the Malvo/Muhammad "Beltway Sniper" shootings and the Derrick Todd Lee serial murders.

Also on the fall schedule is a program on Southern songwriters featuring Will Kimbrough, Kate Campbell, and Carey Hudson, B.S. 1985. Kimbrough almost single-handedly crafted the hugely popular southern independent pop movement. Campbell's unique vision has earned her more comparisons to authors than to fellow musicians. *Entertainment Weekly* referred to her as a "musical Eudora Welty." Hudson led two influential roots-rock

bands (Blue Mountain and the Hilltops) before striking out on his own brilliant career as a musician and songwriter.

Other programs on the Arts & Lecture bill include an appearance by internationally known garden designer Phillip Watson on January 17, and Laurie Smith, of The Learning Channel's *Trading Spaces* and a Madison native, will appear February 9. Writer and theologian Revi Aslan, author of *No god but God*, an examination of Islam, is also slated to appear February 22, and the season wraps up on March 7 with the spectacular East European folk dance troupe FRULA.

"We hope to top the super successes of last year," said Luran Buchanan, executive director of the Arts & Lecture Series. "We are expanding to seven programs and planning something for everyone: writing, music, current events, the creative arts, and family entertainment. This is the best ticket in town." —J.Y.



Piano Benchmark

Music major Ben Tomlinson (seated at piano) performed Beethoven's Sonata in E major, Op. 109, and Chopin's Ballade in F major, Op. 38, at his junior piano recital in May in the recital hall of the Ford Academic Complex. "It was certainly one of the finest junior recitals we've ever had," said Dr. Jonathan Sweat, emeritus professor of music.

It is thanks to Sweat that Tomlinson, recipient of a Sweat scholarship, has had the opportunity to study music here, and the two have had a long and enduring friendship. "He taught me at music camp when I was very young, and he has always been generous with his encouragement and advice," Tomlinson said. "I share with many people who know him a tremendous respect for him as a person."

"You know, Ben and I are the only two native Corinthians on campus," Sweat said, proudly.

Tomlinson said it was his piano teacher, Dr. Rachel Heard, who helped him most in the months leading up to his performance. "I'm very appreciative to have had the opportunity to work with such a high-caliber musician and teacher," Tomlinson said. "I'm looking forward to preparing for my senior recital and graduate auditions with Dr. Heard, who has been as much a friend and supporter as a professor to me."

"It was a pleasure working with Ben on the Op. 109 Sonata," Heard said. "Because of their musical depth, the last three of Beethoven's sonatas are not usually studied until graduate school or later. But when a student like Ben comes along who has such a special affinity for Beethoven's works, it makes it very difficult to say no."



The recital program, by all accounts, presented a formidable challenge. "Playing the Beethoven sonata was a great accomplishment for me because I spent a year working on it, and it's the most rigorous piece I've played so far," Tomlinson said.

"The Beethoven sonata is rarely performed," Sweat said. "Not only is it technically demanding, but it was written in the last part of his life and is considered almost transcendental. Ben's musical understanding is such that he sounds as if he has really lived."

"Not yet," Tomlinson said, grinning. —J.W.