I first met Rod Butler late one night in November 2004, in the extraordinary lobby of the Hyatt Regency in downtown San Francisco. The College Music Society’s national meeting was in session. The previous day I had delivered a paper on cross-cultural music composition. The day I met Rod I had earlier chaired a standing room only panel dedicated to rap and contemporary African-American music. Because we had yet to meet, throughout those conference events, I had wondered if Rod was there watching. Weeks earlier I had responded to a very interesting advertisement for a tenure track position at CSU Dominguez Hills. He said he would be meeting applicants at the San Francisco CMS conference and that I could informally interview there.

Exhausted from the conference’s long day of proceedings, I returned to the lobby for our 8PM appointment. I regretted signing up for such a late time slot for our interview. Surely this guy was going to be as tired and burned out as I was. Once there however I met a man so relaxed and comfortable that I forgot how tired I was. The casual yet sophisticated lounge we occupied opened up to the rest of the multi-storied, elegant lobby. We hit it off immediately and chatted about our pasts, our musical interests. During the course of our two-hour conversation, with cool jazz sounds floating about the lush environs, it barely dawned on me that we were engaged in an interview. That was Rod. His laugh and great sense of humor, his clear headedness, and his optimism in his plans to build the CSUDH music department combined to form a strong, positive impression. Rod lifted things up. After five years of full-time yet adjunct teaching at UCLA’s music and ethnomusicology departments, I was more than ready for something like the DH job. Rod assured me there would be room for someone who could direct courses in world music, music theory, composition, and other topics. This guy was down to earth and I felt assured that we hit it off.

Over the next nine months, he and I remained in touch, including my full interview in LaCorte Hall in spring of 2005. As the hiring deadline approached that summer, Rod asked me to trust his instincts in dealing with some complexities that had arisen. Though the department hiring committee selected me, this was not a done deal. By that time, Richard Kravchak and Stephen Moore were already hired in on the department. I was the third new faculty member of the bunch, possibly left out at the last minute due to budget problems and other wrangling. In the midst of this frustrating glitch came many intense obligations: finishing up my UCLA classes; a major premiere of a four-hour cycle of my works; my world music institute lectures in Boulder, Colorado; and my parents in Northern California were ultimately facing a move to assisted living from their home of 50 years. All through that summer of struggle and uncertainty, Rod took his time during reassuring, patient telephone conversations. He did the same thing a year later, when my father passed away in the fall of 2006. His patience and understanding were immeasurable. A year after that, without warning in November of 2007, we all suddenly lost Rod.

Many people knew Rod much longer and better than I did, including current and former students, campus staff, faculty colleagues, administrators, golf buddies, music collaborators, friends, and of course his dear family. Playing the electric blues on his April 2008 CSUDH memorial concert with Joe Mitchell and Andrew Sporn was spiritually fulfilling as everybody’s performances drew us all together to recognize this man’s work, passion, and humanity. Music offers that to us, and we in turn offer ourselves through music. He remains in the loving memories of many. This will always be so.

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**Fall 2008 Music Department Concert Series**

The DH music department’s fall ’08 concert season featured a varied group of ensembles and performers. On the avant-garde side were trombonist Rodney Oakes and the group SoVu consisting of extended vocalist Nina Eidsheim, Gustavo Aguilar on percussion, and live electronics wizard Phil Curtis. Unique improvisational methods and electronics mark some of the differences between these musical adventures when compared to more traditional acts. Raisha Wilcoots presented a screening of a film originally shot here on campus in 1985 featuring the late Horace Tapscott performing works for solo piano. The pianist-composer’s works sparked the founding and community activism of the Pan-African People’s Arkestra, a group long directed by Tapscott and who is Raisha’s grandfather. Faculty member Jackie Shannon gave an invigorating recital of classical music on her French horn with DH’s own master oboist Richard Kravchak taking part in a trio. In December, Marcos Loya will present his wonderful musical expertise in regional Mexican music.
Scott Morris
Classical Guitarist

Since his debut at New York’s Carnegie Hall in 1998, Scott Morris has been actively performing throughout the United States, Europe and Asia. The Hollywood Weekly recently described his playing as “simply brilliant”. He has performed and recorded with a wide variety of artists including Steve Perry (formerly of Journey) and Martin Chalifour (Concertmaster of the LA Philharmonic).

As a soloist, Scott has been a featured artist at many major festivals including Iserlohn (Germany), Beijing International Guitar Festival (China), Boston Guitar Fest, St. Joseph Guitar Festival, and La Guitarra. As an educator, he serves as the Coordinator of Guitar Studies at Cal State Dominguez Hills in Los Angeles and has given masterclasses throughout the US, Europe and Asia.

Dr. Morris holds degrees and diplomas from Yale University, USC, the Mozarteum, Musician’s Institute (GIT) and CGU and has studied with William Kanengiser, Scott Tennant, Ben Verdery, Sharon Ishin, Pepe Romero, Jack Sanders and John Dearman. Scott was the director for the 2007 GFA Convention in Los Angeles at CSU Dominguez Hills. He has recorded numerous CDs for Erato Classical and Centaur Records. 20th Century Guitar Magazine called his latest CD a “classical guitar masterpiece.”

I can’t wait to hear from all of you and promise to send along all the news (that’s fit to print) in future newsletters.

Current points of pride here on campus include:

- One of the most promising and talented groups of students we have ever attracted at CSUDH
- A new and rapidly expanding classical guitar program headed by Dr. Scott Morris, internationally known performer and recording artist
- Fascinating course offerings in World Music, taught by Dr. Jonathan Grasse, an ethnomusicologist from UCLA who is also a prolific composer and performer
- A revamping of our musicianship courses overseen by Dr. Stephen Moore, who has joined our faculty from the Oberlin Conservatory. He is a concert pianist of world-class distinction and an expert in the Dalcroze method of music education. Our Jazz Ensemble is also benefiting from his expert guidance.
- Our new Department Chair, Dr. Richard Kravchak, is Professor of Music Education, and an oboe/English horn specialist. Dr. K traveled this summer to both Eastern Europe and Central America performing contemporary works, many that her personally commissioned. He is the conductor of our newly formed CSUDH Wind Ensemble—a performing group with lots of promise.
- A vocal and choral program offering performance opportunities in Classical, Jazz, Gospel & Spiritual, Musical Theatre, Classical & Popular Spanish and Contemporary Pop and Sacred genres, headed by Dr. Sally Etcheto. I am, after the above mentioned thirty-six years, an experienced solo and choral performer, who specializes in vocal pedagogy.

- Our Faculty Emeritus treasure, Dr. Hansonia Caldwell, still teaches each spring semester and continues her amazing efforts with the Jubilee Choir and her comprehensive Afro-American music course.
- Last but not most assuredly not least, our highly qualified adjunct faculty who teach percussion, flute, strings, class piano, music appreciation, and marching band methods.

How can you as a CSUDH Music Alum HELP?

- Join the new Music Alumni Association
- Volunteer to participate as a member of the Advisory Board, or on an important committee
- Share fund-raising ideas
- Network with potential donors to support our Music Scholarship Program
- Consider becoming an Alumni Mentor for some current student
- Help spread the word about our growing department and recruit new, talented music students for Fall 2009 and beyond
A Review of a Performance by the Ensemble SoNu
by Jim Vermilya

The musicians were aligned on the stage, quietly waiting for the audience to settle into their seats. Percussionist Gustavo Aguilar was stationed at stage right, vocalist Nina Eisheim sat on a stool in the center and live electronics player Phil Curtis was stationed stage left. They were introduced, the lights went down, and they waited a few more moments. "Haaahhreeeuu!!"

Nina Eisheim let out a long, loud glissando note which briefly went up and then descended. Many of us were startled at the power and abruptness of the first event in the concert by this dynamic trio. For several minutes Nina held the floor, vocalizing while the other two musicians supported her. Aguilar did this with triggered percussion - traditional and non-traditional percussion sounds stored in a computer and realized by hitting a board with rubber pads under which were placed sensors. Phil Curtis sat at his station letting loose various electronic sounds and manipulating them with the use of a digital "pen" (moved around on a digital pad) and another type of controller called a "wii," as well as some dials and the keyboard on his computer. At times he would draw up sounds that would complement or match the vocalist. After some featured work by the percussionist and electronist, this first piece, Aguilar’s RoCaMaWoGa, ended with a very well executed fade out.

After a few words by Aguilar intended to clarify the purpose and definition of the group, Curtis began the next piece with a synthesized voice sound (Eisheim laid out) as well as a clicking, engine-like sound which he morphed into a swirling white noise. I noticed at this point that the instruments had been panned in stereo in such a way that the speakers represented the players' positions on the stage, a very nice organic effect which humanized a form of music which involved a great deal of electronic machinery. I also noted that Nina had a very effective stage presence when not singing. She sat still with her eyes partially or fully closed and appearing to be highly focused on the music being created, but in a relaxed manner. After a pitched percussion melody, Nina sang a slow sung text which started with the word “nothing” and moved into words of which I lost track, but I felt I understood some type of reassuring message.

The next piece, Eisheim's The Little Prince, began with the sound of water being rolled around in conch shells, but this wasn’t a digital realization. Nina and Gustavo actually had the shells on the stage into which they poured water and which they spun around, releasing water into a bowl as they did so. After the conch shell segment, Nina whispered childlike words in a strange language. This being a performance art troupe, I assumed it was an invented language or non-textual vocalizations, but we were later told that language spoken was actually Norwegian, Nina’s mother tongue. This song and the next, Phil Curtis’s Solo, included some interesting percussion sounds. One was similar to a wine glass being rubbed on its rim; another was a bowed metalphone called a flexitone (a cartoon sound effects staple) which Aguilar would glissando to a high pitch as it was bowed. Solo also featured a tiny hand drum, little bells, and a metal mixing bowl which was mic’ed from the bottom and was struck as the water inside it was swirled.

Prior to the final piece, Aguilar held a question and answer session, a common tradition at many of the LaCorte Hall concerts. We learned that instructions for performing these pieces consisted of graphics, text, and traditional notation, as well as conversations about the pieces. The pieces involved a good deal of improvisation but were not free-form, and the improvisations were utilized to convey meanings or feelings specific to the pieces. We also learned how a number of the sounds were created and manipulated and few of the acoustic percussion instruments were discussed. Some of the audience members were curious about the tools Curtis used in manipulating his sound, and I asked if he was inspired by the Theremin in his use of the “wii.” He responded that once programmed, the “wii” and its sounds were sort of like a versatile, more user-friendly Theremin.

The final piece of the evening, Andrea Lockwood's Monkey Trips, was a cornucopia of the techniques that had been utilized in the works preceding it. It also included some classic and classically manipulated synthesizer sounds, lots of great voice work involving some beautiful unaccompanied singing, and a double tin horn. The concert ended as it had begun, with a startling and jarring effect: Aguilar and Eisheim laughing derisively and then being cut off by a mock-angry Curtis. It was a fascinating and stimulating performance by a skilled and creative ensemble.

Appreciate What You Have at Dominguez Hills
by Andrew Sporn, graduating senior

I have been a professional musician for over twenty years. I have lived in New York City, Las Vegas, Nevada and Los Angeles, performing in these cities as well as on worldwide tours, and making a pretty decent living. So after spending my twenties trying to make it in the music business, I decided at thirty to go to college to complete a Bachelor’s Degree in music. It was the best decision I ever made, especially because of the school I am attending. I first went to community colleges around the Los Angeles area for two years before making the transfer to Cal State University Dominguez Hills.

The first person I contacted at DH was Dr. Richard Kravchak, a specialist in woodwinds and music education who is now the department chairperson. We spoke in detail in the months prior to my attending and I auditioned for him on piano and saxophone. Initially I planned to pursue degrees in math and music. Dr. Kravchak convinced me to focus on music education, and that was the absolute right choice. I will graduate in December ‘08, and am looking to get my first teaching position in fall ‘09. I owe my future success to my professors in the music department: Dr. Richard Kravchak, Dr. Jonathon Grasse, Dr. Stephen Moore, Dr. Sally Etcheto, and Dr. Scott Morris. I also had the privilege of being in the last class taught by Dr. Rod Butler, who was the chairman of the department for sixteen years before passing away unexpectedly last November. His philosophies are a huge reason why this unique music department continues to be so very special.

CSUDH is mostly made up of commuter students many of whom are not of typical college age. I am thirty-four and have classmates in theirforties and sixties. This is a small, intimate department with less than eighty majors. However, the DH music faculty is extremely competent and is of superior quality. While other universities might have larger facilities, the quality of music education at DH is second to none. In addition, the rapport that a student can have here with music professors is at a depth not readily measurable. Because of the intimate environment, students can bond more easily with their professors, with much more individual time to ask questions, or to go over anything one might be having difficulties with. The professors at DH are empathetic to our busy, adult lives and schedules and do the best they can in accommodating schedules.

It is much more difficult to build rapport and get superior individual attention when you are attending a university with hundreds of majors in the department. Flexibility is non-existent in such a place, and when students fail to maintain expectations there are plenty of others ready to fill their shoes. At CSUDH, the department and faculty make every attempt to ensure success for every student in the department. I just hope that current and future students will appreciate this while attending the school or are about to consider enrolling here, because CSUDH is one of LA’s best kept secrets in undergrad music education. Upon graduating a student can be confident in applying to music positions: the faculty can be relied upon as references, and as friends and colleagues available for future professional advice.
**Faculty Accomplishments**

**Scott Morris** continues to build a strong guitar performance program at DH, attracting talented students from across the Southland. He received rave reviews this summer for his performances at Iserlohn (Germany), and the Beijing International Guitar Festival (China). His new, 2008 Centaur Records CD is *The Guitar Music of Paganini.*

Performing on custom, hand-built guitars by Thomas Humphrey and Jack Sanders, Scott, on this CD recorded by Stagg Street Studio’s Erich Gobel, expands his Paganini repertoire he began on his 2005 Erich label CD \_Danza. Scott transcribed and performed the late Rod Butler’s *La Nocturne* in China and Germany, along with DH colleague Jonathon Grasse’s *Four Pieces* for solo guitar. Scott and his wife Casey recently premiered a new baby boy, Coby.

**Richard Kravchak** and his fellow members of the Tapestry Ensemble (oboe, clarinet, cello, and piano) performed in New York City’s Bargemusic series. Bargemusic concerts are held on a barge/recital space docked in Brooklyn across the East River from lower Manhattan. The Halloween night ‘08 event featured Southern California composers including DH’s Rod Butler and Jonathon Grasse. Richard had a busy summer concertizing in Europe and Central America where he performed, among other works, a concerto for oboe and clarinet written for him by his wife Julia by Los Angeles-based composer Daniel Kessner. In June ‘08, he performed recitals at Festival Forliest that was broadcast on Czech radio, and in August, performed as an oboe soloist with the National Symphony of El Salvador in San Salvador. In October he presented classes at West Chester University in West Chester, PA. His CD *California Oboe* will soon be released by Centaur Records.

**Jonathon Grasse** presented papers at the Virginia Commonwealth University in historic Richmond, at Santa Barbara’s Westmont College, and at UC Santa Barbara in February and March, 2008. His work on Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos’s early connection to guitar and the popular music known as \_choro was accepted to the ‘Experiencing Villa-Lobos’ International Festival in Richmond. This article is published in the GFA’s journal *Soundboard.* At the Southern California chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology meeting at UCSB he read a version of his paper focusing on problems of meaning and cultural tradition in music, using Villa-Lobos and his Brazilian context as examples. The College Music Society Conference held in March at Westmont College in Santa Barbara included Jonathon’s participation in the panel, “The Relevance of the Current Curriculum to Today’s Students”. Jonathon’s work for soprano sax and guitar *Letters from Brazil* was released in May ‘08 on Douglas Masek’s Centaur Records CD *EclecticSize.* An oboe transcription of the work was recorded by Richard Kravchak for his soon to be released *California Oboe* CD. Jonathon’s *Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Piano,* premiered at his April ‘08 DH faculty recital, received a New York premiere by Richard Kravchak’s Tapestry Ensemble, and was performed in November by the Los Angeles Chamber Players. 🎼

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**Sightings of recent Music Department graduates**

**Hugo Aguayo** (2008) is anticipating entering UCLA’s graduate guitar performance program where he will study with Peter Yates

**Paul Ellis** (2008) is pursuing a Masters degree in composition at Cal State University Long Beach

**Anna Perez** (2008) entered the MFA program in music at CalArts in Valencia

**Victor de Los Santos** (2007) is director of bands at Santa Ana High School

**Yumi Hashimoto** (2006) is working toward her Masters degree in piano performance at New York’s Manhattan School of Music 🎼

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Visit the music department’s MySpace site at **[www.myspace.com/csdhmusic](http://www.myspace.com/csdhmusic)**