



A PASSION FOR MUSIC

*Vicky Emerson, '98,
pours life's cares,
concerns and causes
into the music
she writes*

By Kevin Bertelsen

A phone call from a friend in New York City started it all.

That's how Vicky Emerson, singer-songwriter and UW-RF alumna, learned about "Eyes Wide Open," a traveling tribute to U.S. military personnel serving in Iraq and a powerful statement on the cost of war. The exhibit displays a pair of combat boots—with nametag—for

every service person who has died in the war.

"I went to the Web site," remembers Vicky, "and was struck by the powerful images. I couldn't get them out of my mind."

So she talked to David Schendel—friend, manager and co-lyricist. She wrote a refrain, he contributed the verses, and together they

came up with "Empty Boots." Vicky describes the song as a tender story about loss and compassion. "It came really quickly," she recalls. "And that's usually the sure sign of a good song."

She sang the song for noted recording artist Terri Hendrix and others at a songwriters' competition in Austin, Texas. People were "blown away" by the haunting melody and emotional story of a woman struggling with the loss of her beloved. The line from the chorus—"she is too sad to be proud; she is too proud to be sad"—brought tears to their eyes.

Vicky knew she had to do something with the song. So she recorded it, made it available for download on her Web site, and sent an e-mail blast to her 5-6,000-member fan list. But more than that, she turned the song into a cause. All proceeds from each \$1 download go to the non-profit, non-partisan organization Homes for Our Troops, whose mission is to provide handicap-accessible homes for disabled and seriously injured veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Reaction from the fans has been incredible," she notes. "And I'm really happy to be a vehicle for doing something for a great cause." She's heard from mothers, fathers, and soldiers in Iraq who tell her that they've listened to the song and take comfort in its message. They thank her for caring about them and their loved ones. "That's why we did it," says Vicky.

But "Empty Boots" is just one example of the passion that drives Vicky's music career. And passion is the right word. She's had it from the beginning.

"Great passion. Lousy technique." The words still reverberate in Vicky's head. They came from the mouth of UW-RF music professor Lillian Tan when, as a 15-year-old, Vicky auditioned to become one of Tan's piano students. Apparently Tan figured the technique would come, because Vicky soon began making regular trips from her home in Elmwood, Wis., for lessons. A few years later, when it came time to choose a college, Vicky decided to continue her music education at UW-RF. The total music immersion in college did take its toll, though, and so, upon graduation in

1998, Vicky decided to make use of her business minor. She took a job doing “the books” for a construction company in the Twin Cities.

She stepped away from music for a year—didn’t touch the piano once. But a year was enough. Unhappy at the construction company, she came to an important realization: “This isn’t me! So I went back to the piano, and the music just poured out of me. I decided to just get out there and play.”

She packed her bags and moved to Chicago, taking a job entertaining shoppers on the piano at Nordstrom’s department store. She started doing “open mics” and working with other musicians. She produced and recorded three CDs of original piano compositions. And she started to build a fan base. “Word of mouth can be a very powerful thing,” says Vicky.

Returning to the Twin Cities, Vicky began to broaden her range. She wrote vocals and added singing to her performances. “I feel like I’m growing into the person and songwriter I’m supposed to be,” says Vicky. “The progress of my career has been gradual enough for me to build a good foundation. I’ve learned the ropes along the way.”

She signed with the St. Cloud-based G. L. Berg talent agency, which handles 90% of her bookings,

arranging for appearances on college campuses, theaters, at festivals, for corporate events. She’s performed at venues from here to San Francisco and south to Texas. Following the success of a trial six-song EP, she’s releasing her first full-fledged vocal CD this fall.

Vicky describes her music as a mix of pop and folk, served up at times with a bit of humor. But unlike other female singers of similar age and musical stylings, Vicky is uniquely talented on the keyboard. That sets her apart. She’s also a big-time storyteller on stage. She works hard to connect with audience members.

“I love it when people tell me they lose track of the passage of time during my concerts,” says Vicky. “It means they’ve left whatever is weighing them down and given their life over to the music—at least for awhile.”

Most important, she’s discovered that her best music comes out when she digs deep inside. “Things really turned around for me,” she notes, “when I realized that the songs had to start with me. I can look back through my journals and find—word for word—lines that show up in my songs.”

That’s why, she says, the six-song EP, recorded after a sad time in her life, taught her that “songwriting is cheaper than therapy.” And the new CD reflects where Vicky is right now in her life, with its songs of hope and warmth and joy. One of the songs on the new disk, “Paper Wings,” is about freedom and following your heart. It came out of a dream Vicky had three nights in a row about a butterfly at her windowsill. The title track, “Reach,” she describes as the album’s sexy song, while “Anymore” is a gospel-flavored tune about exiting depression. “Empty Boots” is also on the new CD, where her fundraising efforts will continue for Homes for Our Troops, with \$1 per CD purchased being donated to the organization.

Vicky is discovering that there’s a lot more to the music biz than performing. Most of it she loves—writing music every day, being on the road (“it’s incredibly freeing”), meeting new people, radio interviews, connecting with fans via the Web and e-mail.

On the other side of the coin, Vicky often serves as her own roadie, schlepping heavy keyboard equipment from gig to gig. That’s a chore. But she has figured out that everything she needs will fit into a Toyota Corolla. Cash flow she labels as “interesting.” There can be wide variations in income from month to month, so she’s gotten serious about budgeting. Then there’s the dating scene. It’s hard, she says. “Guys are wary about dating a songwriter. They’re afraid they might end up in my next song.”

For right now though, Vicky is more than content to be doing what she’s doing. More touring and recording are on the agenda. And she hopes the future brings a deal with a management company so that she can license her music into film, TV and commercial work. Fame? Riches? Grammys? Maybe some day. But for now it’s about sharing the music. And that’s reward enough. ■

ACROSS CYBERSPACE

Keeping lines of communication open with alumni is one of our main goals in the Office of University Advancement. We like to stay connected with you. And one of the best ways to do that these days is via e-mail. Will you share your address with us? Currently we use e-mail to notify alumni about our Web-based newsletter Falcon Online, which comes out four times a year between issues of *Falcon Features*. On occasion, we’ll also use our e-mail list to inform you of major campus happenings. If you’re already receiving our e-mails, we obviously have you in our system. If not, we encourage you to send us an e-mail with your preferred address. Contact us at alumni@uwrf.edu. And thanks for hitting that send button.

TAKING ON THE BADGERS

Our men’s basketball team will play an exhibition game against the Wisconsin Badgers on Saturday, Nov. 5. Tip-off is at 7 p.m. in the Kohl Center. It’s the second year of an exhibition series in which WIAC schools play the Badgers. UW-River Falls basketball coach Rick Bowen, beginning year 20 as head coach of the Falcons, once served on the coaching staff at Wisconsin with now UW head coach Bo Ryan. The UW-RF Alumni Association will be hosting a special reception at the Nicholas Suites in the Kohl Center just prior to game time. Tickets are available on a limited basis. For more, please contact Dan McGinty in the Office of University Advancement toll-free at 1-877-258-6647.

¥ For more about Vicky Emerson or to download her single, *Empty Boots*, go to www.vickyemerson.com

¥ Vicky Emerson has scheduled two full-band release concerts this fall for her new CD *Reach*
7:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 23
Abbott Concert Hall, UW-River Falls
FREE
8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 5
Bryant Lake Bowl, Minneapolis, Minn.
(612) 825-8949 for tickets

¥ Eyes Wide Open, the American Friends Service Committee’s widely acclaimed exhibition on the human cost of the Iraq war and a commemoration of the lives lost, will be on display at the College of St. Catherine-St. Paul campus Thursday-Saturday, Sept. 29-Oct. 1. For more information, go to www.stkate.edu or www.afsc.org/eyes

MUST BE THE GENES

1978 Graduate Becomes Third in Family to Receive Top Alumni Award

No family has benefited more from the people and programs of UW-River Falls than our family,” Stephen Swensen told graduates at spring commencement 2005. And he’s done the math. Along with his five siblings, Swensen figures the family spent 64 years in grade school and college at UW-RF (remember, the university used to operate a laboratory school for elementary children).

“River Falls was a wonderful platform to get exposed to a broad background in the liberal arts and to face the world,” said Swensen, a 1978 graduate of the university. He was back on campus this spring to receive the 2005 Distinguished Alumnus Award for his career achievements.

A highly respected leader in cancer research, Swensen heads the radiology department at Mayo Medical Clinic in Rochester, Minn. His work has led to new discoveries in the fight against cancer. In particular, he’s focused on lung cancer research and the radiologic analysis of nodules and masses there.

“Today at Mayo we are pioneering new ways to detect and cure cancers as small as sesame seeds that can be evaporated using non-invasive procedures,” explained Swensen. His 1,200-member department—including 126 physicians and nine physicists—performs 900,000 exams each year in its quest to identify and cure disease.

In addition to his teaching and administrative duties, Swensen is the principal investigator of two National Institutes of Health grants, both from the National Cancer Institute. He’s using the more than \$4 million to conduct low-dose spiral CT screening to detect lung cancer at an early stage when it’s easier to cure. He’s also probing the utility of biomarkers, including both genomic and proteomic signatures of cancer.

For Swensen, the UW-RF connection goes well beyond his siblings. His father, Richard, arrived in River Falls in 1955 to teach in the college’s chemistry department; he later served as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences before returning to the classroom and retiring in 1993. His mother, Grace, holds a degree from UW-RF, as do all five siblings and his wife of 28 years, Lynn.

“In 1974, my freshman year, in my calculus class, I was distracted by a cute blond from Minnesota who sat in the second row,” remembered Swensen. “I was a pre-med student, so of course I was sitting in the first row, but I spent much of my time looking at the second row. This young lady got a better grade than I did, so of course I married her...and it’s the best thing I ever did.”

Swensen’s uncle, Glen Hartmann, ‘56, also at one time head of the radiology department at Mayo, received the university’s Distinguished Alumnus Award in 1983. And his brother David, a 1975 graduate now in charge of Yale University’s endowment fund, was recognized as UW-RF’s 1996 Distinguished Alumnus.

Addressing the graduating class, with much of his family in attendance, Swensen offered his congratulations on a job well done. “What has worked for me,” said Swensen, “is to have some goals and a strategic plan that you put down on paper. Make sure they fit and meet your purposes, and that you have time, whether it’s for raising a family or doing research. Then go for it. And yes, do strike up a conversation with someone in the second row...” ■

Join Us for HOME Saturday, Oct. 29

Alumni/Friends Registration and Reception

10-11 a.m. Deli Area, Hagestad Student Center
Continental breakfast and refreshments before Freddy’s Tailgate at Ramer Field.
Call your classmates and encourage them to attend.

Homecoming Bookstore Hours

10 a.m.-2 p.m. Bookstore, HSC

Volleyball Match: UW-RF Trick or Treat Invitational

10 a.m. — Karges Center

Campus Tour

10:30 a.m. Departs from the Deli Area, HSC
A 45-minute guided tour of the campus.

Freddy’s Tailgate

11 a.m.-1 p.m. Ramer Field
Brat and beer feed under the pavilion near the concession stand.

Football Game:

UW-Platteville vs. UW-River Falls
1 p.m. Ramer Field

Men’s Hockey Match:

Lawrence University vs. UW-RF
7:05 p.m. Hunt Arena

SPECIAL REUNIONS Saturday, Oct. 29

Athletic Hall of Fame

5-6 p.m. Reception, River Room, Rodli Commons. 6-7 p.m. Dinner, River Room.
7-9 p.m. Induction Ceremony, River Room.

1985 Championship Football Team Reunion

All team members invited. Further information to follow. Post-game Fifth Quarter Reception at Bo’s N Mine.

College of Business and Economics Celebration Week

Weeklong events Oct. 24-28 include 20-25 alumni speakers from all eight undergraduate CBE majors speaking to classes; special programs on topics of interest; noon-time panel discussions on international study options; meetings of all five professional organizations; and a presentation by Executive-in-Residence David Swensen, chief investment officer for Yale University. Complete schedule at www.uwrf.edu/cbe.

Football Alumni Reunion

9 a.m. Team breakfast at Rodli Commons. Post-game Fifth Quarter Reception at Bo’s N Mine. Call Football Office, (715) 425-3135, for more.

For more on any event, contact Office of University Advancement at 1-877-258-6647

Health and Human Performance Reunion

11 a.m. Freddy's Tailgate Party at Ramer Field. 3:30 p.m. Post-game reception at Bo's N Mine. For more, contact Faye Perkins, chair, Department of Health and Human Performance, (715) 425-3705.

Phi Nu Chi Reunion

10 a.m. Continental Breakfast, Falcon's Nest, Hagestad Student Center. 11 a.m. Freddy's Tailgate Party at Ramer Field. 1 p.m. Football Game. 3:30 p.m. Post-game reception at Coach's Sports Bar. Contact Chuck Britson, (715) 772-4523, or Fred Schuster, (715) 359-7098, for more.

Theta Chi Alumni Reunion

Friday, Oct. 28 Corner Stone Banquet, Camp David. Contact Dave May at (952) 431-6866 for more. Saturday, Oct. 29, 9 a.m. Annual Meeting at Chapter House, cookout to follow. Call the Theta Chi House at (715) 425-8116 for more.

Vets Club Reunion

10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Presidents Room, Hagestad Student Center. All UW-RF veteran alumni are welcome to join former Vets Club members for a special reception with complimentary appetizers and a cash bar. Post-game at Johnnie's Bar. Contact Bob Buhr at bob-buhr@cltcomm.net or (715) 220-6988, or the Office of University Advancement toll-free at 1-877-258-6647, for more.

Volleyball Alumni Reunion

3:30 p.m. Reception at Bo's N Mine. Trick or Treat Invitational begins at 10 a.m. followed by a post-match reception. Contact volleyball coach Patti Ford, (715) 425-3244, for more.

Kappa Delta Psi

10 a.m. Continental Breakfast
10:45 a.m. Campus Tour
11:30 a.m. Freddy's Tailgate Party at Ramer Field
1 p.m. Football Game
3:30 p.m. Post-game reception at Coach's Sports Bar
For further information, please contact Sandra Wasiluk Dicke at (651) 776-2852 or by e-mail at sandy.dicke@juno.com

Alumni Homecoming Concert

Sunday, Oct. 30
Alumni Choir Rehearsal 10 a.m. Room 134, Kleinpell Fine Arts.
Mass Choir Rehearsal 1:30 p.m. Room 134, Kleinpell Fine Arts.
Concert 3 p.m. William Abbott Concert Hall. The program will include musical selections by the Alumni Choir, Concert Choir, Chamber Singers, Women's Choir, Men's Choir, Combined Choirs, and Symphony Band. Tickets available at the door: \$5 adults, \$3 seniors, \$2 students. Contact Music Department, (715) 425-3183, for more.

Upcoming Alumni Events

- Oct. 7** Dairy Expo Convention Reception co-sponsored by the CAFES Alumni Association and UW-RF Alumni Association. All alumni and friends attending activities planned at the Dane County Coliseum in Madison, Wis., are invited.
- Oct. 8** Scenic St. Croix Brunch Cruise. Join us for a scenic cruise down the St. Croix River with new Chancellor Don Betz. 10:45 a.m. departure from Afton Cruise Lines at Historic Afton House in Afton, Minn. Returns at 2 p.m. Tickets are available on a limited basis.
- Oct. 13** Northwestern Wisconsin Education Association Convention reception for alumni, held in conjunction with the regional teachers convention. Room 258 Eau Claire Memorial High School in Eau Claire, Wis.
- Oct. 22** Falcon Huddle—Menomonie. The UW-RF Alumni Association invites you to join us for a pre-game brunch at 11 a.m. before the game against UW-Stout! This is a great time for parents and alumni to get together and cheer on the Falcons!
- Oct. 26** Distinguished Alumnus Day. 2005 Distinguished Alumnus Dr. Steve Swensen, a 1978 graduate and professor and head of radiology at the Mayo Medical Clinic in Rochester, Minn., will deliver a lecture at 10 a.m. in Abbott Concert Hall, followed by a reception in Gallery 101 of the Kleinpell Fine Arts Building. Join us as we celebrate Steve's accomplishments.
- Oct. 29** Homecoming. Mark your calendar and make your plans. Join friends for a tailgate celebration under Freddy's Tent at Ramer Field. Also scheduled are an alumni and friends coffee hour, campus tours, and various reunions that start before and after the football game.
- Oct. 29** Athletic Hall of Fame. A reception, dinner and awards ceremony honoring inductees into the 2005 Athletic Hall of Fame. Activities begin at 5 p.m. in Rodli Commons.
- Nov. 5** Falcon/Badger Weekend Blast. Mark your calendar now for a weekend in Madison when the Falcon basketball team takes on the UW-Madison Badgers in an exhibition game at 7 p.m. in Kohl Center. Check the Web site for updated information on a pre-game gathering.
- Dec. 4** Swinging Nutcracker Returns to Minnesota Orchestra Hall. Join us for a warm celebration of the holiday season with the UW-RF Jazz Band and the Minnesota Dance Theater as they add a jazzy twist to Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker. The day begins with an 11:30 a.m. brunch buffet at the Rock Bottom Brewery and Restaurant, followed by the performance. It's a holiday treat for the whole family!
- Jan. 20** Minnesota WILD. Get ready for a wild time at the Xcel Energy Center as the Minnesota Wild face off against the Chicago Blackhawks. A pre-game gathering will be held at Tom Reid's Hockey City Pub for dinner at 5 p.m. The puck drops at 7 p.m.

Look for updated information on these events at

www.uwrf.edu/alumni
or call the Office of University Advancement toll free at **1-877-258-6647**.