

Walking the **Walk,** *Talking* the **Talk**

The new audio tour of the OU campus is packed with facts, fun and wonderful music.

BY LYNETTE LOBBAN



So, you have tromped the University of Oklahoma campus since Top Dawg was a pup. You know your Parrington from your VanVleet and can navigate from Physical Science to Felgar Hall without a guide. What could you possibly learn from a walking audio tour of the OU campus? Plenty, thanks to a wonderfully scripted and beautifully scored CD titled “Of Campus Beautiful by Day and Night,” offered by the OU Visitor Center.

Colorful gems from OU’s past are unearthed during the hour-long CD-guided tour, which explores the human element behind the bricks and mortar of the University campus. For example, did you know that the Professor Vernon L. Parrington, who later won the Pulitzer Prize, was censured by the Board of Regents for his cigarette smoking and asked to leave in 1908? Or that the charismatic history professor Edward Everett Dale (of Dale Hall fame) was a working cowboy who first came to college at the age of 26?

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Pam Fletcher, assistant to the director of the OU Visitor Center, second from right, prepares the Williams family from Carrollton, Texas, for their self-guided audio tour of the Norman campus. Standing is prospective OU student Ian Williams with, from left, his father and mother, Tom and Ruthie, and grandmother, Wanda.

The first order of business for the team was to establish the walking route, one that would cover a large portion of campus at an easy pace for tour participants. After a couple of practice runs, the McClure brothers and Wehner videotaped a route that included established OU landmarks, such as the statue of William Bennett Bizzell on the south oval, and freshly redesigned spaces, like the Oklahoma Canyon Garden in the library plaza.

The next phase relied heavily on what Faulconer refers

“We wanted to provide a tour that would give our audience a sense of OU’s history through the people who were a part of it,” says Leslie Baumert, director of the Visitor Center, located in Jacobson Hall. “We wanted more than a voice on a headphone reciting the names of buildings and the dates they were built. An hour of that wouldn’t be much fun.”

Baumert shared her goals for the audio tour with James Faulconer, professor of music theory, who agreed the project would provide a wonderful hands-on experience for fine arts seniors about to enter the workforce. Three of Faulconer’s composition students, twins Toby and Cody McClure and Ted Wehner, eagerly took up the challenge to work on the music, while Andrea Mendoza, a published playwright and a graduate student for Greg Kunesh in the School of Drama, agreed to write the script. The young team infused the tour with original music, first-person vignettes of historic figures and contemporary interviews with such distinguished alumni as Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Alma Wilson and Disney World’s vice president for entertainment, Rich Taylor.

“Involving the students was very important to me,” explains Baumert, the project’s executive producer. “I wanted to showcase their abilities and level of sophistication. We could have gone off-campus for talent, but why?”



to as the “magic” of MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) equipment in a state-of-the-art Catlett Music Center computer lab. “When people walk into Catlett, they see the Gothic Hall, and they think ‘wow,’” says Faulconer. “What many of them never know is that just down the hall, we have this fantastic lab with the MIDI equipment, 21 MacIntosh G3 computers and Kurzweil synthesizers. It’s just what the guys in Hollywood use when they produce a film score, and we are able to offer it to our students. For a composer to be able to work in this environment is like we’ve died and gone to heaven.”

Among its many features, the digital equipment can notate music as it is played from a keyboard, process and “remember” recorded music for playback, and, most importantly for those who work in film, link with video equipment to synchronize music with action on tape. Thanks to their

MIDI background and a UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program) grant, the McClures had spent a summer in Los Angeles working with Hans Zimmer, composer for Disney’s “The Lion King” and 1998 Oscar-nominated score for “The Thin Red Line.”

“From the very day they darkened my door,” Faulconer recalls with a smile, “what Cody and Toby wanted to do was write music for film. The video of the walking tour became their film.”

The McClures used the MIDI lab to compose, arrange and synchronize the music to the footsteps of those walking along the tour, anticipating how long someone would stop to look at a statue or a garden and changing the mood and tempo accordingly. The brothers wrote a little over an hour of original music, a fantasy that weaves traditional OU themes and melodies throughout the CD. The score has been so well received, plans are under consideration to release an instrumental and choral version of the disc to local retailers.

Faulconer says that Ted Wehner, music arts major with an emphasis in computer science, originally came on board to write music with the McClures but quickly proved him-



Robert Taylor

For the Williams family, one of the more interesting stops on the campus audio tour is the Ada Lois Siple Fisher Garden, located between Jacobson and Carpenter halls.

self so technologically proficient, he became more involved with the engineering process of the CD.

“Ted had the awesome task of making everything fit,” Faulconer says. “He had to take all the music and dialogue and edit it and put it back together in a way where you would never know there had been a cut. Not only that, but he also had to edit the stereo field. ‘How loud is the flute in relation to the strings?’ It was a huge undertaking. The nifty part for the students is that from conception to the final product, they did 99 percent of the work.”

Throughout the 10-month project, Baumert and Faulconer held weekly brain-storming sessions with the students to ensure a smooth correlation between the score and the script, which was painstakingly researched by Mendoza.

“I read volumes on OU history and biographies of people who changed the course of the University,” recalls Mendoza. “I didn’t anticipate researching that much, but I felt like I really wanted to know the people I was writing about. I wanted to capture the essence of who they were, not just what they did.”

Her vigilance paid off in the monologues she wrote for such OU notables as Carl Albert and early-day football coach Bennie Owen. But it is the words she chose for Ada Lois Siple Fisher that shine with a truth and courage that define the “knock-kneed colored girl” who challenged the constitutionality of a law refusing blacks admittance to the University. Fisher not only graduated from the OU law school but also later served on the Board of Regents, the very body that had denied her admission in 1946.

When the time came to record the music and the script, it was once again an OU family affair. Students Vanessa Adams and Howard Winningham played Ada Fisher and George Lynn Cross, respectively. Kate Hardgrove, from OU SummerStage, portrayed Cleo Cross; Clarke Stroud, the Oklahoma Memorial Union administrator, was cast as William Bennett Bizzell, Carl Albert and Bennie Owen; and Jeff Hickman, OU Public Affairs’ special projects coordinator, played Edward Everett Dale. Drama professor Kunesh



ABOVE: Local radio personality Gwin Faulconer-Lippert, left, an OU alumna, teamed with drama professor Greg Kunesh to narrate the audio tour script, which was written by graduate student and playwright Andrea Mendoza.

BELOW: Unique features of the script are first-person historical vignettes and contemporary interviews with alumni, such as Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Alma Wilson, left, with OU Visitor Center director Leslie Baumert.



and University alumna Gwin Faulconer-Lippert narrate.

Faulconer and his wife, OU professor Sally Faulconer, contributed their talents on trumpet and oboe. The disc also features the University Chamber Ensemble, conducted by Steven Curtis, and studio guitarist Terry Scarberry.

There are many wonderful moments throughout the 64-minute tour. The Native American drumbeats as you pass the Allan Houser sculpture, "May We Have Peace." The OU fight song and the hustle and bustle of game day as you approach the stadium. And a musical montage that gives you the feeling of eavesdropping on various rehearsal rooms as you view the soaring contemporary collegiate Gothic architecture of the Catlett Music Center.

With warmer temperatures and the promise of blooming gardens on the horizon, the Visitor Center is gearing up for the increased demand for the tour. Twenty headsets are available on a first-come, first-served basis, but Baumert advises groups of 10 or more to call ahead to reserve the units.

"As far as I know, we are the only campus that offers audio tours on CD," Baumert says. "Some have cassette tours, but the CD has so many advantages. It's set up on tracks, so people can tailor their tours to fit their needs, including just the north or south oval if they prefer. It's very user-friendly. You can stop, go into the museum or the library and easily get back to the right track."

In addition to the CD, the Visitor Center also offers a tour designed for children, which includes finding historical landmarks and sculptures, an outdoor word search and a maze. Baumert is currently designing a tour for high school students, and work also is under way on a virtual tour that people can access from their personal computers.

Mendoza, who gave birth to her fourth child while working on the walking tour script, is busy finishing her thesis. She said the project imbued her with a reverence for the past and a renewed appreciation for the present.

"The really amazing thing I realized doing my research is that there are still people out there like Ada Fisher, paving these roads that we're walking down, making it easier for us," Mendoza muses. "It is wonderful to realize the University is not a finished product, but a work in progress."