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AND DANCE,  
WRITE,  
RESEARCH,  
MANAGE...**

**FILENE SCHOLARS HAVE TAKEN  
THEIR TALENTS INTO A HUGE  
RANGE OF CAREERS**

BY KATHRYN GALLIEN

**DEEP IN THE REGULATIONS** for Skidmore's Filene scholarship competition is the following promise: winners will be presented in concert in the fall of their first year. And so last October the twenty-fifth cohort of Filene freshmen stepped onto the Filene Recital Hall stage.

**I**t fell to oboist Madeline Warner to get the concert under way, playing solo works by Paladilhe and Colin. Audrey Wronski—Skidmore’s first-ever Filene bassoonist—performed a classic baroque sonata by Telemann. Mezzo-soprano Victoria Lowe sang convincingly in three different languages, performing art songs from three different centuries. And flutist Rebecca Rawling played an energetic Poulenc sonata, barely suppressing her smiles between tricky riffs in the concluding presto movement. Each enjoyed her first fifteen minutes of Skidmore fame—as did the proud families, and friends, scholarship donors, music faculty, and college leaders in attendance.

They’ll be taking the stage again and again in the next four years, but whether they’ll go on to professional performing careers—or even choose to major in music—is by no means predetermined. Past Filene scholars have become doctors and lawyers, writers and teachers, actors and academics; a fundraiser and a filmmaker, a research biologist and a radio producer. The “ultimate freedom of choice” that lets Filene scholars focus in any academic field shows “an enlightened attitude that benefits the entire college community,” says former Filene recipient Amy Briggs Dissanayake ’89.

That must be music to the ears of those who crafted the scholarship program a quarter-century ago, and it is a warm tribute to the vision of key donor Helen Filene Ladd ’22, the alumna nonpareil who fondly called Skidmore her “other home.” Ladd supported the college broadly but had a special place in her heart for music. So when Skidmore started a new campus in the 1960s, she underwrote the Lincoln and Therese W. Filene Music Building, named for her parents. “My mother wanted to have a meaningful music program at Skidmore,” recalls Bob Ladd, a longtime Skidmore trustee and music booster. The bricks and mortar were just the beginning;

soon Helen Ladd “wanted to breathe more life into her building,” says Tom Denny, music professor and department chair.

So she and husband George, with sons Bob and Lincoln, worked with then-chair Isabelle Williams and development officer Don Richards on a broad program that the family and the Boston-based Filene Foundation would support: scholarships to bring talented



musicians to the college, plus performances and master classes with distinguished guest artists to ensure a rich music experience for them. “It was my mother and father’s wish that it be open not just to music majors but also to those who wanted to make music part of their lives,” Lincoln

**“I honestly believe I would never have had the chance to run my own laboratory if it were not for the scholarship. Someone like me, who wanted to decide at an early age whether music was going to be a hobby or my livelihood, needed a place like Skidmore to work that out.”**

**JONATHAN BRODY '92  
CANCER RESEARCHER**

Ladd remembers. “And we wanted to attract good students from other parts of the country.”

To find its first scholars, the program invited performance tapes from young musicians nationwide and brought ten finalists to the college for live auditions. The four scholarship winners were awarded grants of \$5,000 per year, plus additional financial aid as needed. Denny arrived on campus as a new faculty member in the fall of 1982 when those first Filene Scholars—pianist Mark Brennan ’86, singers Tina Czepiel ’86 and Andrea Miller Weber ’86, and violinist Jonathan Wachtel ’86—performed in the now-traditional winners recital. “Helen Ladd flew in from Maine on a little puddle-jumper,” he recalls, and “she just radiated. She was so proud and engaged in the whole process.”

**A**ll four of those original scholars graduated from Skidmore, but in the next several years a few transferred elsewhere. “It took us a while to understand that we needed to remind students we were not a conservatory,” Denny explains. Indeed, whether the Filene scholars major in music or not, all must fulfill the reg-



ular requirements of Skidmore's liberal-arts curriculum.

As the program matured, its distinctive niche became apparent. Denny says it best serves "a student who is remarkably talented as a performer, has a really strong interest in music, wants a broad education, and maybe even won't major in music." Half of all Filene scholars have majored in another field, while 32 percent chose music and 21 percent combined music with a second major.

Pianist Amy Briggs, a concert soloist and a regular with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's MusicNow series, majored in music but also developed a minor in Asian studies. Percussionist Molly Maxfield '99, a PhD candidate in gerontological psychology

at the University of Colorado, remembers: "I appreciated Skidmore's emphasis on having variety in your college years. I could continue in music while also playing sports, exploring a number of disciplines, and studying abroad."

Every Filene scholar is required to contribute actively to Skidmore's music scene—with what string-bass player Sarah Lyon-Callo '88 calls "an obligation of high-quality musicianship"—and as a group they provide a critical mass that supports the college's concert orchestra, chorus, opera workshop, and several ensembles and chamber groups. Many professors find that the music scholars contribute broadly to academic life as well. Indeed they earn departmental, college, and Phi Beta Kappa honors at a significantly higher rate than the student body as a whole.

The scholarship program still supports four students in each class each year, but today the award is \$10,000 annually. And the Filene Concert Series and Filene Artist-in-Residence program bring in legendary performers and match Skidmore students with top musical artists for lessons and master classes. Over the years, music students have studied with Anna Moffo

and Vladimir Ashkenazy, Robert Mann and Paula Robison, the Western Wind Ensemble and the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. This year renowned pianist André-Michel Schub added a special twist to his residency: he asked to have students perform with him in recital. In November eight students (including three Filene scholars) traveled to New York City to rehearse with him at Lincoln Center, and a few weeks later they took

the stage of Skidmore's Filene Recital Hall to perform movements from Schubert's "Trout" Quintet and the Brahms Piano Quartet in C Minor.

**T**he chance to combine Beethoven and Bartok with business and biology has carried Skidmore's name far—literally to the other side of the

globe, where Mongolian violinist Mugi Ayurzana '09 heard about the program and decided to audition. Lyon-Callo, the bass player who came in the program's third year and is now an epidemiologist for the State of Michigan, remembers, "I had not heard of Skidmore prior to hearing about the scholarship." Neither had Jonathan Greene '07, a clarinetist and environmental studies student from the West Coast. "Skidmore was not on my radar until I heard about the scholarship," he says, adding that he turned down other scholarships that required majoring in music. So did Andrea Silver '94, a French horn player and self-described "science nerd" who wanted involvement in music but unlimited career options, and who is now a fellow in laparoscopic and endoscopic surgery at Creighton University.

The scholarship is equally effective at recruiting music majors, including professional singers Sylvia Stoner-Hawkins '94, who came to Skidmore from Kansas, and Alta Boover '00, who had her sights set on New York University but says winning a Filene scholarship "changed my frame of mind about what I wanted my college experience to be. NYU started to feel big, and I realized how anonymous I'd be."



**"My interactions with the Ladd family throughout my years at Skidmore influenced me the most. The conversations stick in my head as if it were yesterday—the encouragement, the support, and the example of how to make a difference."**

**LAUREN ENGLE-LENNON '92  
SENIOR ADVISOR,  
US STATE DEPARTMENT**

At Skidmore “there was a certain amount of celebrity and respect that accompanied the scholarship, and I always felt as if I made an important contribution to the music department because of it,” says Stephen Steigman ’94, a trombonist who is now a radio producer for KCUR-FM in Kansas City, Mo. Alto saxophone player Melissa Molfetas ’09 adds that, given the strong appreciation for the arts among Skidmore’s student body, “being a Filene scholar is like being the quarterback of the football team.”

Filene winners’ fans include a lot of students who might not otherwise have been exposed to the world of classical music. That was a perk of attending a liberal arts college, says attorney David Joyal ’97, a trumpeter who majored in music. “My friends (and professors!) were always very supportive.” Boover’s most faithful were business majors. Briggs’s loyal following gave her a memorable send-off at her senior recital.

When she took the stage, she says, “my closest friends unfurled a long banner made of toilet paper that said ‘Go Briggsy, Rock On.’”

Like Briggs, Andrea Miller Weber ’86 made a career in music, singing with the New York City and Metropolitan Operas. Jessica Ivy ’94 is a freelance cellist and music instructor,

Frank Heiss ’93 composes electronic music, and Christopher Sidoli ’01 has been in the Broadway touring production of *Cats*. Others have pursued advanced study, like Rachel Malinow Bergman ’92, who earned her PhD in music theory from Yale and now teaches at George Mason University.

But the majority of Filene graduates found other career paths: violinist Jonathan Wachtel ’86 became an attorney, pianist Peter Wan ’95 an investment manager, pianist Kathy Byun ’95 a radiologist, guitarist Josh Chambers ’98 a theater director, oboe player Niv Conty ’95 a filmmaker. Lauren Engle-Lennon ’92 works with the US State Department as senior advisor at the

Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center, and classmate Jonathan Brody ’92 has a PhD in pathobiology and conducts cancer research at Thomas Jefferson University, but both keep music their lives—percussionist Brody plays in a band with other doctors, and Engle-Lennon plays piano “to both relax and entertain.” As violinist Lisa Byun Forman ’00 sums it up: “I may be a lawyer in my daily life, but I suppose I’ll always be a musician at heart.”

“Skidmore never foreclosed the possibility of a professional music career—rather, it opened up an entirely new range of possibilities to me, most of which I likely never would have considered had I gone to a conservatory.”

DAVID JOYAL ’97  
PATENT ATTORNEY



This fall Sylvia Stoner-Hawkins returned to campus as a voice teacher, and among her students was Victoria Lowe ’10, one of the freshman winners of the twenty-fifth Filene Music Scholarship competition.

The competition now runs like a well-oiled machine. Information is included in all admission application packets (as it is for the similarly styled Porter Scholarships in Math and Science), and 10,000 brochures go to high-school guidance and music directors. Hopefuls

submit recordings to the music department with their applications for admission. Last year, the competition drew 162 applicants, twenty-six of whom were called to campus in April for auditions. Performance nerves notwithstanding, “the day of the competition is a wonderfully positive

experience,” says admissions dean Mary Lou Bates. So positive that, in addition to the four winners, seven nonwinning finalists still chose to enroll at Skidmore.

Like all Filene scholars, Lowe started her first term with weekly lessons. She also began singing with the college chorus and vocal chamber ensemble and served as assistant stage manager for the opera workshop. She may minor in music, but she’s leaning toward a major in psychology or anthropology. All of which makes her exactly the kind of student envisioned by Helen Ladd for her signature scholarships. **U**