

Where bassoon meets business: Lecturer helps musicians build careers

by Mandy Potts - Thursday, August 23, 2012

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For the first time this semester, Paula Brusky will be teaching a full load of classes at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

It is just one accomplishment Brusky can add to her resume. At just 31 years old, she is a lot of things: A bassoonist, educator, internationally recognized touring musician, researcher, dance studio owner and the founder of the Bassoon Chamber Music Composition Competition.

“It’s highly unusual for musicians these days to have only one job,” said Brusky, who brings that exact thought to the forefront of her classrooms. There, she not only teaches music but also real-life job-seeking skills -- weaving business and marketing into what she believes is a meaningful, career-building trio.

Among the classes she's teaching in the fall 2012 semester at UW Oshkosh, Brusky is particularly excited about two: Managerial Aspects of the Music Industry and Financial Aspects of the Music Industry. Both classes have been updated for the semester. Next spring, she'll integrate two new classes into her repertoire – Marketing the Arts and Entrepreneurship for Musicians.

“I’m so excited to be on campus full time this fall,” she said. “I’m also excited UW Oshkosh is so willing to take ideas, make changes and adapt classes to meet student needs as the business of music changes.”

In all of her UW Oshkosh classes she hopes to help students “build tools for successful careers,” she said.

“I went to great schools and when I left I tried to write a resume and it was a complete failure. Sure I was a great musician, but that doesn’t always translate,” she said. “I run my classes to make students think and give them applicable skills.”

Brusky began her life as a bassoonist at age 12 and said it’s been “my love ever since.” Along the way, she has learned that playing an instrument – especially a large one like the bassoon, which stands 4-feet tall – is like being an athlete. Much of her research focuses on injuries musicians receive as a result of much practice and performance.

Thus enter athletics and kinesiology into the educational symphony she conducts.

“Musicians are athletes. And we have a higher injury rate than just about any athlete,” she said. “I’ve had many injuries throughout the years and I had to figure out how my body would allow me to continue to play. For a really long time, I thought something was wrong with me.”

In the future, Brusky hopes to translate her research about injuries into another class, which she's hopeful will be eventually offered at UW Oshkosh. Already, she guest lectures at universities throughout the country on injury prevention for musicians.

When she's not teaching students at UW Oshkosh, sitting in with area symphonies, touring or teaching fitness at her studio, Brusky is spending her time on the Bassoon Chamber Music Composition Competition, which was developed out of her love for playing with other musicians. It is a bi-annual competition featuring bassoon in a chamber music setting.

"I really love communicating with other musicians. The more we can stay current, the more we can sustain the instrument," she said. "... Bassoon is looked at as a dying instrument."

She encourages students to "follow your dreams," something she has admittedly already made habit.

Upon graduation from high school, Brusky left her home town of Appleton for Northwestern University, went on to earn a master's degree from Indiana University and then studied for four years in Sydney, Australia where she was the first candidate awarded a PhD in performance from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Her advice: "Be willing to do it. You have to be willing to commit the time. You have to be willing to go all in."

"At the end of the day, the skills you get while earning a music degree make you a great employee. Skills like problem-solving, concentration and teamwork," Brusky said. "I just want to help students make sure their skill-set is beneficial to their future."

Learn more:

- [Paula Brusky](#)
- paulabrusky.com