

USC

Trojan Family Magazine



With a Song in their Hearts

The USC Thornton School of Music celebrates its 125th anniversary by doing what it does best: breaking new ground.

Winter 2009



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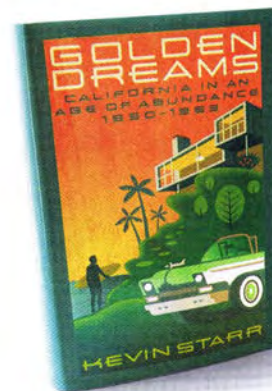
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On the cover: In the groove: Four freshmen in the new popular music performance program are, from left, Peter Johnson, Luke Walton, Leland Cox and Mia Minichiello. Photo by Mark Berndt



➤ **PAGE 20 Keenan Cheung**, USC Housing director, whose kidney transplant involved a remarkable chain of donors including his wife, Jeanne. "This whole experience has been completely overwhelming emotionally."

For past issues of *USC Trojan Family Magazine*, visit www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family

[EDITOR'S NOTE] A "Genius Grant" for Elyn Saks

USC law professor Elyn Saks' 2007 book describing her lifelong battle with schizophrenia touched a nerve with people across the country, including readers of this magazine. Our feature story on her ("Law and Disorder," Autumn 2007) resulted in one of the largest outpourings of reader mail we've ever received, and she was contacted directly by many others.

Her story – and her remarkable achievements – were also recognized this year with her selection as a 2009 fellow of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. This fellowship, known

informally as the "genius grant," provides each recipient with a \$500,000 "no strings attached" award over five years.

These singular grants are not, says the foundation, a reward for past accomplishment, but rather "an investment in a person's originality, insight, and potential." People are nominated anonymously by a body of nominators who submit recommendations to a small selection committee of about a dozen people, also anonymous. The committee then reviews every nominee and passes

along its recommendations to the president and the board of directors. Most MacArthur Fellows first learn that they have even been considered when they receive the congratulatory phone call.

For her part, Saks is excited about the award. "I'm really thrilled and honored," she says. "I'm glad for the recognition of, among other things, my book (*The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness*, Hyperion, 2007), which I hope helps implode some myths about schizophrenia and diminishes the stigma.

"The first thing I'm going to do with my award money is explore the lives of other people with schizophrenia so as to give hope to those who suffer from schizophrenia and understanding to those who don't. This is an amazingly kind and generous program of the MacArthur Foundation."

In describing her accomplishments despite her illness, she told USC writer Melinda Vaughn that "for an unlucky person, I'm very lucky," adding, "it will be nice to not have this secret anymore."

With her book, and this high-profile genius grant, it looks like her secret is out for good.

– Susan Heitman



USC Trojan Family Magazine

EDITOR

Susan Heitman

ART DIRECTOR

Rick Simmer

SENIOR EDITORS

Allison Engel

Diane Krieger

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Susan Andrews, Andrea Bennett
Athan Bezaitis, Alex Boekelheide
Mary Bruce, Ariel Carpenter
Anna Cearley, Talia Cohen
Mel Cowan, Lori Craig,
Jackson DeMos, Bill Dotson
Beth Dunham, Kevin Durkin
James Grant, Richard Hoops
Pamela J. Johnson, Timothy O. Knight
Ross M. Levine, Meghan Lewit
Cristy Lytal, Eric Mankin
Carl Marziali, Steve McDonagh
Cynthia Monticue, Annette Moore
Jon Nalick, Katie Neith
Eddie North-Hager, Justin Pierce
Sara Reeve, Gilien Silsby
Kukla Vera, Lauren Walser
Suzanne Wu

MANAGING EDITOR

Mary Modina

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Russell Ono

Stacey Torii

PHOTOGRAPHY

Allison Engel (coordinator)

Dietmar Quistorf

ADVERTISING/CIRCULATION MANAGER

Vickie Kebler

(213) 740-3162

USC Trojan Family Magazine
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California 90089-7790
tel: (213) 740-2684 / fax: (213) 821-1100
e-mail: magazines@usc.edu
web: www.usc.edu/trojan_family

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Economy Class



When **Lukas Petrash '06** was growing up in Texas, he learned to do a lot with very little. He made his own toys, fashioning a kite from a plastic bag and string, as well as a paintball gun from scraps of PVC, using wild berries for ammunition.

Petrash's early inventions were a preview of his promising architectural career, which focuses on ultra-low-cost sustainable housing. His first project, completed after his junior year at USC's School of Architecture, was a transportable bedroom addition

for his parents' house. On a \$550 budget, he designed and built a 48-square-foot room. This set the precedent for the project that brought him international attention from several shelter magazines – building a completely sustainable home for \$12,000. That's \$9.88 per square foot.

That project began in summer 2005, when Petrash returned to Huntsville, Texas, to work with the Sustainable Builders' Guild of Huntsville, an organization that collects leftovers from lumberyards and contractors. Petrash took on the task of building a 484-square-foot two-bedroom house from scrap materials. The job required not only designing and building the structure, but also making sure it met all building codes. "Everyone told me it was impossible, and they were pretty close to right," says Petrash.

Despite others' skepticism, the president of the guild, Dan Phillips, had confidence in Petrash. Phillips says of Petrash: "He was a quick study, fast and relentless in everything he learned. I was riding in the shadows if he got in trouble or if he had any questions, but he carried it on completely." Working only during the summers, Petrash completed the project in 13 months. The house was built for Petrash's aunt, an artist, and he named the house the MCD House, using her initials.

Early in the design process, Petrash sought assistance from his mentor, USC architecture professor **Goetz Schierle**. Schierle teaches a class on structures that Petrash credits as significantly influencing his current career path. "Unless we know how things work structurally, it will limit how we can dream," says Petrash.

Schierle offered Petrash feedback on his drawings for the MCD House and was very pleased at the result. "Lukas' house is much more unique than a typical design," says Schierle. "It is very artistic. Students like Lukas really only come along once in a while."

Petrash is quick to credit the school. "Before I came to USC, I knew nothing about architecture. It is wonderful to think that I have a lifetime ahead of me to practice all that I had the privilege to learn. I enjoyed USC so much that my younger brother, **John-Paul '07**, chose to come, and now my younger sister, **Grace Anna '11**, is at USC as well."

After graduation, Petrash headed to Harvard's Graduate School of Design for a master's in housing and urbanization. While there, Petrash did extensive research on the history of prefabricated housing, seeking to understand why houses are produced so differently than cars and why hundreds of attempts to mass-produce houses in the United States have failed. He is currently completing a book on the subject.

"With this economy, people are going to start thinking about how can we build housing more affordably," says Petrash. "I think they are going to start making the same mistakes that they have been making for the last 100 years; this book is to help prevent that."

Petrash is now prefabricating eco-friendly houses that can be shipped internationally. He recently finished construction on the first set of houses, which will be erected near Milan, Italy. All the prefabricated pieces (including furniture) for two small houses fit into one 40-foot shipping container, which means, Petrash says, "a person can have a sustainable home anywhere in the world for as little as \$30,000."

– Miya Williams

service members and their families. She also teaches part-time in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at Cal State Northridge. • **Douglas Schenck** recently opened his law firm, the Law Offices of Douglas A. Schenck, in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., which focuses on matters involving serious personal injuries and wrongful death. Prior to founding his firm, he spent 10 years as a civil litigation defense attorney at various law firms in downtown Los Angeles and Orange County, Calif. • **Thomas Woodall MS '93** was recently promoted to principal engineering fellow at Raytheon in El Segundo, Calif. He also was recently honored as an associate fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and currently serves as chairman of the institute's computer system technical committees.

'89 **Robert Hobbs MS** has been appointed chief executive officer of TGS-NOPEC Geophysical Company, a provider of geoscientific data products and services to the oil and gas production industries worldwide. He joined TGS in January 2008 as chief operating officer.

'91 **Rei Hotoda MM, DMA '95** was recently appointed assistant conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

'92 **Michael Herron** of Burbank, Calif., recently accepted the position of senior vice president, national sales leader, at Marsh, an insurance broker and risk adviser.

'93 **Millicent Borges Accardi MPW** recently had her poetry published in several literary journals, including *Salt River Review*, *Folio* and *Room of One's Own*. In September 2008, she was a poet-in-residence at Fundación Valparaíso, an international arts residency organization located on the Mediterranean coast of Andalucía, Spain. • **Jordan Charnofsky MM, DMA '97**, a guitarist in Encino, Calif., appears on a new CD from Crystal Records of Brahms' clarinet sonatas. • **Lisa Gilford JD**, a partner in the Los Angeles law office of Alston & Bird LLP, was installed as the new president of the National Association of Women Lawyers at its annual awards luncheon in New York City.

'94 **Edward J. McCaffery** has joined the Los Angeles office of the law firm Seyfarth Shaw LLP. He practices in the areas of trusts and estates, taxation, and intellectual property. He also holds the Robert C. Packard Trustee Chair in Law and is professor of law, economics and political science at the USC Gould School of Law. • **Natalie Pace** is the author of the book *Put Your Money Where Your Heart Is: Investment Strategies for*