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Communications

February 10, 2016

Faculty Challenged Otto Reynolds III ('11) to Refine his Talent

A specialty vocalist for Celebrity Cruises, Otto Reynolds III ('11) of Charlotte, N.C., has experienced success on a variety of stages, including an MTV reality show.

The Crouse, N.C., native discovered a desire to perform in middle school when a friend asked him to audition for a play. He started performing in local theater groups and singing at church and school. In high school he attended a choral clinic at Gardner-Webb University and his educational plans became clear.

“It was my first time visiting, and I had an instant attraction to the atmosphere and knew this is where I would be attending college,” he recalled. “I knew I loved to sing and I also knew I wanted to make a career out of it. I decided to major in music business to have a backup plan, so if I didn’t make it as a professional singer then I could fall back on my degree and still work in the music industry.”

But he hasn’t needed the contingency plan. Since graduating from Gardner-Webb, he has performed at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., where he had the opportunity to escort Dolly Parton on stage and perform with her as part of the cast. He also made it to the finals of a reality singing competition on MTV called “MTV Copycat.” On the cruise ship, which travels to the Mediterranean in the summer and the Caribbean in the winter, he performs in three main productions—a Broadway revue show with songs from popular musicals; a pop/rock show that has a variety of songs by artists such as the Beatles, Michael Jackson and Beyoncé; and a Cirque du Soleil-style show with extravagant costumes, makeup, dancers and aerialists.

“Performing on stage is a feeling like no other,” Reynolds reflected. “Looking out at the audience and seeing them enjoy your show is one of the best feelings in the world.”

The training he received at Gardner-Webb taught him how to protect his voice as he sings night after night. “Without the proper technique and the correct way of using my entire body as I perform, I could cause serious vocal damage,” Reynolds explained.

He also received support from the faculty in the Department of Music and was challenged to become a better student and singer.

“If I ever needed someone to talk to, I knew my teachers would always be available,” he shared. “Mrs. Patricia Harrelson (professor emerita of music) taught me more than I ever expected and helped me develop into the singer I am today. There is always room to improve and that is exactly what she did for me every week. Just when I thought I had reached my limits vocally she had a way of pulling this new sound right out of my mouth. Dr. Patricia Sparti was my adviser and I valued her encouragement and never-ending support.”

Besides the preparation he received from classes in the Department of Music, Reynolds appreciated learning a variety of subjects. “My classes taught me something I could take away and apply to my life and career,” he observed. “I believe all were beneficial to my success—whether it was the graphic design class that taught me how to design my own logo (that I still use today) or the New and Old Testament classes that helped answer questions I always had about the Bible.”

He concluded, “Gardner-Webb was my home for over three years, and I found lifelong friends there. I received an amazing education and even had the privilege to be the commencement speaker at my graduation. I was challenged daily and strove to become a better singer, student and person. Gardner-Webb has a very special place in my heart, and I know I wouldn’t be who I am today without this great institution.”