

On *Broadway*

Alumna Georgia Stitt, BMus'94, is making her mark on the Great White Way and beyond

BY ANGELA FOX

Georgia Stitt is an emerging talent in American musical theater. Recent credits include assistant conductor of the Broadway musical *Little Shop of Horrors* and associate conductor of *Can-Can* starring Patti LuPone. Other Broadway work includes *The Music Man*, *Titanic*, and the national tour of *Parade*. As an arranger and pianist, Stitt can be heard on the Broadway Cares *Home for the Holidays* CD and on the cast albums of *After the Fair*, *Do Re Mi*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Stitt also has written several original musicals, as well as songs that have been performed by New York's top cabaret singers.

Yet for all that, Stitt didn't listen to show tunes as a child. "No, I was definitely not a Broadway baby," says Stitt, who grew up in Covington, Tenn. "My dad loved classical music so that is what I heard around the house." Georgia began studying the piano at age seven and continued through high school. Like most young piano students Georgia learned to play pop standards like "Some Enchanted Evening" and became fascinated by the way in which words and music can combine to tell a story within the framework of a play. "I remember discovering musical theater in high school—falling in love with cast albums and buying sheet music to *Les Miz* and *Phantom* to play on the piano. I don't think it occurred to me that I could actually write musical theatre until college, but sometime around my sophomore year the idea formed that my love of musical theater and my love of setting poetry might actually be compatible."

Over a decade after graduating, Stitt finds the skills gained at Blair are essential to her success. "The classical training I received at Blair has been invaluable to me, both in my ability to play anything that's put in front of me and to think musically in a number of different styles," says Stitt, who studied piano with Craig Nies. "I use my Blair-taught technique on a daily basis, too, as I deal with issues of orchestration and arranging.



I also know a lot more about the human voice—thanks to Amy Jarman [senior lecturer in voice and assistant dean]—than some other music directors do, because of the accompanying I did in the voice department."

Stitt's success comes as no surprise to Blair faculty. "The first memory I have of Georgia is her interview for admission as a high-school senior," says Michael Kurek, associate professor of composition. "She expressed a desire to pursue Broadway-style songwriting and classical composition, and we made an informal agreement to allow her to do both things, provided she kept up the classical composition at the highest level." Michael Alec Rose, associate professor of composition, also recalls Stitt. "She is one of the most brilliant students I've ever had, both as a composer and as a scholar," Rose says. "A

substantial number of Blair graduates in composition/theory have gone on to the tremendous challenge of seeking a musical career in New York City. Georgia has been one of the most successful of these, I think, because of her extraordinary musical talent, her strong dramatic instincts, and her natural ability to work creatively with others."

After graduating from Vanderbilt, Stitt moved to Manhattan and earned her M.F.A. in musical theatre writing from New York University. Stitt and her husband, composer/lyricist Jason Robert Brown, relocated to Los Angeles earlier this year where Brown is a guest artist composer at the University of Southern California. Stitt is currently at work on a new musical with

New York-based writing partner John Jiler and is opening a Los Angeles branch of The Gym, a musical theater training program she helped found in New York. In October, she became a mother with the addition of Molly Cate Brown.

In her work as a teacher, Stitt draws on her Blair background. "I think my job as a teacher is to provide a safe and nurturing environment, along with a solid technique and a challenge to inspire the students to do their best," she says. "If someone at Blair had told me that I didn't have what it took to be a competitive musician, I'm not sure I would have been confident enough to disregard that opinion. Fortunately, no one ever did."



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Will Fisher is the recipient of the Del Sawyer Trumpet Scholarship, a gift that's allowed him to pursue a degree in trumpet performance at Blair—and share his time and talent with others by teaching music to Nashville children at the W.O. Smith Music School.

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