

(in)edition

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top ten

UWinnipeg Student Makes the Canadian Top 10 in Physics

by Annette Elvers, (in)edition Editor

At the University of Winnipeg Mikalai Birukou is well known as an exceptional student – his professors call him "brilliant." Now, a recent national exam has shown this remarkable scholar to be one of the leading physics students in all of Canada.

Of the 107 undergraduate students who competed in the 2002 Canadian Association of Physicists University Prize Exam, Birukou received the sixth highest mark.

"Only the best students from each university would even get anywhere near to writing the exam," said UWinnipeg physics professor Gabor Kunstatter, adding that the competition drew participants from across the country. "Many of the larger universities explicitly train

their students for this exam – we don't. If our students decide to take this exam, they prepare on their own. That makes his achievement that much more exceptional."

Birukou, who came to Winnipeg from Belarus only two years ago, has the added challenge of studying in a language other than his native Russian. "When I enrol in a course I usually find out in advance what the textbooks are and I read ahead," he says. "And mathematics is the same in any language."

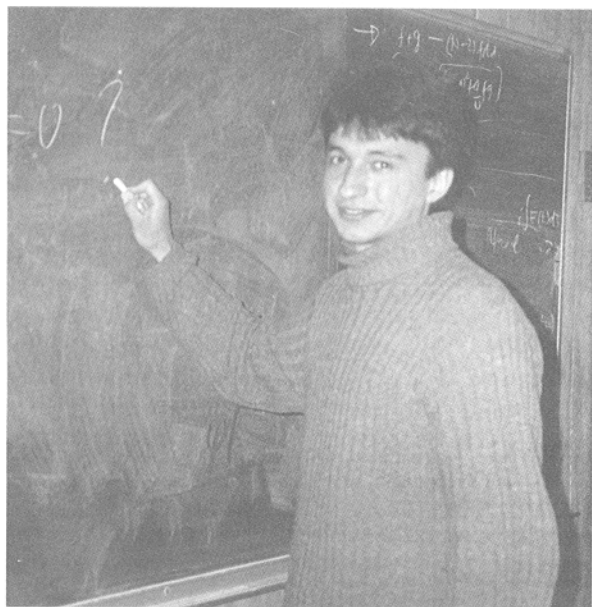
Despite Birukou's newness to the country and the language, Kunstatter says he tackled his studies with enthusiasm the moment he arrived. "He has been giving tutorials to the other students, because he is so far advanced," says Kunstatter. "He's already worked on relativity and black holes, things that normally only graduate students would do."

Birukou explains his talent simply: "I'm one of those who likes to know how things work. I ask the question 'why' and I work to find the answers. Everything about physics is interesting to me."

On this day, the blackboard in the lab where Birukou is working is covered with formulas. To someone unschooled in the field of physics, his writing might appear to be only random strings of numbers and letters. But to Birukou, they are not only meaningful, but magnificent. "Some old theories are masterpieces," he says. "In the same way that some people like to look at beautiful pictures, I enjoy the theories of physics."

After he graduates from UWinnipeg, Birukou intends to continue his studies and complete a master's degree at a joint program between Waterloo and Guelph universities.

"I think we can expect to see great things from him," says Kunstatter. "All I can say is he's just brilliant."



MIKALAI BIRUKOU, ONE OF CANADA'S TOP 10 PHYSICS STUDENTS

note-able professors

by Bartley Kives

As a water-quality advocate and outspoken critic of the lucrative hog industry, Dr. Eva Pip faces extraordinary challenges: anonymous death threats, vehicle vandalism, and even assault.

The stress is enough to make any professor question the desire to work. But the University of Winnipeg biologist has a unique way of dealing with it—she enters a trance-like state to compose instrumental suites on the piano.

"The job drains you emotionally. I find music is a wonderful outlet to centre yourself, and bring yourself back to the point of calmness," says the award-winning professor.

Pip is one of four UWinnipeg faculty members who juggle academic careers with sidelines as musicians. Pip's department chair Ed Byard plays banjo with education lecturer/mandolinist Don Metz in bluegrass sextet Uptown Grass. Meanwhile, chemistry instructor Devin Latimer plays bass in indie-pop quintet Nathan.

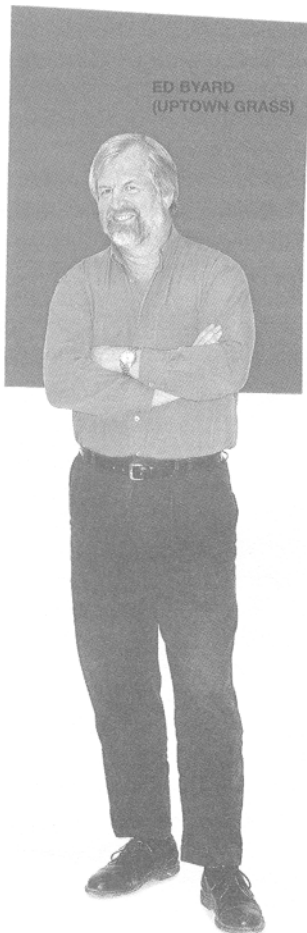
Along with performing research, lecturing or administrative duties, all four academics play on stage and record with their respective musical projects.

"Students are kind of surprised to see you do this kind of stuff. It's almost humanizing, in a sense," says Metz, who specializes in the theory of science education when he's not playing a mandolin constructed partly from vintage maple salvaged from an old cabinet in the basement of Wesley Hall.

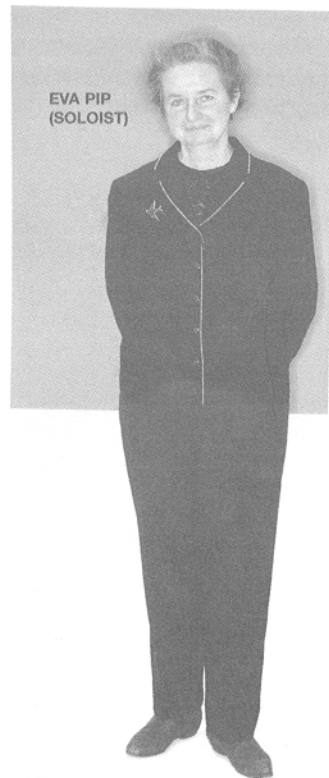
DEVIN LATIMER
(NATHAN)



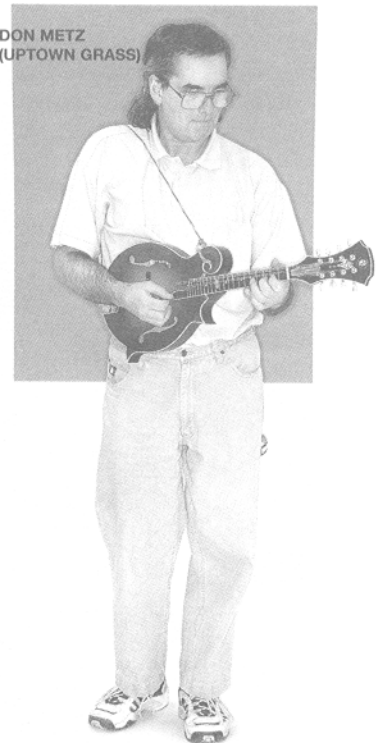
ED BYARD
(UPTOWN GRASS)



EVA PIP
(SOLOIST)



DON METZ
(UPTOWN GRASS)





He and Byard, a spermatogenesis specialist, have played together in Uptown Grass since 1994, releasing two albums and forging ties with other bluegrass musicians in Manitoba. Neither of them finds much of a problem switching gears from old-time mountain music to flatland academic work.

"The on-stage personality carries over quite well to the classroom. Both of us get along quite well with our students," Metz says. "The difference is, we've invested more than 20 years in our academic careers, so we feel confident in front of a class. But when we stand up on stage, we don't always have as much time to put into it as we like, so I'd say we're a little more nervous."

Byard, who was born in the U.K. and lived in South Africa before emigrating to Canada as a child, and the Ontario-born Metz have been playing some variety of folk music for decades. Both musicians started on guitar before picking up the more idiosyncratic banjo and violin.

Pip started even earlier. Some of the suites on her debut CD, *Pictures From Another Place*, date back to her teenage years, while she first took to the piano as a small child. "I never had any formal training. I simply sat down at the keyboard and started to play music nobody ever heard before," she recalls.

Compared to his academic peers, Devin Latimer is a relative newcomer to performing and recording music. Born in Lynn Lake, Man., the hometown of gruff-voiced rock singer Tom Cochrane, Latimer dabbled in guitar as a youth but spent his 20s researching organic chemistry in Winnipeg, Halifax, and Sydney, Australia.

He didn't catch the music bug until 1996, when he began dating Winnipeg singer-guitarist Keri McTighe. Within a year, he learned to play bass guitar and began performing in what eventually would become known as Nathan.

Nathan has recorded one CD, *Stranger*, and maintains a relatively demanding schedule for a part-time project. Instead of catching up on university work, Latimer spent reading week in February on the road, touring Western Canada with Nathan.

"It can be difficult to juggle both, but no matter how tired I am of one, I can always do the other," says Latimer. "It's a left-brain, right-brain thing. They actually benefit each other."

Nathan's ultimate goal is landing a string of dates at summer festivals across Canada. A full-time run on the music industry hamster wheel is not in the cards. Although Nathan has some commercial potential—they were the prairie winner in CBC Radio's Big Break competition this spring—Latimer is committed to his academic job and hopes to return to doctoral studies one day.

Byard and Metz, meanwhile, continue to use Uptown Grass as a recreational outlet, producing bluegrass shows with other artists whenever possible. They see the recent success of the bluegrass-laden *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack as symptomatic of a resurgent interest in old-time music.

For Pip, who sees both music and the pursuit of knowledge about the natural world as spiritual quests, there is no choice – she must sit down at the piano as often as possible. "This is such an important part of my life, it would be very hard for me to function in my other areas without having this as an outlet," she says.

"This is the primary way in which I maintain balance and stability in my life," says Pip. "This is something I need very much."

Bartley Kives (BA '93) writes about music for the Winnipeg Free Press and reviews CDs for CBC Radio One's *Definitely Not The Opera*.

Don Metz's Mandolin

In the early 1990s when Don Metz's Wesley Hall basement lab was being renovated, an ugly green cabinet was found. Falling apart, covered with at least 18 layers of paint, and slated for the dumpster, a staff member from Physical Plant took one last look at the cabinet to see if it could be salvaged. He took a scraper and started working at the top shelf... underneath the damaged paint, he discovered the ugly old piece was made of Bird's Eye Maple. Bird's Eye Maple, coveted for the distinctive circular patterns that

appear naturally in the wood, is expensive and hard to come by. There wasn't much worth keeping, but enough wood could be salvaged for UWinnipeg machinist Gavin Baird to work his magic. Baird, who is also an instrument maker and Metz's friend, knew Metz was looking for a new mandolin. Out of the old cabinet, he fashioned the piece that has become Metz's prized instrument and a fond reminder of the history of the University of Winnipeg.

(coming events)

For a more detailed listing visit the events calendar at www.uwinnipeg.ca

Retirement Reception, April

30 in Riddell Hall from 2:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

25 Year Club meets on May 9

from 3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. in room SM70.

University closed for Victoria

Day on May 20, 2002.

UWinnipeg Convocation is on

June 2. The Science and Education graduation ceremony is in the morning followed by

Arts, Theology, and Joint Masters ceremony in the afternoon. The DCE Convocation will take place on June 21.

Do you have an important UWinnipeg event coming up? Let us know! Email your information to Annette Elvers at a.elvers@uwinnipeg.ca at least two weeks in advance.

a matter of voice

by Annette Elvers, (in)edition Editor



GAIL LOADMAN OFFERS REGULAR WORKSHOPS ON VOICE CARE FOR UWINNIPEG FACULTY AND STAFF.

As any good carpenter will tell you, proper care and maintenance of the tools of your trade are vital to a long and successful career.

But unlike a carpenter who can replace a broken saw, if you're a lecturer and you lose your voice you may find yourself facing a career change.

"It's not as unusual as you might think," says UWinnipeg theatre and drama professor Gail Loadman. "People have no idea how easy it is to ruin your voice." Loadman, a voice expert who works with speakers from all walks of life, says it's not just vocal masters like opera singers who have to be careful. Anyone who has to speak often, or over noise, runs the risk of vocal cord damage. That may mean as little as a strained voice that causes discomfort for a day or two, but if the damaging activity continues it can lead to more severe problems including laryngitis or even vocal cord nodules.

Fortunately, there are many things you can do to protect your voice. Loadman offers a few tips:

1. Turn Down the Volume

"I know of at least four phys-ed teachers who are off work on long-term disability because they injured their voices," says Loadman. Using your voice at high volume for extended periods of time causes undue stress on vocal cords and can lead to serious damage. She adds that anyone who regularly has to speak over noise or in a theatre setting should use a microphone. Is whispering any better? Loadman says no. Speaking too quietly can be as hard on your voice as a shout. Maintaining a natural volume is your best insurance against vocal strain.

2. Take Care of Acid Reflux

"Thirty-five per cent of the population suffers from acid reflux, but only seven per cent of the population knows it," says Loadman. If you have frequent heartburn, burp often, or suffer stomach upset from spicy foods, you may have acid reflux. This can cause digestive acids to travel up the esophagus, burning your vocal cords and causing laryngitis. If you think you may have acid reflux, see your doctor and find a treatment that is right for you.

3. Drink Lots of Water

Researchers estimate that nearly three-quarters of the North American population isn't getting enough water. How much is enough? "I always say, 'Speak wet, pee pale.'" laughs Loadman. "What that means is to stay hydrated when you're speaking or performing. If your urine is light in colour, you know you're getting enough water."

4. Avoid Caffeine and Alcohol

Everyone knows that coffee, colas, and chocolate contain caffeine, which can cause dehydration and leave your voice vulnerable. But Loadman points out that even some clear drinks contain caffeine – when in doubt, read the label. Just like caffeine, whetting your whistle with alcohol can leave your voice dry.

5. Take a Voice Vacation

"If you're teaching two classes in one day, try to take a break and don't talk to anyone in between," advises Loadman. That may sound extreme, but resting your voice when it's strained from overuse or even from a cold can save you from bigger problems down the road.

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(in)edition is printed on recycled paper. After you have finished with this issue, please pass it on to a friend.

Along with traditional printed copies, (in)edition is now being distributed electronically on the faculty and staff e-boards. Share your thoughts on the electronic format - email a.elvers@uwinnipeg.ca